

# m3 themes

## sha xin wei • sponge

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**

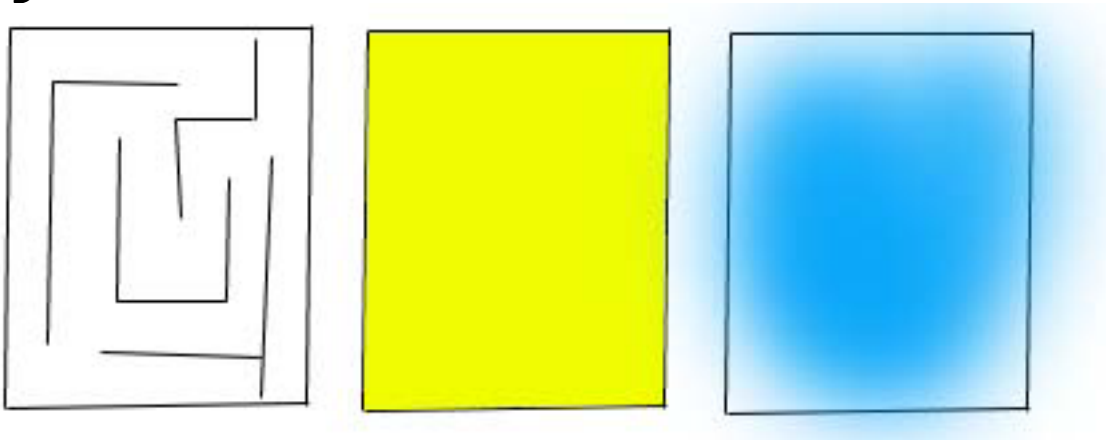
What do people experience in these rooms, or spaces? To answer this we should distinguish between the phenomenology, perception, and psychology. We can design in terms of the phenomenology -- the experiential quality which is not the same as what you see or hear (media), and not the subjective psychology.

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



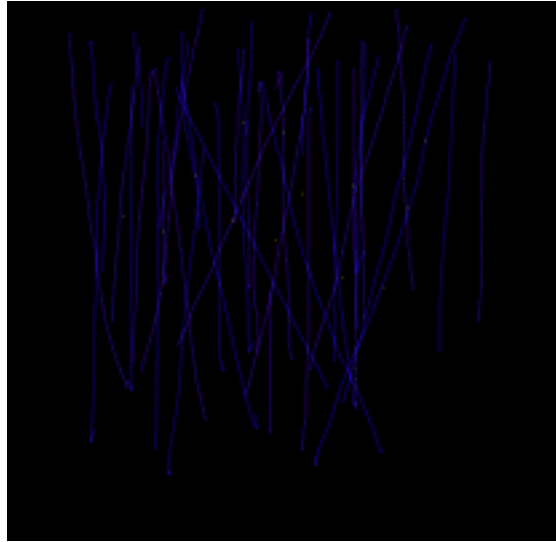
Clothes that trail and exchange wisps of fabric or sound behind people. These tendrils curl, waft and intertwine behind us. As you pass someone, your clothes interfere audibly (Doppler, radio tuner squeal, anharmonics, etc.), images and sounds that you carry or make bleed from you to the other person, 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.

*xinwei@sponge.org • 23 may 1999*