

EveryVille – 2008

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EveryVille is an imaginary new exurban community of roughly 20,000 people. It has recently been incorporated as a separate town from Megalopolis. Making good use of the flat featureless terrain that used to support dairy farming, developers have carved the plains into several residential subdivisions sustained by a few commercial and institutional services. In a recent heated meeting within the newly established city council, the members discussed how to give EveryVille coherence and identity. Several different strategies were proposed. Some suggested a strong police force operating from a monumental building; others suggested a unified college with a civic campus. In the end the city council voted to hire an architect to decide the question of how to give EveryVille a focal point, a place or method of identity, a home for shared services.

Traditionally, when an architect is asked to give a place identity, they build monuments or recognizable structures such as churches or banks. In material reality, architecture of pedagogical permanence is valued because they represented an imperial sovereignty. This is within an old model of the city defined by centre and periphery both spatially and politically. “It functions through three tiers that serves as checks and balances on each other while extending its power to all realms: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.” (Sumrell & Varnelis (2004) *The One Wilshire Building*)



Mont Saint-Michel, Normandy, France



Tokyo, Japan

In our age, a new sovereignty is emerging. Its force emanates from the global network itself. This diffuse network supplants the old imperial model of centre and periphery, replacing it with a placeless network of flows and hierarchies. This new sovereignty is “Ether”, which in our time, is defined by the realm of the media, culture, and the global telecommunication network.

ether |ˈē θ ə r|

noun

1 Chemistry a pleasant-smelling, colorless, volatile liquid that is highly flammable. It is used as an anesthetic and as a solvent or intermediate in industrial processes. • Alternative names: **diethyl ether**, ethoxyethane; chem. formula: $C_2H_5OC_2H_5$.

2 (also **aether**) archaic Physics a very rarefied and highly elastic substance formerly believed to permeate all space, including the interstices between the particles of matter, and to be the medium whose vibrations constituted light and other electromagnetic radiation.

• (**the ether**) informal air regarded as a medium for radio : *choral evensong still wafts across the ether.*

Ether has an anesthetic quality. It can reduce the dominance of our physical sensation while maintaining our consciousness. Under the spell of its influence, the most intimate and cherished of all physical space, that of the body itself can be assaulted. As ether separates the mind from the body, we make the transition from material to virtual reality, subsequently, establishing an immaterial culture. We check into the global space of telecommunications in order to escape the dead world of objects, to leave behind this world of material goods and submit ourselves to something greater. Real objects will always repel us because they cannot continually satisfy our desires; they give themselves up too easily. Once they are purchased, objects become dead to our desires. The telecommunication realm, on the other hand, promises that the spirit can finally part from the flesh and exist fully in a world of electronic images. These images are seductive because, while circulating endlessly in an ethereal world, they can never be possessed. We can fantasize about having such images to no end without ever feeling the disappointing responsibility of ownership.

Similarly, land and space are going through the same transformation. Throughout history, land has been considered a commodity. It had initial value and is often invested with even more. One of the most successful ways people have invented to extend the value of land is through borrowed spaces. People build gardens that replicate wonders of the world through reduction, deformation, and exaggeration. “Gardens do not move. What they can do is import and store elements of the outside world. As a result, gardens enable us to glimpse a world that extends beyond the physical dimensions and form of the space.” (Suzuki (2001) *Architecture without a Place*) It is a hybrid of the material and virtual realities.



Karesansui Rock Garden at Ryoan-Ji: the dry sand patterns are symbols of the violent seas.

Today, as the world has become a placeless network, while the mind can be separated from the body to freely explore of this network, the notion of borrowed spaces can take on a whole new dimension. We can connect the people in a confined physical space to an infinite informational network of borrowed spaces through virtual reality. The full spectrum of senses can be stimulated electronically while the conscious acts as a recording surface of the spatial experience. Sure, the senses maybe products of the network, but if we believe them to be real and consciously allow them to consolidate within us to shape our identity, then is there still any difference between the virtual and the real?



Screenshot from "The Matrix"

A socket in the back of Neo's skull used to connect him to the Matrix, also allows information to be uploaded directly into his mind.

The virtual is generally perceived as a drive against the spatial or physical world. Nonetheless, the virtual world requires an infrastructure that exists in the physical and infrastructural world. Though ether is formless, it has to be created. Its production requires an enormous amount of physical hardware. Once the visual data has been produced it has to be stored and organized in control centres filled with rows after rows of servers. After the data has been organized, it is transferred through a labyrinth of fibre-optic wires. Thus ether is often produced at giant telecommunicational urban hubs. The virtual world is always tied to a physical location, revealing the simultaneous importance and abandonment of the physical world.



One Wilshire Building – SOM. An mostly uninhabited 39 -storey office tower on the most valuable real estate in Los Angeles, is now the palace of Ether.
Sumrell & Varnelis (2004) The One Wilshire Building

Within in the town of EveryVille, the newly constructed office park at Highway 1 and Avenue B stood out as the ideal location for an ethereal world of borrowed spaces. The office tower at 7

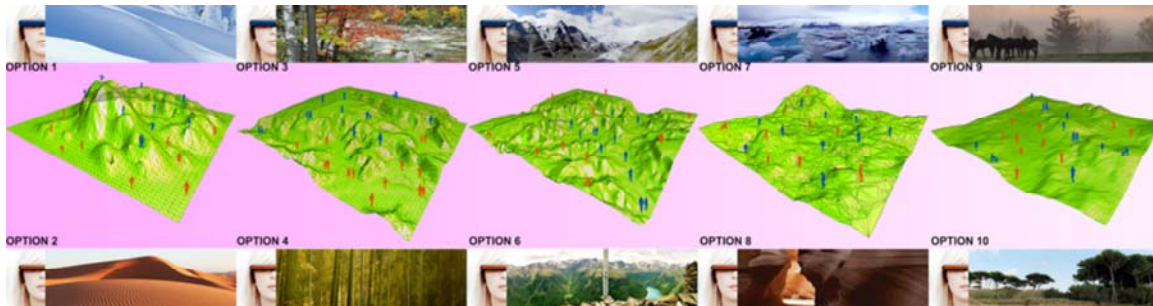
Avenue B is the tallest structure in the park. Like most office towers built in the modernist manner, 7 Avenue B declares that form follows function. Throughout the design, expression of any form was eliminated as superfluous, making it the tower without qualities. This architectural white-box, however, is the centralized telecom hub of the town. Vast amount of fibre-optic cables are laid throughout 7 Avenue B resulting in a digital network in and out of the tower. The maximum flow and storage of information is achieved with minimum physical movement and human inhabitation. It's within this confined modernist box where infinite wonders can be imported in.



7 Avenue B – 3D rendition

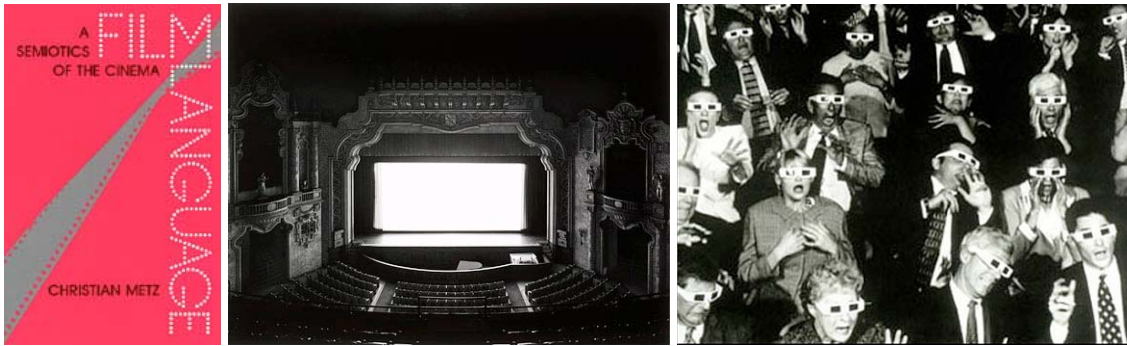
On the top five levels of the tower, topographies simulating varying geographical conditions of the world, such as the Grand Canyon and the South Pole, are constructed as green-screens of a film set. Each person is equipped with virtual sensory package that stimulates the full spectrum of sensory experience corresponding to the desired “destinations”. A pair of real-time video goggles will render the green-screen topography into a specific landscape. Furthermore, two landscape options sharing a common topography are offered on every floor. For example, “Whistler” and the “Sahara Desert” are the two options offered on the first level where the topography is characterized as a dune. Then the virtual sensory package will generate the experience of the unique landscape. Thus there is always a mixture of people experiencing different landscapes on every level. The GPS attached to each person monitors their movements and creates looped paths

for them to follow. With this centralized positioning system, people can co-exist safely within this motion space without ever fearing of crashing into each other. The images will always remain seductive because they will never repeat. We can fantasize about them in endless circulation but will never be able to possess them.



The five types of topography each supporting 2 landscapes for a total of 10 options

In this immaterial world, we have submitted ourselves to sensory experience through ether. Through this submission, our senses allow us to identify with a place much more intimately, which in the end, shapes both the identity of the people and the place. “The identification occurs in a series of mirroring between the people and their surroundings over a period of time. This mirroring can be both projective and introjective, in which the subject and the environment can simultaneously be the projector and the screen. The process depends on the introjection of the external world into the self and the projection of the self on to the external world, so that there is equivalence – the one reflect the other – and then identification may take place.” (Leach. *Perspecta*, Vol. 33, *Mining Autonomy*, (2002), pp. 126-133) I have taken on the concept of projection and introjection both literally and philosophically in this proposal. People inside the ethereal landscapes not only see the landscape itself, but they also see themselves seeing and being seduced by these electronic images. Their conscious records both the sensory experiences and the duration of experiencing. The experience is the introjection of the ether into the self, and the duration of the experience is the projection of the self on to this ethereal world.



"Am I not myself looking at myself looking at the film?" Christian Metz. The spectator is absent from the screen as perceived, but so too present there as the perceiver. (Metz (1982) *Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*)

Ether depends upon this physical and infrastructural world for it to exist. Within it, the human mind departs from the body and enters a placeless network of borrowed spaces; we exist fully in a seductive world of electronic images. As we circulate endlessly in this ethereal world, identification occurs as a series of mirroring between our surroundings and ourselves. Our sensory experiences of the virtual world consolidate in our memory blurring the frontier between the virtual and the real. Ether, the new sovereignty of this world, has a physical embodiment at 7 Avenue B. The tower is an architecture of negation, simultaneously real and virtual, material and immaterial, projective and introjective.

Fin.

September 3, 2008

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