

Subject: [xinwei 2.04.98]: fragments of a credo (for sponge bible)

From: xinwei@stanford.edu

Date: Thu, 2 Apr 1998 14:46:15 -0800

To: farabo@sirius.com, salter@sirius.com

Subject: fragments of a credo (for sponge bible)

[Dear Chris, Laura,

I wrote this back in February after a brainstorming with you about the aesthetics of the control room. got carried away, but since Chris is assembling the bible, maybe we can throw this in somewhere for the archive. I believe that we're now supposed to meet Sunday around brunchtime, at our cottage in MP.

Ciao,
xw]

February 1998

In Marvin Carlsson's survey of performance art, I read about work that in some respects provide a historical depth to sponge:

- (1) Kaprow and Beuys in process (vs object) of art;
- (2) "real-time activity" and "life art": Bonnie Sherk ("Sitting Still" 1970, "Public Lunch" 1971, "Cleaning the Griddle" 1973 working as a short-order cook in a donut shop); Tom Marioni ("Drinking Beer With Friends Is the Highest Form of Art");

But much of this early work was based on the body. I guess that Laura can tell us a lot about this from her own professional experience! The way I see it, sponge's take on this is the dissolution of the body as a site of agency, into a network, and more interestingly and "radically" into fields. radical is quoted because if we read Whitehead, Zhuang Zi and other old fogies, we'd hear our echoes in their work.

- (3) "In 1973, Bonnie Marranca coined the term, 'Theater of Images' to describe this same approach -- works that rejected traditional plot, character, setting, and especially language, to emphasize process, perception, the manipulation of time and space, and the tableau to create 'a new stage language, a visual grammar "written" in sophisticated

perceptual codes,"

We could repeat the formal evolution that according Jacki Apple and Carlsson, performance art had already moved through three phases: (1) opposition of performance to theater, (2) emphasis on body and movement with general rejection of discursive language, (3) gradual turn to image-centered performance and return of language by 1990. Even Reboert Wilson has moved toward, returned to narrative.

Let me guess that what happened in the capsule history of performance art may reflect how people become more comfortable with different expressive modes, whether it be through body dynamics (eg dance), sound, music, visual media, stories, poetry, proofs. We start with what comes more easily. Just as some people feel more comfortable dealing with clay and sculpture. Some mathematicians are inarticulate in ordinary English medium, but quite articulate in algebra (say), so they craft their art in algebra. I think that as we grow in a well-socialized context, we all tend to become much more refined in the practice of language, both in formal discourse (eg. writing contracts or letters to the editor) or in dinner party chitchat, or if that's our concern, in art craft. But the stakes are high, and there's a lot of embarrassingly inept use of language by musical or visual artists. This is not surprising. After all such arts' media are not primarily text. But there's no law against a performance artist from using whatever media are at hand. The only criteria are how evocatively the media are employed. Now, I happen to enjoy working with language, but obviously not in the forms that pertain to traditional fictive arts. In sponge's case, this may be actually an advantage. I do believe, however, that I have some ways with language (or better, language-mediated creations) that could be employed in a sponge production -- in the actual piece, whatever that is! For me, of course the language includes different mathematical dialects, but in any case, my conceptual and affective creations come out in language, not in sound or paint. So let's work out how and where my predilections will fit in.

So, what is sponge about in terms of novelty of aesthetic means? I have nothing against reusing forms that have been used before. In fact, novelty and originality smack of a peculiarly romantic Western European notion of the artist which is literally foreign to me (and to most of history). I think we agree that the best criterion should be, does it work here, now with the people who we want to experience our creation? In fact, repetition of forms that work may be the best thing to do as art. It's how

we form a relationship embedded, perhaps only locally to a given run of performances, in a social context that'll determine the value of our work, I believe. Just because an effect has been used millions of times is to me a weak argument against using it. We should consider afresh whether anything will work in the particular situation. (The old question -- are we producing only to expert critics?)

Yes it is certainly true that text (textual language) is powerful, and can turn in the hand, cutting too sharply, perhaps, against the play of imagination, but language can also be deliciously polyvalent or ambivalent. poetry.

I'm not interested in "telling" people direct things through sponge work (there are other venues for that kind of production), but on the other hand, I do think I have something to say that can put all sorts of spin on people's weltanschauung. And my spins are not random! (We agree that random is boring.) So allusion, suggestion, spin, irony, are good. What would be great might be to apparently "tell" things directly, but actually work on indirect ways.

But poetry exists, and poets and philosophers are both ultra-sensitive to this problem of the simultaneous sharpness and ambiguity of language. But where philosophers try to solve this problem by pruning away ambiguity, poets create wonderful, moving pieces of what Guattari might call aesthetic blocks out of carefully arranged pieces of polyvalent, slippery text. It's just as hard work as sound composition or digital architecture.

Now it seems that we're not agreed on the use of language for m2. And I think it is a serious difference, but I'm not going to let it become an obstacle to producing m2. So here's another way to think about the issue. What's m2 evoking for me, us, others? What are themes guiding us in this work? We're (I for one) interested, among other things, in existential instability, and the human formation of pattern and sense out of this magma of the lifeworld. Sense includes desire and fear! This is value-laden production, not an epistemological project.

In my way of work, I need at least some themes articulated in a stable way. Unlike most positivistically-trained people, however, I don't expect others to work in the same way. Indeed it's a pleasure to work with you because of the differences!

One theme that I'd like to visit again and again is the phenomenological

switching between thrownness and reflection. This can take many forms, in the microlocal scale of individual existentialism, or the scale of one's socio-ethical engagement, one's political commitments. Another is the dream-logic of absence and desire, anticipation, and retrospection. Another is the distribution of control and of observation in the flow of people and data.

Okay that's enough, in fact too much for May 98. Back to language. I think that language is one of the, if not the strongest distributed systems of control that operates in the world. So excluding it severely hobbles our work. This is not to argue for splashing words as isolated icons on one hand, nor using fully written out narrative scripts on the other. There's a universe of ways to employ the medium of written, oral textual signs. In fact, in my presentation at the Utah conference, I argued that there are a multitude of modes of writing-as-performance that come from mathematics; they're neither chirographic, nor are they typographic, nor are they oral (at least in the traditional audio-linguistic sense). Persian and Chinese calligraphers knew this; that's why the Chinese art of calligraphy has an independent aesthetic existence from, say landscape image art, or from poetry. Yet calligraphy is intricately interscribed with these sister media. My toy example of pages with all proper or trademarked nouns physically excised, used as a *texture*, is an attempt to find a middle way to use text. (eg OCR Wired magazine, then find and replace all trademark words by blanks, or even punch a holes a la computer punchcards at the trademark words.) We fight fire with fire, one might say.

The same argument that text is dangerous, cuts also against the use of video and image, in light of advertizing. In fact, double-subversion is a greater "danger" to eviscerate anything sponge does in this post-literate world. One of my most deeply held ambitions is in fact the reclamation of language against the disembodied market. It's an eternal process, not one to give up or one whose end is to be expected in some millennialist fashion. But this goes in hand with my response to what I call naive existentialism -- a revelry or a despair in the chaos of the world: to be human means, first, to wring our own patterns out of the magma of the world. Anything else is suicide. So, here's a principled call for language, but used in funny striking ways.

Now where? If not in the space, then in a symposium to parallel the installation/performance in the Lab? Maybe we can think of the symposium as the part of m2 that's fashioned in language, just as we'll have

Claudio's "part" which is fashioned in 3D graphics. This way we can practice our use of this medium until we're all more comfortable with it and maybe work out in the future how/where it may be appropriately incorporated.

Xin Wei

sha xin wei * <http://www.stanford.edu/~xinwei> * phone: 650-725-3152, 327-8533

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X-Sender: xinwei@popserver.stanford.edu
Date: Thu, 2 Apr 1998 14:46:15 -0800
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sha xin wei * <http://www.stanford.edu/~xinwei> * phone: 650-725-3152, 327-8533

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
Date: Thu, 4 Mar 1999 06:17:45 -0800 (PST)
To: sponge@sirius.com
Subject: solid video space

hi chris, laura,

another ieda fo etude: i'd like to traverse a solid chunk of video. i.e. define a volume blob in 3d in which each point is associated with a frame of video, then traverse that chunk in different orbits. one way to produced structured lighthjt in loively ways.

indexing into this space via gestures, or via traversals of an intermediate surface, like the surface of a hand, or part of body.

i would need a machine with enough RAM to contain all the video in memory, say 500MB . disk is too slow.

xinwei

From: Xin Wei Sha <xinwei@sponge.org>
 Date: Thu, 4 Mar 1999 06:15:08 -0800 (PST)
 To: Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>, Laura Farabough <farabo@sirius.com>
 Subject: harmonic dance
 Cc: sponge@sirius.com

dear chris, laura,

thinking about a subject for one etude: harmonic dance. The phenomenon is how could sound be generated from the patterns of motions of people in a space? Say that the density of people in a room at time t is mapped to a smooth distribution

$$p(x,y,t)$$

then we can look at a set of spatial and temporal differential operators on $p(x,y,t)$,

and from there generate a spectrum. The analogy would be to the vibrating plate of a violin or some other peice of an instrument: $P(x,y,t)$ would be the displacement of the plate at time t over the position (x,y) from rest position. Characteristic "tones" and "timbres" can be designed in by taking different spectra (eigenvalues corresponding to basis eigenfuctions for the differential operator for the physical system). The $p(x,y,t)$ constructed from the motions of the people could be interpreted as a function to be projected against the eigenbasis in order to produce a spectrum which then is mapped to sound.

sounds complicated but the idea is quite compact.

would need some sensor of people positions, plus realtime math to feed into M AX. can be prototyped in Mathematica.

xinwei

sha xin wei * sponge * <http://sponge.org> * phone: 650-327-8533

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
 Date: Mon, 10 May 1999 11:18:11 -0700
 To: Laura Farabough <farabo@sirius.com>, Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>, maja@cwi.nl
 Subject: marked performance vs immanent performance
 Cc: xinwei@leland.Stanford.EDU

Dear Maja, Chris, Laura,

Here are some great sources on writing and continuous ontology that might inspire us. The Latour, Damiris and Guattari especially have jumped my bones. I think some of my intuitions about "immanent performance" gain a lot of texture in light of what these people write.

Gesture and Speech

Andre Leroi-Gourhan / 1993

Does some French (armchair) anthropology on the origins of gesture, writing and speech. Even if his anthropology is scientifically apocryphal, I think his observations are useful and provocative.

Signs of Writing

Roy Harris / 1995

A new theory of writing that ...treats writing as an independent mode of communication based on the use of spatial relations to [coordinate human activities.] Shows how the principles apply to musical and mathematical notation as well as to texts ranging from hieroglyphics and sonnets to signatures on a check, supermarket labels, and hypertext.

We Have Never Been Modern

Bruno Latour / paperback / 1993 (English tr.)

Latour very elegantly takes apart modernism's cuts between nature and society, human and object, that "premoderns" in the worlds of alchemy, astrology and phrenology never made. And he makes a pretty good argument that we're not modern at all. Along the way he introduces the idea of hybrids (via Serres) and monsters such as the "ozone debate," which proliferate like mad in the presence of science. It's musical thought, concentrated, provocative and delightful. I see us collectively as a mediating in Latour's sense between the material, erotic, mathematic, spirit aspects of the dense plenum of experience.

"Becoming (Other)wise"

Niklas Damiris / samizdat / 1999

Niklas just recently showed me an essay showing how we can replace the dogeared notion of subject and subjectivity which stampedes us into concerns ranging from intellectual property to spectator-actor dualities to (dramatic and post-dramatic) performance, by a much more nuanced notion of dynamically varying fields (the deleuzian term would be plane of assemblage) of potentials out of which subjective forces emerge. This essay very succinctly describes some of the intuition driving my alternative interest in performance immanent in the world.

This topological way of looking at the world gives us a much richer way to understand also motivation and affect without appealing to some mystifying subject. But a consequence of taking this seriously may be that we find the questions of spectatorship and "marked performance" lose their force and relevance to how we live our experience in the world.

For a fraternal approach this, there's the great poet schizophrenic himself:

Chaosmosis, An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm

Felix Guattari / paperback / 1995 (English tr.)

He ends his last book with this:

"Among the fogs and miasmas which obscure our fin de millénaire, the question of subjectivity is now returning as a leitmotiv. It is not a natural given any more than air or water. How do we produce it, capture it, enrich it, and permanently reinvent it in a way that renders it compatible with the Universes of mutant value? How do we work for its liberation, that is for its resingularisation?

Psychoanalysis, institutional analysis, film, literature, poetry, innovative pedagogies, town planning and architecture -- all the disciplines will have to combine their creativity to ward off the ordeals of barbarism, the mental implosion and chaotic spasms looming on the horizon, and transform into riches and unforeseen pleasures, the promises of which, for all that, are all too tangible."

Baci, baci, baci,

Xin Wei

PS. Text description of m3 is in preparation!

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
Date: Thu, 8 Oct 1998 04:36:35 -0700 (PDT)
To: Laura Farabough <farabo@sirius.com>, Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>
Subject: idea for a future choreography
Cc: sponge@sponge.org

Hi Laura, Chris,

Here's a fragment.

I listened again to a favorite astounding piece by Ligeti: Poeme Symphonique, for 100 metronomes. 20 minutes of them winding down. Puts minimalist music to shame. Enormously subtle patterns, micro-rhythms, joke. Something you can only listen to in private, I thought.

But then, I wondered, what if we use *that* as a script for a future version of thresholded performance: have performers who are mixed into the crowd in a piazza (or any other open environment), move ever more slowly, but very subtly over 20 minutes, each performer follows (pretends to follow) one metronome.

Maybe we should time-reverse the piece, so that it ends on the crescendo with abrupt cut. I prefer Ligeti's order, but in open scene, may need the sound to swell up from inaudibility. We pump sound in from speakers (in parked cars?) So performer will invert the tempo.

Xin Wei

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
Date: Mon, 14 Dec 1998 07:49:43 -0800 (PST)
To: Laura Farabough <farabo@sirius.com>, Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>, xinwei@leland.Stanford.EDU

Subject: m3 notes

Cc: sponge@sirius.com

[Hi Chris, Laura,

That was fun. Sorry to be impatient. blame fatigue. Here are my notes. Please circulate your versions in email and cc sponge@sirius.com. Henceforth, I will set up a filter so that all email to sponge@sirius.com will be copied into a file on my Mac. A few time a year, let's print out our correspondence and give the paper copy to ... Laura, who has so much matter that she wouldn't notice a few more pounds of paper, right? How about that?

ciao,

Xin Wei

]

m3 notes

14 December 1998

Laura, Chris, X

at Laura's house

Two rooms, or maybe 1 room with two modes of participant (doing vs watching)

1. participants in room 1 with objects

Sandbox: ludic thrownness: eople play with objects and co-construct a "logic" of relations among objects, and among themselves.

* Object includes physical thing, interface to computer, projected media (eg. structured light).

* Maybe some of the gestures are selected as Moves in a script generated on the fly by participants. Q. Are there meta-rules, then, or should performers

be watching and culling & writing down gestures in a parody of ethnography/ethology?

* Ideally, "group mind" [let's drop this cognitivist language, that goes for " epistemology," too, as an end], or better, coordinated activity, emerges out of this play.

2. performers in duplicate set, double of room 2

* Participants watch performers play with "same" objects, from pre-fab

script or script generated from session in #1.

* Exogenous variables enter, perturb room 2

Misc

Homogeneous stuff (tinker toy, lego) vs nonhomogeneous (Barbie doll).

Algebraic stuff (lego) vs. continuous stuff (currents of heated air).

What if you CAN imagine other than what is actual, but can't shape matter or language to express it?

New "objects"/etudes:

* Bundles of fiber-optics carrying video, i.e. fiber-guided structured light, vs. structured light radiating in air. Participant reweaves video directly.

* Speech paint: place mikes around room, mike -> speech-recognition -> text -> video projector on wall. As you move around space, speak, and your words (with relatively high 5%-10% error rate) will appear on walls as a function of your location or motion between cells. locus is important

Possible SUB-sets of m2

* heater cages in window

* show videos in array of monitors/projectors

From: salter@sirius.com

To: xinwei@stanford.edu

Cc: farabo@sirius.com

Subject: hey guys!

Date: Thu, 25 Feb 99 13:23:47 +0000

Hey guys...greetings from the end of the world...you both will have to see this site right now to believe it...we're in northern England in the most weird, surreal place you can imagine...working right now 17 hour days (I just got here only 2 days ago)...the place is a huge construction site...I'm currently staying in a bizarre travel motel on the outskirts of Doncaster (near the earth center site)...replete with a Pizza Hut, Toys R Us, McDonald's and American styled outlet mall...and currently no phone in the room...this makes every other theater job/installation that I've made or worked on before seem

easy...have to walk around and program wearing hard hats, construction clothing (looking a bit like you laura in your garden)...i. would definitely find all of this inspiring...i will take a bunch of video to show you both...so at night i've been thinking alot about m3....trying to get to the core of the idea...here are the first in a series of ramblings..please both of you respond..i will try and send replies every two days so we can start this conversation...here#s my input as of right now (in stream of consciousness fragments)....xinwei...this is all great news from fabienne....this pierre shaefer center for the arts sounds great....these kinds of institutions sound like the types of things that we need to align with...i'm getting increasingly fed up with narrow minded art people...plus tired of feeling like i'm a pauper wanting to make complex things with technology.....

more on this later...laura...how's it going there....have you checked out the guidelines for the rockefeller map grant...in order to do this we need to come up with a list of collaborators as they will need to show that we are actually going to work together with them...maja (we'll see when we meet with her in may)..sam? natalie?(what do you guys think...is she too obsessed with her own career or do you think she would be interested in what we are planning on doing.

ok..here are some ramblings....

i figured out one reason why i keep coming back to game structures and play...

perhaps this is a language thing too...i've just been given a walkie talkie...a real one to communicate with plus other cool electronic gadgets////

so...when i've been thinking of play in my dreams i've been thinking of the metaphor of constructing a space...this is different than inhabiting a media environment (like m2)...caro atlas spoke to me about the question of agency in m2..do people feel alienated by the technology as if they cant do anything anymore in the face of it or somehow that they can transcend it...

this is interesting to me...dreaming of digital spaces and environments i wonder if we can create a space which people can construct in a physical way (this is the thing which is appealing about sand, lego, tinkertoys, erector sets--and which does not translate 1-1 in the digital realm) that then alters the media in the space dependent on what is constructed (content laura!)

...

create perceptual toys..perception erector set --perception tinkertoys... what does this mean...

game vs play...

the stakes of the performance show that the question of agency is not a given when dealing with technology....this is what is important..that technology acutally has a context (that it is not just a set of tools) but that the environment that contains it (or it that contains the environment)is in the process of flux

reading snow crash..laura here's a good book to whileaway the time in the garden and while you#re writing the diss...

modular construction systems like tinkertoys and erectorsets need the duration#of imagination..operate on a different time structure than computer games...

tomb raider 2-3: appeals to the nervous system

myst/riven: problem solving-world reduced to logic structures

lego/erector sets: ability to construct a world form simple, formal parts... teaches mechanism of systems building...defintitely a glimpse on the industrial age....

continuous elements--topologicaltoys (is this possible ---are we are wanting to make toys that are both physical as well as virtual?

game===millions of differnt games--i have always thought about game that is run by playing with certain toys that are part of larger system

PERCEPTION PLAYGROUND---play with physical matter which assists in transforming an environmnet--digital construction set--sandbox: play with granulated stuff

HOW CAN WE BUILD A WORLD (AS OPPOSED TO ALREADY INHABITING ONE THAT IS THERE) OR...MORE PRECISELY___HOW CAN WE BUILD A CONDITIONAL SET OF STUFF THAT ENABLES THE PLAYERS TO CREATE MANY WORLDS....

ISN'T THIS WHAT IS ACTUALLY INTERESTING ABOUT THE POWER OF DIGITAL SPACE--THAT PEOPLE SOMEHOW MEDIATE BETWEEN ENGAGING IN REAL PHYSICAL ACTS THAT THROUGH SIMULATION CREATE OTHER TYTPES OF PERCEPTION (NOT ESCAPE)SPACES???

..i can imagine that there would be alot of interest out there is we could construct a kind of physical/digital construction set...maybe it is very small and tiny...

i was thinking about the space...the possibility of isolating some of those#playing which somehow would influence other oareas of the room... i made a diagram.....bu t i cant send it yet....

questions i am haunted with (ahh that word again)

why do people play? why would they want to shape their own environment? (in simulation)

the performance actually demonstrates/embodies the effect of the increasing# separation betweenhuman experience-physical existence and digitally mediated worlds.....play advances individual agency by influencing and shaping the environment around you---isnt this what we were trying to get at in m2..albeit in a metaphorical way?

reading about nanotechnology and the notion of 'fog'---xinwei..you know about this? pretty crazy.....reading drexlers 'engines of creation'--if this is where we are headed...i have reason to feel pesimistic....

constructive systems fire the imagination....b/c the players are working with symbolic objects--purely formal state of things...differnt from video games# which set out an already scripted environment that you need to figure out how to get through...

dreaming of a space which we set out the tools and which people then build their#own worlds...there the game lies.....the game then is about perceiving the world in a different (or multiple ways) manner...can our toys create those conditions.....?

the flatness of the screen --the immateriality of the image destroys the notion of construction as we know it in the physical sense of things...why would someone want to manipuate objects on a screen to constructa world...anywasy,, most software works like this already...can we realize this in a room?

BOX FRAMES EVENT-----have eitherof you guys checked out the mattel/intel interactive toys that just came out (laura--check out nytimes from about

two weeks ago...\$99 video camera that allows the user to project him/herself into different computer environments?? i think its out already...

moreee in two days...pleaserespond to my dreamssssss...s.....

c.

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
Date: Sun, 7 Mar 1999 08:50:50 -0800 (PST)
To: salter@sirius.com
Subject: Re: da goods
Cc: sponge@sirius.com, Laura Farabough <farabo@sirius.com>

dear chris, (and laura! this is also to respond to yesterday's conversation!)

yesterday, i went up to sf to see laura, we talked about m3 -- actually talked about m3 proper -- imagine that. she's cool to the idea of explicitly dealing with "play" and "game" because they're terminally trendy right now. i agreed that they may be trendy (is that true?) but i thought we have much deeper things to say about these notions. laura also said that the ideas raised so far about m3 are just revisiting ideas all the way back to m1. i said, so what -- i think we haven't actually worked out the potential in a lot of the past ideas, like system and exogenous. rule script improv play (in matter and in human gesture). she agreed. but she also wanted to bring in what i call more field-like or topological perceptual images: like her MRI hallucinations, and also some fantastic images built out of aquatic lifeforms. i agreed that those forms have weird otherworldly (to us landlubber humans) textures and dynamics that we could use to great effect in abstracted form in dig video, etc., i thought that

1. these are just at the level of perception -- what are the big philosophical/ethical/affective themes at stake?
2. to advance the anti-object, anti-system campaign (two of my personal projects), i suggested that it still makes sense to START with a playroom with objects, ostensibly , apparently about rules, and then undermine it by the notions/experiences. eg. by moving to reconstructions of gestures by computer algortihm or by performer, and to smooth/continuous fieldlike patterns like the aquatic stuff, fibreoptic video, projections into water,sand, smoke, synthetic surface, etc.

laura very much wants to do a salon with students (pre-degree, not post-mfa artists) around the camera oscura near the cliff house. to be held at her house, maybe in May. i'll let her describe it herself. we thought it'd be a good first exercise in running a salon/apprentice-project.

While i agree we should do this, thinking about it overnight, i now think it would be a fatal

mistake to let the work of organizing that divert us from cultivating Yerba Buena, and making friends with CICV, TAT, writing grants. which unfortunately should be our top priority at the moment.

as for such things, laura will call Beau Takahara in the next few days, and i will try to set up a meeting with Judy Schwarz (Sil Valley Art Council) for this week (probably Wed.)

as for such things, you MUST web over to <http://www.cicv.fr/accuegb.html> because this is a place that has the staff and equipment to actually help residents BUILD their project, ranging from film, dig video, computer graphics, vr wearable sensors tech (body tracking) etc. etc. -- they have this inhouse, and will house/feed the artists as long as necessary to complete project. so we must get a good PDF together. i'll try to get a fresh set of Acrobat Exchange -- is that what you said can embed QT movies?

i showed laura Maja's CD. and told Maja she was welcome to come May 3-9. i will be in Italy March 19-April 6 (maybe April 10).

abbracci,
xinwei

ps. i have a tape of an incredible experimental film Planetopolis by Gianni Toti, a 70 yr old word/cinema poet fom Rome who is one of the star artists at CICV. Toti may not be your(plural) cups of tea because he spans the history of the 20c communist movement and has a grand humanist cosmology (Tupac Amauta, Pasolini, Nono, Shostakovich, Rzewski, etc.). But his aesthetic methods are post MTV, 3D comp graphics, video morphs, etc. wild and moving combination.

Delivered-To: sponge@sirius.com
X-Sender: xinwei@sponge.org@mail.sponge.org (Unverified)
Date: Mon, 13 May 2002 10:08:28 -0400
To: sponge@sirius.com
From: Sha Xin Wei <xinwei@sponge.org>
Subject: [xinwei 9.03.99]: response to 28.2.99

Hi Chris,

Well, this isn't quite the 2-day turnaround that you proposed, but your note from 28 Feb was full and eclectic, so I had to go through it a

couple of times.

1. Play. See my remarks in my followup to my chat with Laura. Do you agree that play is terminally trendy? I actually don't buy into the positive value attached to being "un-trendy" because I don't buy the romantic occidental notion of originality. Chinese artists flourished for 4500 years without such a notion of originality, and there's something for westerners to learn from this, I believe. But this is wrapped up with a long discussion of the occidental preoccupation with subject ego that I'd rather so simply transmute directly into some sponge work that sidesteps entirely such objects in favor of fields, topologies and magmas.

2. What do you think are the big questions, heuristics, themes we can use as blindman's canes in dreaming up m3? Here are some, fusing from yours, that I like:

- A. How can we improvise atop an apparently rule-based system?
- B. How do we play in language. And how do we play in matter?
- C. Why do we play? (hmmm, no let's not do this -- it's not a question)
- D. What's play in the world -- this is quite another notion than game play, of give, elasticity, nonvoid gaps between things.
- E. What's the relation between play(D) and play(ABC)? See book by Brian Smith -- The Origin of Objects.

3. Nanotech fog? Dunno, but let me guess -- reminds me of Lem's insect bots and planetary sand sentience. I'm sorry, but the nanotechies (Drexler immortality guru included), like complex systems and a-life folk (Kaufman, et al.) are to my mind all overgrown children running around with only half a rag of an idea. These are things that boys (me included) like to play with at 13, but mathematics and sex are many orders richer and incomparably more satisfying ;-)

4. Constructing worlds

Yes this is interesting -- does seem like a (boy-but)ch gender thing? even I suffer from this fascination but at a rather abstract level. but maybe we can nuance it as more like a way to swim in mattermedia -- a way to put hands into the stuff, sweep, displace, create ripples out of unstructured matter. is topological toy an oxymoron?

constructing a space is what I still want to do with a certain unnamed silval research lab, but there are some internal politics that may

monkeywrench.

5. Explain me this, please: "modular construction systems like tinkertoys and erectorsets need the duration#of imagination..operate on a different time structure than computer games..."

6. I distinguish between PERCEPTION PLAYGROUND (Laura's MRI fits into this perceptualist domain) and GESTURE SPACE or CREATION SPACE. Let's move away from perception (merely epistemology) to becoming.

7. The Mattel camera that embeds you into videospace is tip of iceberg. I witnessed some fascinating playspaces last summer. I think that's a fantastic area to move toward, let's jump ahead.

Watch out for all that construction equipment! Come back with all your sensors intact.

abbracci,
Xin Wei

Delivered-To: sponge@sirius.com
X-Sender: xinwei@sponge.org@mail.sponge.org (Unverified)
Date: Mon, 13 May 2002 10:09:17 -0400
To: sponge@sirius.com
From: Sha Xin Wei <xinwei@sponge.org>
Subject: [xinwei 18.04.99]: spirituality

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
Date: Sun, 18 Apr 1999 08:49:13 -0700
To: farabo@sirius.com (Laura Farabough)
Subject: spirituality
Cc: xinwei@leland.Stanford.EDU, Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>, sponge@sirius.com

Dear Laura (Hi Chris),

>I do find it ironic that we talk about spirituality and experience et
>cetera in terms of work but don't know how about or use what has happened
>to me this year+.

Actually I think Chris and I have callously *not* talked very much about experience in terms of spirituality. Well maybe Chris would disagree, pointing to our concern with what I call the phenomenological cusp between immersion and reflection. But my language and interests are pretty de-sacralized. Of course you can read the spiritual back into the terms of wonder and play, but I work without it explicit up to this stage of my life. This is bound up in a much deeper level with the way Niklas and I prefer the world, without the metaphysics (the mystique) of the self. This has many charged consequences, including (1) rejecting the autonomous existence of psychoanalytic subject, (2) non-interest in self-transformation as an artistic enterprise, (3) retiring questions like those concerning "spectator" or "actor" or perhaps even "agent," in favor of questions concerning planes or better regions of subjectifying and objectifying forces. (Qv. a paper by Niklas "Becoming (Other)wise.")

>

>I feel it is essential for you both to know that I am in a different world

>now -- and what it is like. I am in the Upside Down House . . .

>

>

>so, I think I will indulge in a short story about the situation and send it

>to you both.

Of course, I respect your personal voyage and transformation but the question is to what extent sponge's journey is congruent to any one of our personal journeys? (To be coherent, I should even claim that "personal journey" has no sense.) One difference noted to me more than once between many American artists (and poets) of recent decades and European artists is that Americans often make art out of the concerns of their own lives. Art as auto-therapy. This has powerful results, of course. But there are other ways to do art. Deep-historicized, social-psychological, socio-politically sited, anti-expressive, ecological, logical-humorous etc. Studio Azzurro's work is typical -- moving, transformative, compelling -- but not personal in the sense of Americans' self-personal. Chinese landscapes are even more distant from this art of self, and in fact tend to erase this occidental obsession with the subject altogether.

Now, that said, I am curious though about the story of the three Houses, and what it means for you. It's been cited to me but I have never heard it. I must admit that it has somewhat ominous tones.

>Meantimes . . . email is fine and I will try to become looser and more

>active with it, but I need to see and talk with you both -- together and

>individually as well. sponge is more than an intellectual exercise for

>me.

Indeed you're right, co-presence is best. But email *usage* is not an intellectual exercise at all, as Ann has well demonstrated in deed and in her dissertation. Rather it can be constitutive of passionate, ethical as well as conceptual relations. Presumably sponge is a modest example of such relations.

Well, this is too much Play, I must return to my dissertation!!

Ciao,
Xin Wei

PS. Side rant: I find Americans and Europeans fascination with Buddhism and Zen amusing because they replicate entirely the metaphysics of self (Subject) but in exotic cloth. When in fact a much more interesting reading of Tao (or Zen) would have us remove that aspect altogether. This is the paradox: if you are truly taoist (or zen) why go through the elaborate rituals of dressing funny, memorizing chants in exotic syllables and making bread, hyper-elaborate processes of defining the Self even more sharply while waving the banner of diffusing the self?] But this is an aside, not directed at present company!

PPS. Now it's Chris who's been remiss at not responding to *our* email on the beat as it deserves, hee hee.

Subject: [xinwei 5.09.99]: raw notes from L+XW phone

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
X-Sender: xinwei@popserver.stanford.edu
Date: Sun, 5 Sep 1999 17:39:35 -0700
To: Laura Farabough <farabo@sirius.com>, Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>
Subject: raw notes from L+XW phone
Cc: sponge@sirius.com
Status: U

L: Air currents in the room. Actual blowers triggered to blow air in the room.

Use as input, the (semi)autonomous body parameters like temprature, breathing rate, pulse rate. How about use analogue? What if we just feed

through the data mapped say to noise?

Voice - speech as the communication is what changes the tone of the room, but use the involuntary autonomous body for navigation, like echolocation.

X. As you walk over projected image on the floor, the object appears to roll in slow motion, as if under water.

Video -projected textures, matched/offset from clothing's patterns, animated

Don't make room feel causal, i.e. don't make its moving video textures lock to your motion, but predictable, learnable, until the unexpected event.

I.e. as you're walking around you notice you might be able to disappear in camouflage or stand out in relief if you walk at the right speed or spin etc.

political -responsible for atmosphere as collective environment, ozone hits

A Research Objective: investigate how people can adapt and learn alien perceptual environments. SRI: Marcelo - psychographics on SRI.
Special case: VR sickness.

Advisor for Laura:

Gayatri Devi - fill the room with gel, let people walk through it. projected.
Dr. Devi: psychiatry and neurology, was Co-Director of Alzheimer Lab in Columbia, NYC. Friend of ours. Was interested in being scientific consultant on neurology to sponge*m3.
212-772-3028, gayatri@panix.com, devigay@sergievsky.cpmc.columbia.edu

L: Kid's version, with gel!

XW must Burn 5 m2 cd's for Chris to take??

XW: gone September 11 - September 28, Oct 7-11

Chris: gone September 6 - October 11

TO MEET:

Mario Durham - L + XW Sep 30
Exploratorium - L + XW in October
Melanie Bean - L in Sep or Oct.
Zellerbach - L in Sep
Beau Takahara - L Sep 26, Ground Zero kickoff
Xerox PARC - Partner's?? email Scott Minneman coords to Laura, Chris
Peter Anderson September 27-30

Email Laura and Chris original of m3 PDF for editing

L: Get Quark 4?

GRANTS to do's -

Warhol , Sept. 15 - Chris
Creative Fund, Nov.

Subject: [xinwei 23.10.99]: sponge thread 1

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
X-Authentication-Warning: mail1.sirius.com: sponge set sender to xinwei@stanford.edu using -f
X-Sender: xinwei@popserver.stanford.edu
Date: Sat, 23 Oct 1999 01:01:13 -0700
To: Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>
Subject: sponge thread 1
Cc: sponge@sirius.com
Status: U

[
Hi Chris, We start our conversation thread game tonight? L -> X -> C ->
... One sentence each.
Please send it to Laura.
I will cc sponge@sirius.com.
]

Laura:

I think the edge is this: the by-product of room 2 is the pleasant,
delightful, wonderous experience of the client, but the task of room 2 is

something altogether other.

Xinwei:

YES, this is homologous to your diverted gaze, and to what I see in
tgarden, where there's ostensible conversation -- hi what time is it may i
have a cigarette goodbye -- but where the power of the spell lies in the
flow of matter, of air, decayed sound and stray thread.

From: xinwei@stanford.edu

Date: Sun, 24 Oct 1999 14:14:48 -0700

To: farabo@sirius.com (laura farabough), Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>

Subject: rant re. doing "found tech" art

Cc: sponge@sirius.com

um, a gentle psssss...

mri tech is 15-y-e-a-r-o-l-d-n-e-w-s for me, you know
there's only one mathematical idea in it - called the Radon transform. i assigned it to my grad
students years ago. and on the medical side, my college roommate Steve went into radiology,
and neuroradiology at ucsf (one of the top radiology programs in the country in case you want
to follow up there) and at columbia, so i got all the imaging stuff fresh direct from the horses
mouths (my med friends who invented this stuff) over the past decades. plus the recent work
on med imaging for telesurgery and agent-assisted surgery using remote sensing, blah blah blah.

i have the same reaction to this as you to say gail wight's use of "science" in her art.
so , tell me what's the point?

it's really boring stale tech, and not very transformative experience by itself, (NOT what you
brought into the machine, but the machinery itself), so
what i ask both you and chris is, what's the point of slogging into the mechanics of this stale
technology? what's the power, the compelling experiential effect, the formal structure in
which you think it might take meaning, that you want?

ditto with head-mounted displays... glasses are boring... There's a 10 year lag it seems to turn
the trash that VR research generates into novelty commercial products. (david lynch did a nice
send-up of vr glasses in "wild palms" what, 10 years ago?)

i certainly can be convinced that a tethered device like glasses may be good for Sauna, since immobilizing the body is part of Sauna's concept, but frankly I'm not interested in tethered experience. projections for me! :)

dreaming about very very dense simultaneous many-layered projections (many overlapping projectors casting structured light) in TGarden. same could work for Sauna -- ask the Sony (?) guy who built the "tank."

un abbraccio,
xinwei

[xinwei 10.11.99]: hi To: Maja

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
Date: Wed, 10 Nov 1999 14:22:03 -0800
To: Maja.Kuzmanovic@cwil.nl
Subject: hi

Hi Maja,

How are you doing? How were (?) Atlanta and Boston?
In 3 days I'll be back in Italy. It's been a whirlwind here too -- after the "monsters" talks -- I'm back applying for jobs and postdocs etc.

Chris, Laura and I presented our proposal for a residency at the Yerba Buena last Monday to the head curator. I'll tell you the details of the \$28K proposal when we speak next, but briefly, this minimal proposal includes (1) residency with 3 salons - public conversations, (2) a build-up over 6 months of working models and media (projected, on the web, etc.), (3) a version of room 2 -- the media sauna built as tubes into which people will be slipped on pallets. We named you as a 4th colleague, and asked for a fee on your behalf. Yeah it's token, but it's genuine.

Concretely, in any case, we were thinking about how to start working on some material together. So we came up with this idea: we can build two of these tubes either lifesize or miniature, out of some material like a mesh that can hold an image. One tube would be here in SF, the other would be in Utrecht (or wherever you can easily house it). Each tube would have one maybe more video projectors to shine image onto the surface. Then we can jointly make video and sound media that we can each playback on

our own tubes. This can be our first concrete workshop, and a way for us to work even separated. Of course shipping media is slow, but it's easier than shipping people I guess. Also, we own the videocam and editing tech. that we need to get started right now creating images and sound. I think it might be a fun way to say "va fan" to the CAVE, too. The interesting difference here is that we are going after a much more intimate and intense space, with immobilized body but radically shifted senses of time and motion.

I know this is the sauna, not the t garden and the howling clothes, which are what tug my heart, but Laura and Chris convinced me that this is a good way to get started. In fact, we're planning an even more "cargo-cultish" version of the media sauna, which requires no institutional funding. Early next year, in Feb or March, we plan to invite a few people out to the beach here, and bury them in the sand (immobilization) inside tents (like Victorian changing tents). We'll place video-glasses on them and feed prepared images+sound to them for x minutes. And then we'll open the tents toward the sea and remove the glasses.

Back to institutions. We're also taking our idea to the California College of Arts and Crafts which opened a strong Media and Design wing here in SF, and to Banff and the Mass. MOCA. We'll see.

December 4, we will hold a salon at Laura's house to which we are inviting local creatives and supporters. You'll receive an invitation in the mail.

Hope things are going well for you! Tell me if we might even have a chance to meet up somewhere in Europe in November.

Take care ... Baci,
Xin Wei

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
Date: Sun, 5 Dec 1999 14:10:58 -0800
To: farabo@sirius.com (laura farabough), Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>
Subject: Re: M3 as theater
Cc: sponge@sirius.com

laura,

these are elliptical and interesting thoughts - i want hear more...
this reminds me that i have a few thoughts (for garden) left over from my
last rtrip -- from maja that i should pour into our email soup.
i hope and expect chris back from portland thoughtfully too...
let's talk soon
oh and thank you for the wonderful marvelous invitations,
i turned it over and over in my fingers, smiling
jetlaggedly
xinwei

imagining M3 onstage reveals critical and potential aspects worth considering.
Puzzle, sauna, garden are not a sequential order. Rather, I think of puzzle
and garden as binaries and sauna as variable.
Puzzle and garden belong to the extreme ordinary; sauna belongs to another

yes i see this for garden as
"extreme ordinary" but puzzle is in the mode of the model (the
meta-ordinary of mode of science and of the kantian analytic)

in all three spaces (or modes of theater) though, from the point of view of
person, there's a local transcendence. (ann weinstone has a notion "weak
transcendence")

order. puzzle and garden are social, in and of this world, sauna is
individual and the way out of this world into another.

Ask me later what I mean. I can see this onstage. When I translate this
understanding back into the immersive environment, I realize that puzzle
and garden should be
transmutabile, sauna is
unexpected, one enters it through individual circumstances.

yes, interesting idea - like a bank of fog (steam) that looms unexpectedly
in the night road? i just came up

[xinwei 13.12.99]: agencies and the mangle of practice

From: xinwei@stanford.edu
Date: Mon, 13 Dec 1999 11:26:36 -0800

To: Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>, Laura Farabough <farabo@sirius.com>
Subject: agencies and the mangle of practice
Cc: sponge@sirius.com

Hi,

last night I put in a placeholder for a richer answer to Fabienne's question about where the "constraints" on action come from. What is the alternative to design by master narrative, whether in a local scope of the score for a piece of music, or in the (apparently) larger scope of a dramaturgical research project? Mid-century, the alternative was randomness, aleatoric action. There are other and much more fruitful, meaningful alternatives. Andrew Pickering's *Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* has a profound description of meaning construction braced by the concepts of material agency, human agency, and disciplinary agency. (There are interesting intersections with Popper's *Third World*, and Guattari's asignifying semiotic layer that we could explore, later.) I think chapters 1 (The Mangle of Practice) and 7 (Through the Mangle) are the ones to read unless you're interested to see how these seriously provocative ideas work out in scientific work. For a good example of disciplinary nonhuman agency, look at his chapter on Hamilton's discovery of quaternions.

Unlike so much flaky work in, e.g. distributed cognition, Pickering's approach makes a lot of sense at least in the domains of practice that he studies. I think his description of how we make knowledge simultaneously historical, relative and objective (I would say intersubjective) provides some rich language for sponge conversation.

Other references Fabienne recommended:

Author: Ehrenzweig, Anton, 1908-1966.

Title: *The hidden order of art; a study in the psychology of artistic imagination.*

Imprint: Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967.

Physical Description: xiv, 306 p. illus. 23 cm.

Winnicott, *Game and Reality* (?)

Re play, of course, there's Stefano's thesis on play.

un abbraccio,
xinwei

[xinwei 26.12.99]: Beauty, when it does not hold the promise of happiness, must be destroyed.

[hi laura, chris,

i'm in the middle of resending email from me relevant to ideas for m3. found this one that could be relevant for our sauna salon.

laura, i will send images soon. maybe also xeroxes via elizabeth who's in atlanta today.

maybe you can ask the LAB asst assigned to sauna to help scan them in. and also to make printouts. not likely that i can do it myself. my students are gone for the summer :)

-ciao,

xw

]

From: xinwei@stanford.edu

Date: Sun, 26 Dec 1999 22:29:49 -0800

To: Chris Salter <salter@sirius.com>, Laura Farabough <farabo@sirius.com>, maja@cw.nl, squash@sirius.com, regnaut@imagnet.fr

Subject: Beauty, when it does not hold the promise of happiness, must be destroyed.

Cc: sponge@sirius.com

[Dear amici spongii,

Some of us -- Diane Nelson and I back in the SCAAN days, Helga and Niklas -- have been (re)reading the Situationist International. Here's a zap, relevant to our spongy dream of infiltrating public architecture. You will understand why I have as little patience for New York Times' whitewash of the Gulf War as for the most elegant recitation of the Holocaust. To me they are equally ethically and artistically void.

What, instead? Parks ... Urban studies ... Habitation and re-habitation ...

Kisses for the millenium,

xinwei

]

Plan for rational improvements to the city of Paris

Unattributed

Potlatch #23, 13 October 1955

The Lettrists attending the September 26 meeting jointly put forward the following proposals for solutions to the town planning problems that happened to come up during debate. It is worth noting that no constructive action was decided, since all those present agreed that the most urgent task is to lay the groundwork.

The subways should be opened at night, after the trains have stopped running. The passageways and platforms should be poorly lit with dim, blinking lights.

The rooftops of Paris should be opened to pedestrian traffic by means of modifications to fire escape ladders and construction of catwalks where necessary.

Public gardens should remain open at night, unlit (in some cases, dim lighting might be justified on psycho-geographical grounds).

All street-lamps should be equipped with switches; lighting should be for public use.

With regard to churches, four different proposals were put forward and all were judged tenable until the appropriate experiments demonstrate which of them is the best.

G.E.-Debord argued for the complete demolition of religious buildings of all denominations. (No trace should remain of them and their sites should be used for other purposes.)

Gil J. Wolman proposed that churches should be left standing but stripped of all religious content. They should be treated as ordinary buildings. Children should be allowed to play in them.

Michele Bernstein suggested that churches should be partially demolished, so that the remaining ruins give no hint of their original function (tour Jacques, on Boulevard de Sebastopol, being an unintentional example). The ideal solution would be to raze churches to the ground and build ruins in their place. The first alternative was formulated exclusively for reasons of economy.

Lastly, Jacques Fillon is in favor of transforming churches into fearful houses (maintaining their current ambience and accentuating their unsettling effects).

All agreed that aesthetic objections should be over-ruled, that admirers of the great door of Chartes should be silenced.

Beauty, when it does not hold the promise of happiness, must be destroyed. And what could better represent

unhappiness than this sort of monument to everything in the world that remains to be overcome, to the immense inhuman side of life?

Train stations should be kept as they are. Their rather moving ugliness adds much to the feeling of transience that makes these buildings mildly attractive. Gil J. Wolman called for removal or scrambling of all information regarding departures (destinations, times, etc.). This would promote the derive. After a lively debate, those opposing the motion retracted their argument and it was approved without reservation. The aural environment of stations should be enhanced by broadcasting recorded announcements from a large number of different stations -- and certain ports.

Cemeteries should be eliminated. All corpses and memories of that sort should be totally destroyed: no ashes and no remains. (It is necessary to note the reactionary propoganda constituted by these hideous remnants of a past filled with alienation by the most automatic of associations. Is it possible to see a cemetery and not be reminded of Mauriac, Gide or Edgar Faure?)

Museums should be abolished and their masterpieces distributed to bars (Philippe de Champaigne's works in the Arab cafes of rue Xavier-Privas; David's "Sacre" in the Tonneau in Montagne-Genievieve).

Everyone should have free access to prisons. They should be available as tourist destinations, with no distinction between visitors and inmates (to make life more amusing, visitors would be eligible, in draws held twelve times a year, to win a real prison sentence. This would be especially aimed at cretins who cannot live without running interesting risks: today's speleologists, for example, and all those whose craving for games is satisfied by such pale imitations).

All monuments, the ugliness of which cannot be put to any use (such as the Petit or Grand Palais), should make way for other constructions.

All remaining statues whose significance has become outmoded -- where any possible aesthetic renovations are condemned by history to failure beforehand -- should be removed. Their usefulness could be extended during their final years by changing the inscriptions on their plinths, either in a political sense (THE TIGER CALLED CLEMENCEAU on the Champs Elysees) or in a puzzling sense (HOMAGE TO FEVER AND QUININE at the intersection of boulevard Michel and rue Comte, or THE DEEP in the cathedral square on Ile de la Cite).

The dulling influence of current street names on people's intelligence must be stopped. Names of town councilors, heroes of the Resistance, all Emiles and Edouards (55 Paris streets), all Bugeauds and Gallifets, and in general, all obscene names (rue de l'Evangile) should be removed.

In this regard, the appeal launched in Potlatch #9 for ignoring the word saint in place names is even more valid.

[xinwei 14.12.98] m3 notes (WORKING TITLE: SANDBOX?)

m3 notes (WORKING TITLE: SANDBOX?)

14 December 1998

Laura, Chris, X

at Laura's house

Two rooms, or maybe 1 room with two modes of participant (doing vs watching)

1. participants in room 1 with objects-interfaces

Sandbox: ludic thrownness: people play with objects and co-construct a "logic" of relations among objects, and among themselves.

* Object includes physical thing, interface to computer, projected media (eg. structured light).

* Maybe some of the gestures are selected as Moves in a script generated on the fly by participants. Q. Are there meta-rules, then, or should performers be watching and culling & writing down gestures in a parody of

ethnography/ethology?

* Ideally, "group mind" [let's drop this cognitivist language, that goes for "epistemology," too, as an end], or better, coordinated activity, emerges out of this play. SWARM MENTALITY AT REDUCED SCALE...

For kids, what does this environment become: an emergent game where various kinds of competitions develop (CF. MAN AND GAMES-ROGER CALLOIS)

2. performers in duplicate set, double of room 2

* Participants watch performers play with "same" objects, from pre-fab script or script generated from session in #1. THIS IS AN EVENT WHICH IS CONTROLLED AND SCRIPTED--USES THE "TRAPPINGS" OF TRADITIONAL THEATER -proscenium based, etc...

* Exogenous variables enter, perturb room 2--exogenous variables are the world coming in through the cracks--our camera obscura of information and economic flows that are outside of human comprehension yet nevertheless impact human experience--the second room the world seeps in---the first room is a construction-a fantasy--the second room seems to challenge that fancy with something else-- tug o' war between the two rooms in the second event---

THE MACHINE:

Room1: Machinic assemblage--a space without rules that enables a kind of free play-radical type of "learning" environment where social meaning and context emerges only through some type of sustained cooperation between actors in groups--experience knowledge of the real, intentionalized social world outside of the space of the experiment is built up here (within a completely constructed space) Xinwei's question, based from the inquiries of Russian activity theory, is how to fold in intentionality into the system?

Room2: Machine with rules-driven by a tension between endogenous and exogenous variables--Meaning is now overlaid (from inside looking out and outside looking in)-open system subjected to the larger environment around it...

dream machine

thanatos machine

economic flow

pattern structures that emerged to social collaboration in the first room no longer have that context---now all of the participants have to reorient their world view again--like how we listened to the beginning of the Ligeti metronome composition... Here, the interfaces become part of a larger web of meanings...

Misc.

Homogeneous stuff (tinker toy, lego) vs nonhomogeneous (Barbie doll).

Algebraic stuff (lego) vs. continuous stuff (currents of heated air).

What if you CAN imagine other than what is actual, but can't shape matter or language to express it?

(Interesting notion here: how those individuals in the sandbox use the interfaces to shape their world--interfaces act as non-linguistic bridge to expression--that which is beyond "language"--"IMAGINATION EXCEEDING EXPRESSIVITY"

(LETS CALL THESE OBJECTS TOYS--BUT TOYS WITH EMBEDDED SOCIAL PROPERTIES--perhaps we are designing sophisticated toys for kids--)

New "objects"/etudes:

* Bundles of fiber-optics carrying video, i.e. fiber-guided structured light, vs. structured light radiating in air. Participant reweaves video directly.

* Speech paint: place mikes around room, mike -> speech-recognition -> text -> video projector on wall. As you move around space, speak, and your words (with relatively high 5%-10% error rate) will appear on walls as a function of your location or motion between cells. locus is important

*Interactive table surface-(resistive film? embedded wacom LCD tablet which shows a video feed of the room and other participants working and creating--haha field museum madness is seeping in)

that controls global room variables (back to our obsession of observing the observed)

*Xinwei--what other types of tangible media interfaces that actually could use "sand" or other natural elements?--we could work with some basic sensor devices to yield unusual interfaces--

Other ideas--is to shift the testing fields--possible venues: art/two stores across the street from each other--school classroom--etc....,

Possible SUB-sets of m2

* heater cages in window

* show videos in array of monitors/projectors

* 15 min loop of metaphysical video in department store or any drive by window or public space near freeway

m3 themes

sha xin wei • sponge

may 1999

m3 is sponge's project for the year 1999-2000. In a controlled experimental space like a gallery and later in a semi-public park built out of fusions of digital media and physical material, using continuous as well as discrete forms. The gallery version will play on fantasies of the puzzle and the garden. The semi-public park version will be a place to replenish the spirit and a serve as a critically-inflected experiment embedding digital media in architectural built space. This project may be also carried out as a sequence of etudes which can stand alone, although they'll answer to the arc of themes we describe in this note. We're preparing a PowerPoint slide version of our proposal.

sponge's overall research program

First, a reminder: sponge is a conversation dedicated to the construction of public experiments in phenomenology and desire.

sponge's research program is a multivalent one -- aesthetic but also technological, political, philosophical -- to perturb worldviews

from the current paradigm of

- object
- discrete finite representations
- rule-based action
- dualist ontology
- informatic

to

- fields (from which objects can be formed)
- fluid expression (anyone can form novel meaningful gestures)
- continuous action, continuous becoming
- a-linguistic sense-making

Why? To make possible --

- Imaginary space in which people can imagine other than what actually exists;
- The means and the materials which people can actually make these imaginaries.

The space of this imaginary is multivalent: not just aesthetic, but also physical, social and erotic, which is why sponge work cannot be "art work" nor "scientific work" nor "language work" but a fusion form of creative work.

themes

1/ PLAY

play in many guises, but the two main senses that we're using are *game-play*, and *ontological play* -- how stuff deforms and slips around stuff. (See my e-mail from 9 Mar 1999.)

rule-based play

- Discrete finite representations
- Game as a formalizable system:
- There is a State space of finite discrete representations, and Transitions $s \rightarrow T(s)$
- Combinatorial complexity that inevitably emerges from a modular approach which combines above

free play

What does this mean? Continuous ranges of options over a continuous phenomenal manifold?

Social, group play emerges without explicit instruction or command.

2/ EXPERIENCE

Emergent theater (script generated vs. immaterial).

Dissolution of the body in the network.

Reflexive ability to shift from spectator to creator, inside-gallery to outside-park.

Moving from such questions of spectator and actor to more immanent notion of performance as gesture immanent in ordinary life. This is based on the formation of experience and subjectivity out of the flow or interference of fields of media and matter.

3 / ONTOLOGY -- LA STOFFA DEL MONDO

system and its exterior

What is the paradox of a system? That there is always an outside to any system, that there are always exogenous variables. Is an "open system" an oxymoron? How can a society be a system -- what are the rules?

tangible media

The give and elasticity, plasticity of some forms of matter vs. crystallinity, brittleness and the interlocking rigidity of the gear-world. How can we give digital media such materialities, and how can we infuse computational media in matter.

phenomenal, experiential qualities

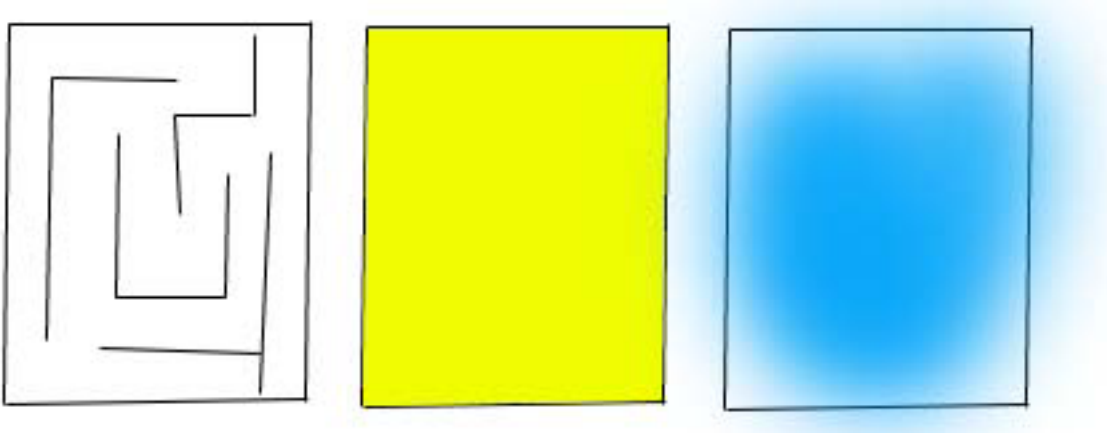
What do people experience in these rooms, or spaces? To answer this we should distinguish between the phenomenology, perception, and psychology. We can design in terms of the phenomenology -- the experiential quality which is not the same as what you see or hear (media), and not the subjective psychology.

We design keeping the phenomenal qualities in mind. We describe our pieces to curators using the perceptual (you see this color, that structure, you hear these sounds at this time...). And we design nothing of the "internal subjective experience," the psychological, of individual visitors. We do not expect to design phenomenological epiphanies but make states/ environments in which such epiphanies are much more likely to appear. One such epiphany is the shift across the cusp between immersion and reflection, but there are many, marked for example by laughing in delight, an ambient erotic rush, a crystallization of a memory, a resolution or eruption of a pain.

- Puzzle
- Tight, boxed in
- Always know where you are, but can't get there from here
- Only small number of options at every juncture (sparse logic)
- Amusing, after awhile people should not be scared or frustrated anymore, but amused
- Sense always other people's presences
- Shower
- Snow-blindness
- Cleanses palate

- T(opological)-Garden
- Consolation
- Memory , recollection
- Anticipation
- Unearthing and burying bodies and other precious objects
- Contemplative work -- layering, digging, sifting, exposing depth
- Sense-making without language

design



Schematic of m3 Spaces: Puzzle, Zero, and T-Garden

It may be better to think of these parts more as scenes in the temporal order of the experience of the visitor.

- Netspace
- media-bots shine video onto realspace puzzle
- solving the model of the physical puzzle space controls the media display
- display is used as "algorithmic" binoculars into the m3 space and event
- people on the net can play with this and modify the media structure of the installation/performance
- Puzzle
- combinatorial, discrete
- sliding panels
- pushing a door aside in one corridor slides it to block an adjacent corridor.
- contact sensors send open/close signals to sound synthesis software
- Zero
- very light, featureless walls

- the light fades slowly over time, and then light flashes, wipe out.
- people lie on floor and see their own bodies projected onto ceiling (after flash), but their images are mixed in realtime.
- T(opological)-Garden
- Start with bodies of performers and visitors: the people will wear sumptuous fabrics with embedded (active/passive) sensors
- As they approach other people their clothes will audibly interfere - squeal, doppler shift, layer sounds
- Performers may touch or be touched, which leaks image or recorded sound from one body to the other.
- As they walk around their location, speed, configuration will be fed to a MIDI composition program which maps changing configurations to ambient sound.
- Objects projected as video into the continuous matter medium
- Localized sound for 'burying' and 'unburying' video projected objects

etudes

m3 is a conceptually large piece, so in the first 6-9 months, we will build a series of studies playing with particular themes and techniques. Each study can stand alone as a performance and/or installation, but will draw from and feed ideas back into the m3 arc. We plan to collect what we build and learn into m3 over a second period of 6 months in Year 2000.

Howling clothing

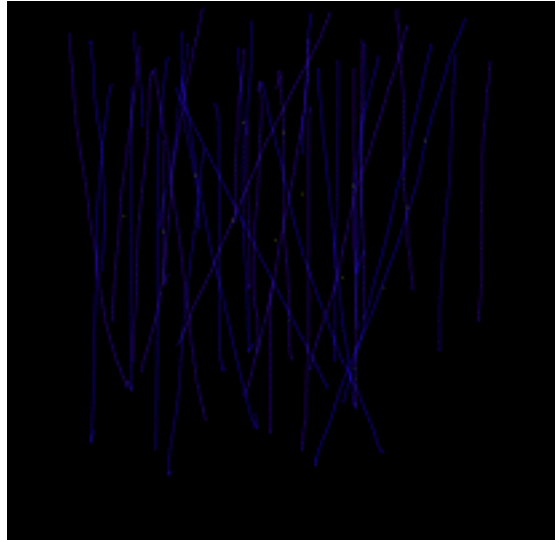


Clothes that trail and exchange wisps of fabric or sound behind people. These tendrils curl, waft and intertwine behind us. As you pass someone, your clothes interfere audibly (Doppler, radio tuner squeal, anharmonics, etc.), images and sounds that you carry or make bleed from you to the other person, as you touch or approach other bodies. The sound is function not of individual identity but of relative spacing and motion.

Fiberoptic video bundles

Bundle up hundreds of fiber-optic cables. Butt one end against a video projector -- try shooting video down the bundle. Bending the bundle lets light/image leak around corner. Weave these bundles' threads effectively permutes the pixels. May be one of the objects buried in the T-garden. Or suspended by the hundreds from ceiling down to 0.2 - 2.5 meters off the floor.

Thread-volume



thread-volume

Thousands of threads fill the airspace. Threads are tied to strain-sensors, which map to re-synthesized sound. You walk through it and can't help but leave impressions, bend the threads. Breakage should be ok.

Speech paint

As you walk around the room, speak. Your speech appears as text splashed onto the wall nearest you. As you walk around your words are painted on roughly so that it seems like you're splattering your voice onto the walls.

Each wall has a microphone at its top center, connected to continuous speech recognition software (eg. Dragon Systems). The software converts to text, and another application takes text and maps it to screen. Screen image is projected onto the wall from video projector mounted above opposite wall.

Puzzle Room

See description above of Puzzle Space. We build the sensors on tracked dividing screens, and the software that maps state of sliding doors to sound.

Web Puzzle

People on the WWWeb will see a display of a maze in which little robots (appearing as discs with perhaps a headlight) will solve the puzzle. The geometry of the maze will be updated (1) by people sliding the corresponding door in physical Puzzle space, *or* (2) by a remote visitor clicking on the web display. This will be a Java simulation-cum-control of the Puzzle Space. Details as in "m3History" document or the Cafe Istanbul napkin.

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