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The Museum as a Digital Experience

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Manager of Asymptote Arquitecture Co., New York, United States

The Guggenheim has commissioned Asymptote (Hani Rashid and Lise Anne Couture) to design and implement a new Guggenheim Museum in cyberspace. The first phase of the Guggenheim Virtual Museum will be launched on-line on New Years Eve 2000 as part of a three-year initiative to construct an entirely new museum facility. The GVM will not only house and connect all of the Guggenheim Museums worldwide but will also be the first museum to contain art generated exclusively within and for the Internet. The Museum will contain ongoing special exhibits, a digital architecture archive as well as three dimensional spaces linking the various "first reality" museums and amenities. The project will consist of navigable three dimensional spatial entities accessible on the Internet as well as a "real time" interactive component installed at the Soho Guggenheim location in New York City. For Asymptote, this important new work brings forward their ongoing interest in merging technological possibilities with human experience and spatial manufacture.

When speaking of an architecture for the next millennium there are two conditions to consider. Primarily the physical space of architecture as we have always known it, enclosure, form and permanence will without doubt persevere and another virtual architecture surfacing now in the digital domain of the Internet. Buildings, institutions, objects and space are now being constructed, navigated, experienced, comprehended and altered in their virtual states by countless people across the globe. This is a new architecture of liquidity, flux and mutability predicated on technological advances and fueled by a basic human need to probe the unknown. The path that both these architectures, the real and the virtual, will inevitably take will be one of convergence and merging. Historically, architecture has always struggled with this dialectic of the real and the virtual at once, architecture's stability and actuality has always been tempered by the metaphysical and the poetic.

Today computers, global networks and digital tools are the critical means by which architects navigate this trajectory into the future. The Guggenheim Virtual Museum as envisioned by Asymptote originates and surfaces from such a state, where the museum's colorful past, its important and historic architectural *van-garde* and its valued pedagogical and cultural dimension all serve to form a unique scaffolding for the museum of the future. The Guggenheim Virtual Museum, utilizing state of the art technologies, will emerge as an impressive and new architectural work by fusing information space, art, commerce and architecture. The resulting virtual architecture will be accessible from anywhere in the world, while uniting all the Guggenheim museums it will also be the first important virtual building to emerge in the twenty first century.

ASYMPTOTE AT THE NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE

Asymptote has completed two projects for the NYSE in 1999. One project is a "virtual reality" trading floor and system map accessible and manipulated through the use of high end computer systems.

Theater project is an interior renovation (The Vortex) to a part of the trading floor known as the ramp.

The renovation of the ramp by Asymptote came about as a result of the stock exchange's need for both housing and accommodating the "virtual Exchange" model data and interface, as well as developing and building a state of the art area on the floor showcasing the exchange's technological advances and also a place that by extension would be a backdrop to any media events generated from the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

The MFTFV or multi-dimensional trading floor simulation model is primarily the result of "architecting" the flows and locations of data streams within the Stock Exchange's physical and electronic condition.

The various types of data that move through the Exchange were attributed an architectural assembly and embodiment. These architectures were then assembled together in what is effectively a hybrid architecture and interface.

The MFTFV allows the operations component of the NYSE to move about, view, interact and correlate immense streams of data and information all within a scaled and controlled architectural environment constructed of pixels, texture maps and data feeds.

The MFTFV primarily consists of two components ... a virtual trading floor that mimics the existing trading floor in as far as its geographic end topological similarity, and a more abstracted component that surrounds the virtual floor that is the system-scape, a virtual architecture making geometric and accessible the computer systems and electronic backbone of the entire facility.

The virtual trading floor allows the operations people to survey stocks, manage the floor operations, understand fluctuations and circumstances as they unfold, and gives them the opportunity to travel freely throughout the floor observing and managing the trading day activities. The system-scape that surrounds the floor allows operations staff and other authorized individuals to view and monitor the electronic landscape that effectively allows the floor to operate. This critical function reaches a new level of efficiency and criticality when one is able to understand all that is unfolding as a multidimensional spatial condition.

The Vortex has a number of reasons for its design and location within the existing trading floor. Its main purpose is to serve as the central "*theater of operations*" for the trading floor. It is from this location that the operations staff is able to monitor all the Exchange's systems and intricacies. The MFTFV is housed within this location as are numerous other data feeds, graphs, charts and the like. Another program feature of the Vortex is its presence as a technological showcase and media backdrop.

The design off the Vortex takes into account not only the ergonomic and anthropometric concerns of the people involved with the space who for the most part stand, view or at keyboards and other interface hardware. It also accommodates the need for television media events located within the space. The architecture consists of a large backlit surface of blue "liquid" light, on which the capacity for 60 flat screen state of the art monitors can be 'tiled' and synchronized. The high resolution monitors make for an extremely high resolution video surface, unparalleled by an existing video technology.

The curvature of the glass and accompanying linear counter along with the floating plasma monitors, embedded keyboards and a large graphic intervention (digital fresco) fulfill a conceptual mandate that the space be a physical analog to the movement and continuous flow of data and information through the physical space that is the New York Stock Exchange. The design of the Space resulted from the experience Asymptote gathered by reconstituting the New York Stock Exchange in virtual space and allowing us to understand the architecture not so much as a physical place of more standard architectural readings such as the physical movement of bodies and equipment accommodation, instead the architecture that really determines the flows of capital and the bartering value are what really constitutes this place of absolute information architecture.