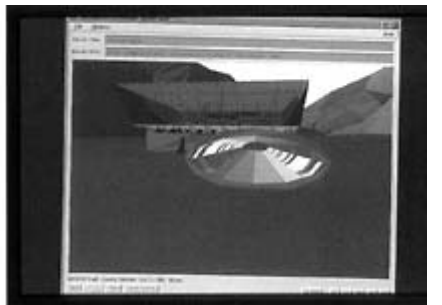
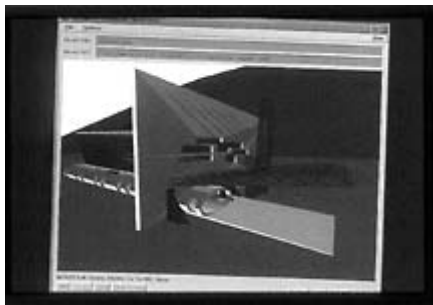
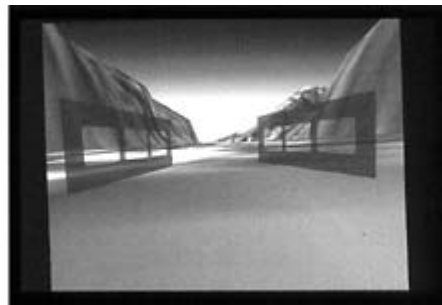
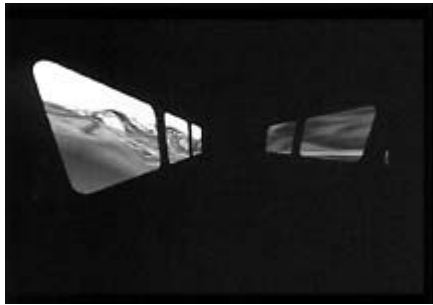


Crossings STACEY SPIEGEL



The new artist is deeply concerned with moral obligations toward the entire society of which he feels himself a part. In this sense Lessing's statement that "the theater is a moral institution" can be applied to all creative activities irrespective of their initial stimuli and peculiar media. Thus any artwork is the result of the forces manifest in the social and economic structure and mirrored by man. Art may often appear bare of ideological clarity in the sense of a social program. However, the artist is not a propagandist but, more than any other person, a seismograph of his time and its direction, who consciously or unconsciously expresses its substance. Apart from this limitation of predetermined social and ethical existence, the creative artist is free as to his formulation.

Moholy-Nag, "Vision in Motion" 1947

The decoding of nature has preoccupied humanity through the millennia. Whether expressed as a biblical vision or a microbiological scan, the seduction of defining social meaning and organization through observing nature continues to be a primal force. In the 17th century, the painter Vermeer used camera obscura to translate the real 3-dimensional landscape into a condensed 2-dimensional visual experience. His intention may have been to explore the impending belief that, through the mechanization of nature, one could penetrate the meaning of nature and extend it beyond simple representation.

Crossings is an exploration in expression that is not without similar conviction. From an analog world of one-dimensional information, we are reconstructing a simulated digital 3-dimensional landscape. A metaphor for real space so dimensionally accurate in representation that it extends itself to the surreal potential of invention and play. We are in fact playing at the

boundary of representation. Through electronic media, our discourse is entirely in cyberspace, a visual analog of the 3-dimensional world we know.

Crossings came as the result of the desire to explore the potential for 3-dimensional interactivity in navigating information on the World Wide Web. The concept for Crossings was formulated around a metaphoric landscape through which a high-speed rail link passes. The rail link refers to changes in communications technologies. European culture — like North American culture — is in a transitional state. Perceptions of local, regional and national identities are being compressed and redefined through access time. The Crossings project is based on the proposition that, in terms of its social/cultural implications, the interweaving of a high-speed rail system through the European landscape is analogous to the electronic pathways of network communication. It is our assumption that, as in the real world, virtual landscape interventions may become primary opportunities to explore cultural identity and information.

Crossings began as a virtual model based on a mountainous landscape stretching over 15 kilometers in length. This terrain was selected for its social and political context as a border region of the proposed high-speed rail line connecting Paris and Berlin. It extends the physical landscape into the network of hypermedia using interactive three-dimensional space in which to explore. Those experiencing the terrain over the WWW can choose to interact with the environment or contribute to the project through their own symbolic manifestations. These may take the form of conceptual, historical, geological, ecological or metaphysical responses to the context and site.

Navigating through the model, the participant explores the "next generation" of interactivity so far only referred to in literature. Riding the rail one experiences the artistic interventions in the landscape as visceral signposts. The moment one leaves the train, one roams the landscape, investigating the symbolic layers of the environment, which unfolds into psychological, emotional and intellectual spaces.

Like Alice passing through the looking glass, each form encountered in the landscape has the potential to link the participant to other realities. This hypermedia link allows the viewer to access sound, image and text as well as animations and video stored in the ether of the WWW. It is in this way that Crossings is able to extend its navigational potential through layers of information and cyberspace.

Crossings is — by definition — a heightened investigation of the mechanization of nature. Its environment is the signature of our post-industrial era and reasserts that in this time one must leave the boundaries of geographical terrain to explore and search for meaning in a new social paradigm.

This project is not a celebration of technological sophistication or an acceptance of the values imbued to virtuality. Rather, it is intended to contribute to the experiencing of information space by evoking an informed dialogue around the dynamic potential of 3-dimensional interactivity in the World Wide Web.

The project was conceptualized by artist Stacey Spiegel and produced while she was artist in residence at the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe Germany. The realization of the work was accomplished in collaboration with Rodney Hoinkes, head of design applications at the Centre for Landscape Research, University of Toronto.

The software for network interactivity is made possible by software known as CLRMosaic; the landscape model was generated using the software PolyTRIM. Both CLRMosaic and PolyTRIM were developed at the Center for Landscape Research at the University of Toronto lab under the directorship of John Danahy. The software currently runs on SGI machines.

At the time of writing, the following people had contributed landscape interventions: Stacey Spiegel, Rodney Hoinkes, John Consolati, Chris Ziegler, Eckart Lange, Edward Kim, John Featherstone, David Schleindl, Michael Forte, David Mizrahi, Caroline Westort.