MobileGaze: Your previous project *Wonderwalker*, a participatory wunderkammer, created analogies between memory, the collection and the public display of the private. Where do you see the role of these issues/themes converging in your recent work *Apartment*?

Martin: *Apartment* is in some ways a more personal, allusive kind of wunderkammer. I think the less literal nature of the work made people open up more: I was astonished by what private memories some people posted.

Marek: In *Apartment* you have individual stories grouped into "themes" in an online city, here we specified the themes and potential relationships beforehand. Wonderwalker was thought of as a museum where the visitors not only self-created the collection, but also located their icon-links, the hope being that the grouping of icons would be self-organizing.

MG: Henri Bergson is his essay "Of the Survival of Images" remarks on the circuitous nature of images as contained in our memory. He recalls how "To picture is not to remember. No doubt a recollection, as it becomes actual, tends to live in an image; however, the converse is not true, and the image, pure and simple, will not be referred to the past unless, it was in the past that I sought it, thus following the continuous progress which brought it from darkness into light." (1) Does this notion of memory and the calling forth of images apply to your work, and if so how?

Martin: The theory of memory that inspires me is the current belief in cognitive psychology that to remember is to infer, to reason, and to construct. Our minds don't just read a memory off some kind of hard disk; instead remembering is a creative act in itself.

Marek: Neither pictures or words are generally remembered. However we live in this media fantasy where every time you have a flashback its total recall. We don't store Jpegs. In our heads, perhaps, when we access an image its like we open Illustrator and recreate the image from scratch, based on a few compressed
recreate the image from scratch, based on a few compressed fragments. On top of that the fragments are re-written/altered every time they are opened. And other changes in the hardrive can also alter that memory... imagine looking at a childhood photo of yourself. In Apartment the nearest we came to that was by re-creating the 3D Apartment every time, with slightly different configurations. We are working towards a conception of memory and structure like that.

MG: Language is the catalyst to the interface development in the Apartment - semiotically speaking, as it prefigures the image in this work. What theoretical importance does it have in the generative result of Apartment's configurations?

Martin: We hoped to show that words and images can coexist and enhance one another; that instead of representing opposing modes of thought, they are manifestations of one underlying process.

Marek: Maybe our sense of ourselves is a story we write. Recently my father returned to where he was born and found several conflicting narratives at play, even to the point where the land itself has been erased. Turning text into space, an impossibly direct process in Apartment, assumes a story on the part of the author. The most successful apartments are the ones where the subject of the author and the structure of the piece match, where space and text combine.

MB: William J. Mitchell, in discussing the fluidity of the private and the digital commented on how "The domestic living room is emerging as a major site at which digitally displaced activities are recombinining and regrounding themselves in the physical world." (2) As such, do you see the Web as a public display of private space, or as a public space as such?

Martin: I would classify the space in Apartment as a public collection of private spaces, since there are no true conversations occurring. A generally accessible message board, on the other hand, would be completely public in my view.

MG: Do you see a parallel between net.space and contemporary architecture and design in a project such as Apartment? It seems to me that both are involved in shaping our experience of space and both are presently being subjected to the ephemeral.
Marek: When I started studying at the Architectural Association in London, the school had just narrowly defeated an option to become a community-based architectural experiment in Convent Garden. Instead the AA decided to nurture its teachers as "pop stars". I remember Bernard Tschumi, current Dean of Architecture at Columbia, explaining that while others went out and protested he stayed inside and created conceptual narrative works. At the same time Cedric Price was conceiving a time-based architecture where cultural and material forms become self-organizing structures.

This difference is visible today. If you look at Asymptotetrs Virtual Trading Floor the stock market has been pictured as a 3D cacophony, it even has 1D ticker-tape floating in 3D! The message is obvious - this stuff is way too complicated and you better leave it to your betters. On the other hand, Martin's Marketmap creatively re-works the information into a "gestalt image" where you instantly get a picture of the market. Then you can further mine it, at each level getting another clear picture.

MG: You have used VRML in many of your works. What are the advantages and limitations of this language?

Martin: It provides fluid 3D views, but limits your audience tremendously. It's like designing the interior of a mansion with a huge budget--you know your audience will be small, but the artistic power is addictive

Marek: I still like that vrml is a web-based 3D standard, but it never caught on. I use it for performances like Adrift, but its lack of general support is its greatest downfall. So I may be moving. Being text-based, it's easy to move stuff in vrml based on external programmed sources.

MG: What role do you see the Apartment archive playing a decade from now? Will it become a collection to bequest to an institution? Will there come a point in the process where the work becomes a finite oeuvre? Or do you see it taking other forms: such as the documents featured in Mark Tribetta's recent net ephemera exhibition?

Martin: There are several end points. The two most important are the Turbulence site and the Whitney exhibit. The Whitney installation is truly finite, because the collection of apartments will freeze on June 10, when the exhibit ends.
Marek: We don't have the time or money to create a proper archive of Apartment. Basically in 10 years it will be reduced to a trace, a few screenshots here and there. This will be the 4th work I will lose as a result of technology's transformation! Our current solution is to work by commission, and not expect to be able to sell anything we do, or have it remain. Being time-based, each time created from scratch from a program running on the server, perhaps it's more like dance or theater than painting.

MG: Are you working on any new projects involving audience participation, and if so (or not) why and how?

Martin: We're working on a project to create collaborative maps of mental space. Recent experiments show that the geometry of mental maps has unusual properties that, as far as we know, have not yet been explored artistically. Audience participation is crucial as a way of finding out how people's subjective mental maps differ.

Marek: I am working on 2 very different projects. In 1997 we began Adrift, which will be at the New Museum in October 2001. Adrift is a collaboration between a writer, composer and myself. The live performance is logged and then replayed over a 3 month period. Each log of the performance changes, as it accepts live feeds from various data sources, including perhaps audience participation. Martin and I are also working for a project for Nabi, due in December. Currently we are thinking of a collaborative mapping tool of mental spaces. I'm reading Kevin Lynch, his method for creating user-maps of cities in the 1960s. Funny how Christopher Alexander and Lynch are back in fashion.


Valérie Lamontagne