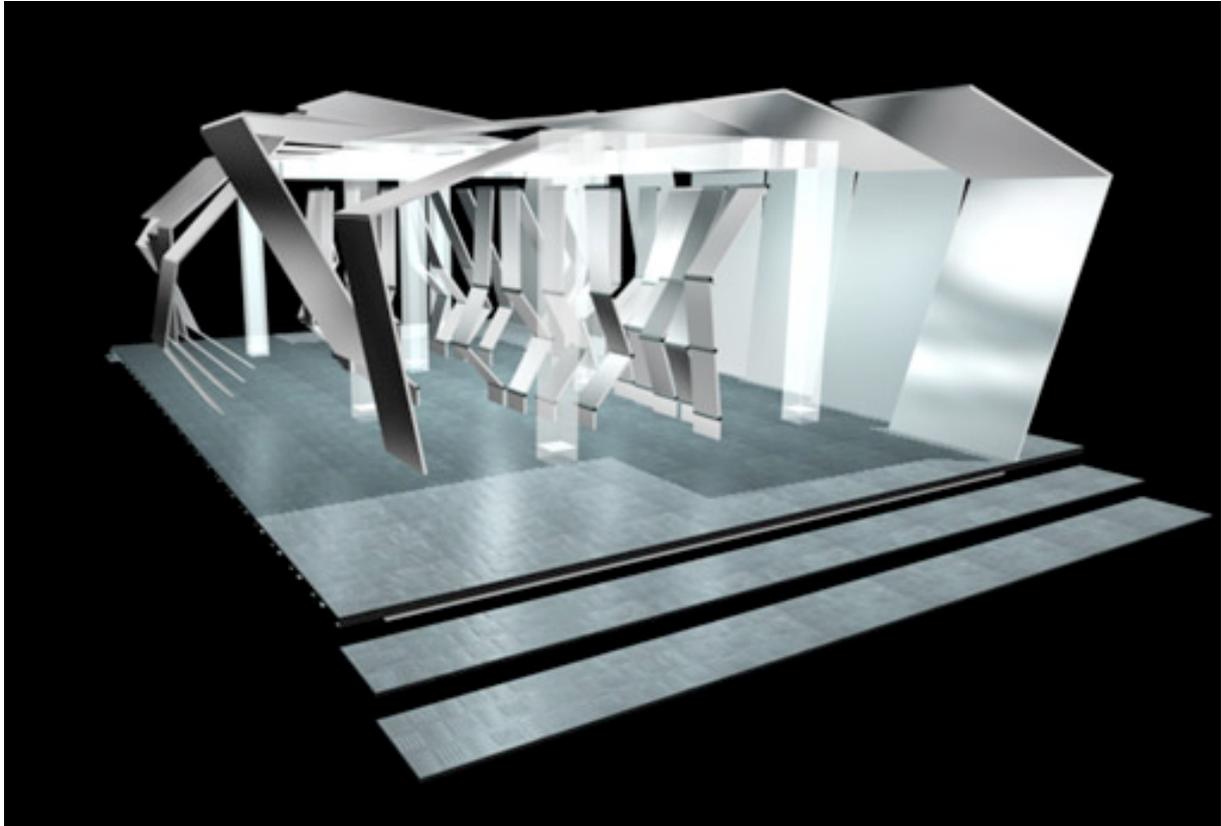


'ecstatic architecture' – study outline

The study seeks to develop a variety of premises concerning a design approach which tries to deal with the irreversible impact of new technology on our body as well as on our perception of space. Architecture will be understood as a means of investigation, which provides producers as much as users with possibilities to enter multiple perception worlds of our being. Possible consequences for a development of spatial strategies based on the following points of research shall be summarized in a terminology of 'ecstatic architecture'¹:

- body, space and technology – a new sense for issues of the body and its potential weaknesses
- the enduring relevance of the virtual before and after modernism
- new space-scapes and their oscillating objects
- choreography beyond control – hybrid forms of architecture and its multiple authorship
- schizophrenic space and patterns of hyper-realistic existence
- space does exist anymore without information and we do not exist without it – implications for a technological prosthetic
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As a main reference of this study the following two projects (developed by the team of Escape*sphere / svk wth. Barbara Imhof+Birgit Trenkwalder/ 1997-2003) will be discussed: first an installation called 'Rückprojektion', which was originally developed for a specific space in the Museum of Düren (Germany), and then became a technically developed prototype in cooperation with Festo for the Ars Electronica Festival '01 in Linz. (www.aec.at/gummibaer)



¹ 'Schmiere. Eine Alchemie der neuen Baustoffe', Neil Spiller

This experimental set-up was based on the following:

- specific conditions of space are inseparably connected to virtual dimensions of perceptible space
- we are part of such a space-continuum without always being conscious of it
- architecture is capable of raising a consciousness towards expanded experiences of space, and therefore becomes a tool for perception in itself
- the prototype claims to exemplify a continuous space which lies in between media space (internet game surface) and space accessible with our bodies (interactive, kinematic, public modelspace in the city)
- a new technological media space develops through providing interrelations between the varying configured spaces and the introduction of a feed-back system
- the urge for communication, designing modes of curiosity as well as playfulness lead the user to activate the interactive Feed-back system – as a result existing configurations of space are altered to a condition of `fluid space`

„Everything that is static, is condemned to death. Nothing that lives, can exist without transformation. This is what Sanford Kwinter calls a soft system: a system driven by its very `softness`, its capacity to move, to differentiate internally, to absorb, transform, and exchange information with its surroundings. What is life?: a living organism has the astonishing gift of concentrating a `stream of order` on itself and thus escaping the decay into atomic chaos (Schrödinger). A fluid systems ability to maintain order is due to its ability to alter its structure. This means that order does not exist as form in space but as movement in time: a direction. And if a form is to continue, it must be able to transform itself. This does not concern a form that can move, but rather a movement that passes through the form. By changing form, soft systems or living entities try to remain intact and strong.”²

The continuously transforming space in this case became demonstrated through a defined spectrum of potential choice; the supporting software of the game surface as well as a wide variety of possible spatial configurations became reflected within a clear set of rules. The installation did not yet meet the stated call by Lars Spuybroek in asking `what if form is made of movement instead of a form that moves?` - but at this time there was a consensus in the team that the social interaction should become a major interest while dealing with this sort of `continuous space` within the public realm. The potential reprogramming space would not encourage direct means of communication but rather offer variable spatial configurations that would allow for altered means of exchange.

We therefore investigated the social potential around a technological, public space.

The study as it is laid out seeks to concentrate on the relationship between our bodies and new technological spaces, it will focus on the cultural conditioning on the side of the future user.

Another related project done by Escape*spHere was an exhibition design for `Smart Environments` (www.escapesphere.at /Looshaus / curated by unit F):

² `The strategy of form` von Lars Spuybroek & Maurice Nio



We were asked to develop a user surface within an exhibition context which was to be presented without any physical object. The curatorial aim was to present an overview of a growing technological influence in the field of fashion. In this case Architecture could become radically reduced to providing a comfortable background setting, leaving issues of spatial configuration with those firms which have specialized on media presentation. In this case one would prioritize the 'projected far-space' to the 'physically inhabitable near-space'. Architecture would become 'obsolete': the visitor would remain within a classical space of frontal presentation, the impact of moving bodies and the potential of re-linking and subjectifying information would be neglected.

The exhibition design the team finally came up with was somehow trying to regain aspects of physical experience within the purely virtual. We proposed a continuous presentation ribbon, which provided a multidimensional realm of knowledge to be conquered by the body and its self-determined sense of selection and association. Mostly linear modes of presentation (on varying video footage) for the diverse range of topics presented became counterbalanced by partially separating sound – and image sources. Their spatial distribution within the topographical setup encouraged the active role of the visitor – he/ she became part in creating knowledge space. In this case one could no longer claim a singular authorship for space/knowledge design. In this sense architects will eventually have to give way to a new complex understanding of plural authorship and multiple signature.

Technology long ago has become part of our surviving life aids. Teleportation as just one example will soon question our modern concept of the authentic body in its individual unique condition. These bodies might then be looked at as inevitable failure due to their vulnerability and due to their systemic finite organisms.

What will happen with us in the realm of multiplication and morphing, where the paralysed

physical body becomes obvious? What kind of schizophrenic spaces will we then move through?

Neil Spiller describes architecture as a man-made shield of the body – mutations of even such imply radical changes for the armouring skin.

Sandrine von Klot, Juni 2005

www.svk-architecture.at