

## DREAMT SPACES

Maria Asuncion Salgado

Beyond a mere interdisciplinary relationship, the symbiosis of cinema, body and architecture conveys an illusion: showing a dream-like architecture.

The vision of architecture through a cinematographic filter facilitates infinite possibilities, from creating inhabitable conditions in impossible spaces to providing architecture with unimaginable attributes. Aspects such as movement or dematerialization, in principle far from classic architectural values, have a familiar ring due to experiences from cinema. Likewise, in recent decades architecture has carried out daring spatial experiments where the only goal is experimentation on the relationship between body and space.

The importance of the dialogue between space and its user required a drastic change that deepened in aspects beyond the formal. Architecture was not supposed to limit itself to fulfill the function of enwrapping bodies any more, but to take a step forward in order to meet man's other needs: sensorial, physiological and psychological aspects.

Despite the importance of this question on the perception of certain architecture, for many years architects were absent from this experimental field. In the majority of the cases, as mere spectators, they limited themselves exclusively to observing the proposals of some artists and film-makers who transformed space with just another plastic material. Many of these proposals of "space alteration" were left behind, however, some of them established a basis for events to come which would forever change the traditional ways of understanding space.

Many of the artistic experiments which comprised spatial interchanges during the seventies and beginning of the eighties met with more response among filmmakers than architects.

As a matter of fact, the majority of these alterations rested upon technological devices such as the video in order to consolidate the proposals. Artists like Dan Graham<sup>1</sup> with a long history of sensorial and cognitive space alterations (many of them based on the superimposition of filmed images in common architectural spaces) or Paul McCarthy give proof of these changes.

### *Spinning Room Installation, 1971-2008*

*Paul McCarthy  
Whitney Museum, New York*



---

<sup>1</sup> Graham, Dan. (1942, Urbana, Illinois). Graham is an influential figure in the field of contemporary art especially in conceptual art. Some of the works that explore this dialogue of alteration between body and space might be emphasized: Two consciousness Projection (1972); Time Delay Rooms N.6 (1974); Present Continuous Past(s), (1974); Yesterday / Today (1975); Video Piece for two Glass Buildings (1976); Video Piece for Shop Windows in an Arcade (1978); Video Projection Outside Home (1978-1996).

With regards to McCarthy<sup>2</sup>, some of his installations have recently been recovered and improved thanks to incorporating a more modern technology (which only implies higher-quality camera and projection equipment).

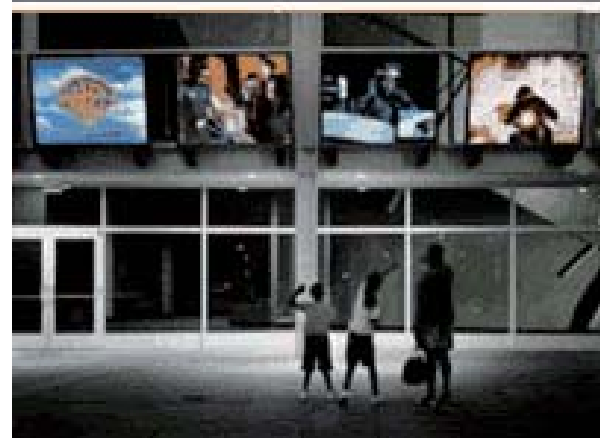
In many cases these experiments of cognitive space alteration rested upon reflections about social changes caused by new technologies in consumer society. These transformations naturally assumed by society, challenged the apparent inactivity of the architects who did not seem to get excited about these changes.

The logical relationship sender –receiver was radically transformed during the second half of the 20th century. This new perception emerging from cinematic images offered new processes of connectivity between body and space. Apparently, the role changes between body and space motivated by new visual technologies, succeeded without requiring an in-depth revision of the concepts of consumption-driven architecture. However, even more changes still had to be assumed.

A very evident example of society's change in attitude towards this alteration can be found in the security cameras which cover our cities. What was previously considered an intrusion into privacy nowadays symbolizes an atmosphere of security.

The relationship between a more permeable architecture and video surveillance should lead us towards a transparent world without any secrets. However, underneath the shelter of this new technology emerge new privacy and of course, presentation techniques.

The new paranoia has nothing to do with the feeling of being observed, but rather with the fear that nobody exists to supervise us.



*Jump Cuts, 1996*

*Elisabeth Diller & Ricardo Scofidio  
United Artist Cineplex, San José, California*

---

<sup>2</sup> *McCarthy, Paul*. (1945, Salt Lake City, Utah). McCarthy is a contemporary artist who has taught performance, video, installation, and sculpture. *Spinning Room*, (1971/2008).

Under this assumption, the architects Elisabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio<sup>3</sup> designed a project called Jump Cuts<sup>4</sup>, which combined the video surveillance technology with the construction technique of a glass curtain wall. The idea was to project some of the building's inside activities onto the glass façade, including film fragments which could be watched from the inside. The façade is converted into a well-measured showcase, acting as a contemporary advertisement.

Among the spatial experiments which explore man's change in attitude towards the architecture and the current reality, a decisive event for mankind occurred which would transform life as it was seen: a new era; the digital conscience. As an example, one of the consequences of the digital revolution has been the conclusion that both architecture and space are also virtual. This in turn implies that they are not restricted to something physical, but that they have to do with a mental predisposition.

Nowadays, nobody argues about internet's "habitability" where a person can develop a parallel existence to the one that we may wrongly call reality. In a not too distant past, however, this duality seemed unimaginable, that is until the Wachowski brothers bewitched us with *The Matrix* (1999).

*The Matrix, 1999*

*Andy Wachowski & Larry Wachowski*



*The Matrix, 1999*

*Andy Wachowski & Larry Wachowski*



---

3 Diller + Scofidio. They run an interdisciplinary architect studio which combines visual arts with scenic arts. Elisabeth Diller is professor of architecture at the University of Princeton and Ricardo Scofidio gives lectures of architecture at the Cooper Union University of New York.

4 Jump Cuts settled down permanently in the theater United Artists Cineplex, in San Jose, California, 1996, as part of the program of Public Arts. Its North façade is made from an additional piece of scaffolding with 12 liquid crystal panels, which project images of 12 crystal cameras and fragments of life films.

Independent of the script, the real innovation of this film focused on establishing a new dialogue between body and space. The Matrix's horrifying reality surrenders physical space beyond mere body storage and provides the characters with an entire spatial universe – but only dreamt.

Within The Matrix the world resembles the known one, with the possibility of creating virtual spaces a la carte. Outside The Matrix the human beings pile up in individual capsules, deprived of their free will, with their only purpose being to provide energy to the system. Although at the end of the 20th century technology did exist which imagined a practical alternative to the fatalist one of The Matrix, the truth is that the proposals which emerged by then seemed to ignore the universe of possibilities from a new scenario revealed by the science-fiction cinema.

The message opened up a new horizon for the architects: space expansion could be realized outside the physical territory in order to conquer the virtual space as if it were a blank canvas.

It seemed an illusion to think that this change in scenario was the medicine that would allow architects to reinvent themselves, but as a matter of fact that was what happened. At the end of the 20th century the debate among architects started to slacken in an alarming way, since in many cases they did not play their part in the drama where the cultural panorama had been converted by the vanguard. Apparently, there was neither direction nor clear objective in their way of asking questions.

The shift in mentality has not only provided architecture with a new horizon but has also reopened some previously exhausted areas of investigation (such as the elimination of its physical limits and democratization) that directly affect the body question.

These changes allow architecture to regain a place in the show, which at the end of the day is nothing but the interaction with its users.

It is precisely the interest in opening new communication channels between space and body which characterizes the 21st century architecture. A dialogue that is not restricted to the visual area but appeals to biological and sensorial aspects of living organisms.

Through his proposals of physiological architecture, the Swiss architect Philippe Rahm<sup>5</sup> inverts the traditional passive role of architecture, providing it with devices capable of activating a persons' biorhythms with a certain goal.

One of his best-known projects, carried out with his former partner Jean Gilles Décosterd, is the Melatonin Room . Equipped with two rooms with two different climates in order to alter the natural melatonin produced by our bodies, the Melatonin Room<sup>6</sup> project tries to demonstrate the influence of space on a living organism.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Rahm, Philippe*. Rahm was the principal of the firm "Décosterd & Rahm, associés" until 2004. He currently works in Paris (France) and Lausanne (Switzerland). He has participated in a number of exhibitions worldwide. He is currently working on several private and public projects in France, Poland, England, Italy and Austria.

<sup>6</sup> *Melatonin Room*. Installations: D! Club, Lausanne, Switzerland, March 16, 2000; Fondation Claude Verdan, Lausanne, Switzerland, August 3 to September 30, 2000; SF-Moma, San Francisco, USA, March 3 to July 12, 2001. Collaboration : Jérôme Jacqmin, Grégory Marot

Melatonin is a hormone related to fatigue and sleep which is produced in the brain's pineal gland. This gland reacts to the luminous stimulation of the retina. Under normal conditions melatonin is produced at night since intense exposure to light inhibits its production; however, it does not work in the same way with any type of light: it has been established that green light has greater influence on melatonin production than ultraviolet light.



*Melatonin Room, 2000*  
*Décosterd & Rahm, associés*

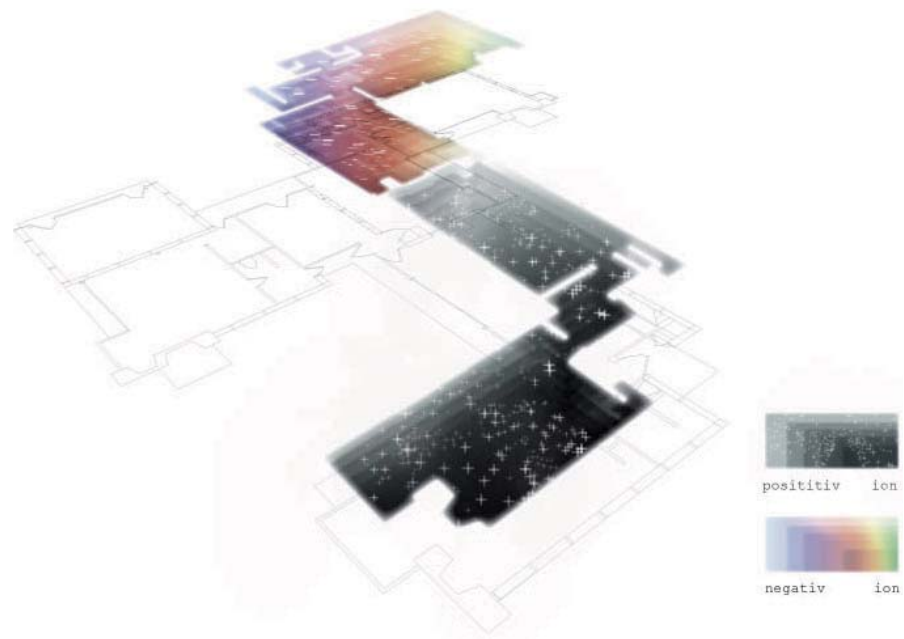
Melatonin is a hormone related to fatigue and sleep which is produced in the brain's pineal gland. This gland reacts to the luminous stimulation of the retina. Under normal conditions melatonin is produced at night since intense exposure to light inhibits its production; however, it does not work in the same way with any type of light: it has been established that green light has greater influence on melatonin production than ultraviolet light.

For that reason the exhibition was based on two side-by-side rooms equipped with white and green light respectively, in a reduced space between sender and receiver. The physiological impact of an electromagnetic architecture on the human metabolism can be investigated in this way.

This project could be perfectly adapted to a film script in which the environmental conditions would not be sufficient to guarantee habitability. The human being would have to ensure that artificial light and oxygen stimuli are not provided in a natural way (e.g. in outer space). This plot, which sounds like a science-fiction film, is an architectural reality, just like another of Rahm's projects: Polarized House could perfectly form part of the settings of a horror film.

With a more radical approach that appeals directly to our emotional state, Polarized House

developed as part of the interdisciplinary exhibition named The Gen(h)ome Project<sup>7</sup>. Phillippe Rahm uses tiny, beam-mounted ionizers to fill several rooms of the Schindler House with positive ions and negative ions.



**Gen(h)ome Project, 2007**  
*Phillippe Rahm, associés*

It is well-known that the atmosphere is charged with ions. During winter time the level of positive ions are higher, which causes irritability, tension and bad moods. On the other hand, during summer time the concentration of negative ions is lower resulting in good spirits. The ionic influence on our mood is of such an importance that a dramatic change in ion concentration could cause schizophrenia. The exhibition is perceived as “haunting”, dynamically demonstrating that invisible particles in the atmosphere have the power to influence emotional states.

Without going so far as making people mad, for some time it has been considered that aspects such as the solar irradiation influence positively on a person’s mood. The direct relationship between solar irradiation and architecture seems easy to control. But what happens in open spaces? Not only do the technical limitations have a certain impact on a project with such characteristics, but also the communication rules between the inhabitants and the space are different in this context.

As testament to this the Swiss team Fabric<sup>8</sup> designs its project Perpetual (Tropical) Sunshine as an architectural installation of urban space.

<sup>7</sup> *The Gen(h)ome Project Mak Schindler House, 2007*. Modernist Landmark Transformed into Genetics Lab by Artists, Architects. October 29, 2006 – February 18, 2007. Participants include Greg Lynn/FORM, Karl Chu, Servo, Marcos Novak, Ocean D, Weathers-Sean Lally, Phillippe Rahm, Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, and Open Source Architecture.

<sup>8</sup> *Fabric CH*. (Architecture Studio). It was founded in 1997 in Lausanne, (Switzerland). Staff: two architects: Christophe Guignard and Patrick Keller, a telecommunications engineer, Stéphane Carion and a computer engineer, Dr. Christian Babski, with the intention of undertaking architecture, interaction and research projects. Nowadays Fabric works on the hybridization of these non-material territories with the physical ones, seeking to link a universe made up of bits to one made of atoms.

developed as part of the interdisciplinary exhibition named The Gen(h)ome Project<sup>7</sup>. Phillippe Rahm uses tiny, beam-mounted ionizers to fill several rooms of the Schindler House with positive ions and negative ions.

Perpetual (Tropical) Sunshine<sup>9</sup> is temporary climatic architecture that emits light and warmth. An open space with light and temperature conditions from rays of sunshine similar to those at 23 degrees latitude in the Southern hemisphere is simulated by a panel of hundreds of infrared light bulbs. Interesting pictures were taken of this, showing dozens of people dressed in coats and scarves, sitting on chairs as if they were sunbathing – in a humid, night time environment.

It sounds like a scene from a Woody Allen film, however, it is actually about creating determinate conditions with space, i.e., it is about creating architecture.



**Perpetual (Tropical) Sunshine,**  
2005  
*Fabric, Switzerland*



**Perpetual (Tropical) Sunshine**  
Lyon 2005  
*Fabric, Switzerland*

Undoubtedly, this atmospheric control turns out to be hardest to bring about for architects and for that reason this now constitutes the last frontier. Nonetheless, very interesting projects are being developed in this area, which in turn lead us ever closer to a solution.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Perpetual (Tropical) sunshine* was conceived and realized by Fabric, with the support of the City of Lyon, the Federal Office of Cultural Affairs (OFC-BAK Switzerland), Pro Helvetia, the City of Madrid, the City of Lausanne, the State of Vaud and OSRAM in 2005.

One of the most successful projects of this type was developed some years ago by the Americans Diller & Scofidio, titled Blur<sup>10</sup>.

At Expo 02 in Extasia they get in touch with several pioneer architect studios in the interdisciplinary investigation, in order to plan an architectural project defined as The Blur Building, “an atmosphere beyond the eye mechanics”. The project was initially inspired in other cloud projects that had been developed previously by the Japanese artist Fujoko Nakiya.

Located in the city Yberdon, next to the Lake of Neuchâtel, its development started in 1998, when the partners of West 8, known for their landscape projects, met for the first time with Diller & Scofidio. They agreed to tackle the project from a symbiosis point of view, between landscape and digital technology. The predominant material would be the most abundant one in the locality, in this case, water, and a system of filtration and powering would be created in order to create the sensation of living within a cloud.



**Blur, Swiss National Expo 2002**  
Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland  
Diller & Scofidio



**Blur, raincoats 2002**  
Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland  
Diller & Scofidio

Although the aesthetics of “blur” by Diller & Scofidio tried to experiment with the visual effects of photographic lenses obtained through a natural atmosphere, in fact it was about a connectivity experiment. On the one hand, it was concerned with the dematerialization of architecture and the control of natural conditions and on the other hand, visitors communicating among themselves through a device connected to a virtual net.

---

<sup>10</sup> *Blur* is the centerpiece pavilion of the Sixth Swiss National Exhibition. Swiss National Expo 2002, Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland. 15. 05. - 20. 10. 2002



The Blur project is certainly the anticipation of the last great challenge for architects: the construction of architecture and the atmosphere which surrounds it.

NASA scientists ensure that technologies exist to install a base on Mars with the objective of adjusting the atmosphere of this planet for its later inhabitation. Although until now bureaucratic obstacles hold up this project, intuitively some current architectural proposals seem to be carried out in line with this project, which undoubtedly would be one of the greatest creations of mankind.

None of the above is science fiction, but we can elaborate a new architectural map with a clear cinematographic influence. It is obvious that none of the current projects might ignore the necessity to establish a permanent dialogue between space and body, a dialogue which in some cases might be influenced by hundreds of cinematographic references.