

How to provide Affinity?

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This paper and our project aim at the need to create space that fosters and supports communication, emotion and experience. Traditionally, architecture has been a static, physical structure of concepts, but with new technology you could propose supple solutions that recognize architecture as the setting for the events of experience. Contemporary architecture is a meta-space residing almost any thinkable field, striving to blur the boundary between art, architecture, design, urbanity, etc. and break down the distinction between the material and the viewer. Space becomes organized information and intuitive experience within contemporary culture. Computer-technology delivers a tangible concept of time and a new sensibility of space through collection, creation and distribution of data.

Space becomes a place for performance where you have to perform to use the potential of space. Performative space offers a symbiotic state between inhabitant and environment in an experience of flow. In this performative space the opportunity to step back and become a viewer disappears and leaves the inhabitant inside a network of media, emotion, power and appearance. In order to sustain a balance of reality and free will - emotion, technology and design has to go hand in hand.

These ideas are very present in the project, which is made by the design group called diffus, where a mixture of theory and practise is essential.

The project is sourced by an idea competition called Landmark East England that we used as inspiration for our work method. The goal was to develop and deliver a visionary idea for a landmark – a sustainable icon representing a new region in England, **1** which comprises Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Research found that there was a lack of identity or sense of belonging and nothing anchoring people to the region as a whole. Common affinity was somehow forced to the people of East England with this new region. We came to the conclusion that a single landmark or a series of landmarks would do little to achieve true affinity.

A bridge might have been a solution. Bridges have an ability to connect physically as well as mentally. But where should that bridge be? But how would people in Norfolk connect to a bridge between Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire? Would more bridges do? Or would that just be bridges for the sake of bridges? And again would it connect all the areas when not all are having common borders?

② One of the winning projects of the East England Ideas Competition used the idea of a bridge. The idea is to make a Bridge of Reeds, that acts as both a physical and metaphorical gateway to social, cultural and environmental opportunities. Reeds are symbolic of the region; from the Norfolk Broads to the Essex estuaries to the Fens and the bridge will ultimately provide access to 6,000 hectares of green space. A reed visitor shelter will demonstrate new ways of understanding and enjoying the landscape and culture of the region.

In our conviction common affinity appears when people have a common history, interest, understanding or myth. Therefore, we based our design strategy in trying to elaborate an *alternate reality* based on fabulation, virtualization and narratives that we subtly interweaved into architectonic structures (fabric) of the real. We wanted to give the people of East England a mythology specific to East England – something that would be unique to the jointed area. ③

All elements of the project are connected to a constructed myth. The myth is of an ancient population called Draugemits (palindrome for timeguard) who has lived in East England ever since Great Britain was little and only existed of the area of East England. This mythological population was and is still controlling time from a range of holes. The

holes are spread randomly in the East-England area. If the public are lucky enough to find one of them, they will have the possibility to explore the cavity and look after traces of the ancient population. The holes are small and deeply rooted inside the earth. ④⑤⑥ They are like a spider's fragile nest construction, which has developed over time, and left traces behind reminding us of a time consuming effort. Spinning time is the main activity of the Draugemits, and their goal might be to built wormholes or timeholes as described by today's most advanced physical theories. Timeholes protecting you, like wombs and cocoons from the rust of Time itself. A visit in a deaugemit hole will therefore offer an intimate and sensual experience to the explorer. ⑦-11

Moreover, augmented reality technology will enhance the experience by creating a feeling of shared space trough telepresence among people exploring different holes at the same time. Or it might be a comprised experience of past, present and future activity. You can see the existence of the Draugemits, but like time they are only visible through traces. 12-13

V i r t u a l i t y i n P h y s i c S p a c e

With computer technology the diversity and complexity of space has been conspicuous. The ways we are exposed to objects of media has fundamentally changed with the rise of computing. Different kinds of media are somehow brought into the same level, where the relations between non-hierarchical elements become essential.

The foundation of design and architecture becomes interactive and related to relations. The human body and mind becomes part of this network of relations. The challenge of designing architectural space based on the described conditions are, to optimise the quality and likelihood for interaction, contemplation and play to occur. Inhabitants both generate and become an integral part of the environment as they engage with it. When activated by a user an environment exists simultaneously as a durational 'performance' and an immersive installation environment.

The performative space as theoretical approach was essential for the Landmark East-England project. We wanted people to actively discover and participate in their affinity – in other words to perform their affinity rather than someone forced it upon them. Therefore the project is a creation of potential plots and situations in an undetermined process of resolution.

With the Landmark-project we wanted people to immerse into their affinity. And taking the immersive idea that has developed explosively in computer game industry and apply it to affinity is a result of the exact opposite phenomena as immersion. The medium of immersive virtual reality is not merely an abstract space but also an experienced physical space, due to the fact that the body cannot be abandoned. The immersive virtual reality is a spatial and temporal arena, wherein mental models or abstract constructs of the world can be given virtual embodiment in three dimensions, and then artificially and synaesthetically explored and operated through interaction. But in the words of the American architect Marcos Novak the immersive element of the digital space is not a 'complete conceptual apparatus' (Novak 1999). A complementary concept is missing, describing the outpouring of virtuality into the physical space. Novak says: (billeder af novak 14-16)

"Eversion" is the term I employ to describe a motion complementary to the familiar notion of immersion. Whereas "immersion" describes a vector moving from ordinary to virtual space, "eversion" describes the counter-vector of the virtual leaking out into the actual. Eversion predicts that the content of augmented reality and ubiquitous computing will be the population of the physical world with phenomena and entities first encountered in virtual space. (Marcos Novak 2001)

By introducing the term eversion Novak emphasizes the importance of trans-coding between digital and analogue space. We need the bodily experience to be able to operate virtually. It is with the experience and memory from reality we are able to act immersed. On the other hand will

whatever we experience in virtual space become part of our memory, bodily as well as mental. Immersion in virtual computerised space has become part of our memory, everted and part of human everyday skill.

The immersive experience in the Landmark Project is highly low tech and desperately analogue, mainly based on fabulation, cartoons, and mushrooms growing in local forests. It ultimately appeals to the experienced sense of tangible actualisation where curiosity, combined with a story where you have to fill in missing gaps yourself, suspense the experience. A tangible actualisation where the structure will support a membrane protecting the visitor from its surrounding but also work as a "Human to Nature Interface" which is a direct-sensual interface to the primitive conditions of the place. The interplay between immersion and eversion continuously occur, and the challenge of design processes seems to be mastering the virtuality of physical space as well as the physics of virtual space.

The virtual outside the computer-media is the true virtual in the words of Pierre Levy. The virtual is not opposed to the real but instead to the actual, and the virtual should be conceived as that which could become real. Levy's notion of the virtual supports a positive idea about a field of possibilities in a distinction between realisation, which is the transformation of the possible to the static, and actualisation, which implies the production of new qualities. The real is on a fixed path, where only transformation is capable of actualise new possibilities and solutions to problems. The virtual on the other hand can take one of many paths, some of which are real, others actual.

The Landmark Project is very much a product of a trans-coding between physic and virtual space and the virtuality connected to dreams, thoughts and fabulations carries the project. Besides that an equalizing and blending of different medias have occurred. There is a certain architectural structure present in the project but it is also a mythology, a

social space, a political issue, a bedtime story etc. Of course architecture has always contained these elements but the difference lies in the impossibility to tell what media is the most important. The relations between elements or the performability of the project seems to take over the former architectonic protagonist. Media is beyond matter.

The mingling of different medias could easily get muddy though. Boundaries between medias are blurred by media-beyond-matter or a certain post-media ideal that becomes a pre-orgasmic state of mind where the catharsis never occurs, and the fear of the emptiness on the other side of redemption exceeds the lack of purification.