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Diller + Scofidio Blur Building

Arteplage Yverdon-les-Bains, Swiss Expo 2002

wind: 8.2 knots humidity: 52% temperature: 60°F

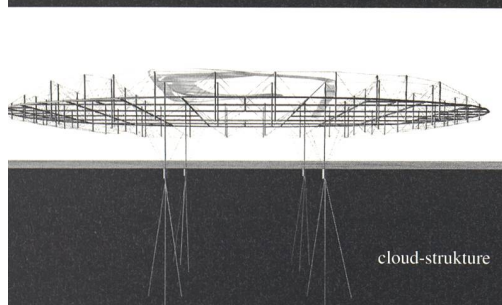
The Blur Building is part of a team project selected after a two-stage international competition for Swiss Expo. The Extasia team was chosen to develop the Yverdon site at the base of Lake Neuchatel. Extasia team members are Diller + Scofidio of New York (Blur), West-8 of Rotterdam (Expopark), Morphing Systems and Vehovar & Jauslin of Zurich (Forum).


In the Extasia project, the exhibition Forum, theaters, and restaurants are integrated into a surrealist landscape on 13 hectares of lakefront property. The main attraction, Blur, is a media building that hovers mysteriously over the lake. A boardwalk promenade links the land and water-based exhibition sites.

The Extasia site strategy is to combine nature and artifice into hybrid forms: a topography of man-made hills is planted with flowers, sensors, and speakers; new technologies are woven into phenomenal experiences combining seductive sounds, intoxicating smells, lush images, and sensuous textures; actual and artificial weathers blend into micro-climates. Rather than following a prescribed narrative sequence, visitors follow temptations and desires as they make their way through the site. After dusk, performance events and lighting scenography transform the site into a night playground.

Blur Building

Blur is 100m wide by 65m deep by 20m high and is made of the indigenous material of the site: water. The artificial cloud is produced by a fog system: lake water is filtered, then shot through a dense array of high-pressure fog nozzles and regulated by a computer control system. The public can approach Blur from shore via pedestrian ramp. Raincoats are distributed at the ramp entrance. Along the 140m journey, visual and acoustical references are slowly erased until only an optical „white-out“ and the „white-noise“ of pulsing fog nozzles remains. Sensory deprivation stimulates a sensory heightening: the density of air inhaled with every breath, the lowered temperature, the soft sound of





d: 1.1 knots humidity: 25% temperature: 91°F

water spray, and the scent of atomized lake water, all begin to overwhelm the senses.

The ramp deposits visitors into the center of the fog mass onto a large open-air platform where movement is unregulated. Unlike entering a building, the experience of entering this massless and elastic medium in which orientation is lost and time is suspended is like an immersion in „ether.“ The enveloping fog combined with wireless technologies provide the main components of an architecture/media event entitled, Babble. As the media event has no fixed beginning or end, the visitor can at any time, continue upward to the Angel Bar at the summit. The ascent through the fog is similar in experience to an airplane emerging through a cloud layer to the open blue sky. After a restful stop on top of the cloud, the visitor can return back to shore via a direct stair down and connecting bridge back to shore.

At nightfall, a video/film program is projected onto the fog from shore. The public can view the night show from the boardwalk.

Fog System

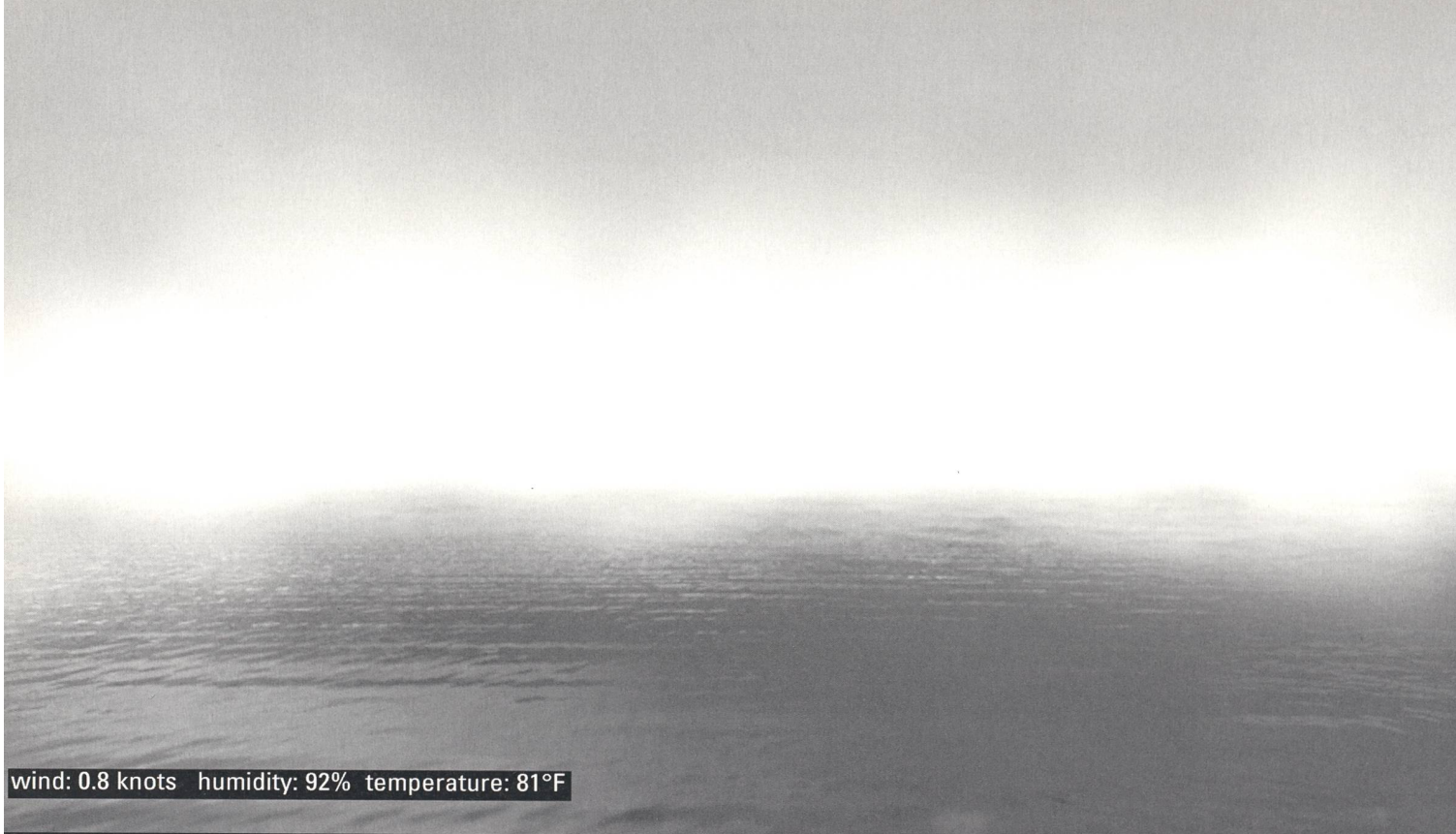
The Blur is smart weather. A built-in weather station reads the shifting climatic conditions of temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction, then processes the data at a central computer. Control algorithms regulate the system response at 13 zones.

When winds are high, the control zones on the windward side of the structure operate at higher pressures than the control zones on the leeward side. During periods of low fog demand (cool and damp conditions) all zones operate at lower pressures and, conversely, during periods of high fog demand (hot and dry conditions) all zones operate at higher pressures.

The dynamic form of the fog results from the constant play of natural and



Fog test in april 1999, Yverdon-les-Bain



wind: 0.8 knots humidity: 92% temperature: 81°F

technological forces, however, the combination of weather variables produces certain general appearances. On a windy day a bit of the leading edge of the structure is revealed, leaving a fog trail on the tail end. On a hot, humid day, the fog tends to expand outwards. On a hot day with low humidity, the fog tends to fall and drift in the direction of the wind. On a cool day with low humidity, the fog tends to rise upwards and evaporate. As well, if air temperature falls below lake temperature, a convection current lifts the fog upwards.

All in all, the system is composed of 12,500 fog nozzles spaced 1.25m apart in every direction along 20km of plumbing lines.

Angel Bar

Eventually each visitor will emerge from the fog onto the Angel Bar deck where he/she can rest, drink, and have a panoramic view of the landscape. Bar service is located along a depressed ramp sandwiched beneath an upturned sunning area. The bar serves only water. A large selection of waters from various global sources are available, including a selection of commercially available bottled spring waters, artesian waters, mineral waters, sparkling waters, distilled waters, as well as rain waters and municipal tap waters from a variety of international cities, and an exclusive collection of glacial and polar waters. Tastings are available for water connoisseurs.

Babble

To „blur“ is to make visually indistinct, to shroud, to make vague, to obfuscate. „Babble“ is an indistinct or meaningless confusion of words or sounds.

We are a visually-obsessed culture that demands high definition and measures satisfaction in pixels per inch. Broadcast and print media feed our insatiable desire for the visual with an unending supply of images. In Blur, the public will experience a re-balancing of the senses. While Blur is a seductive visual icon whose image will undoubtedly be used in ad campaigns and recorded by



wind: 1.2 knots humidity: 48% temperature: 42°F

hundreds of thousands of cameras, as an immersive experience, Babble offers little to see. It is an immersive environment in which the world is put out of focus while our visual dependency is put into focus.

Blur introduces an alternative to the convention of the „spectacle.“ Unlike entering a building, the experience of entering this atmosphere is one in which orientation is lost and time is suspended. We aim to exploit a lack of definition, which is the strongest feature of this atmosphere, in order to create an experience of heightened attention to be sustained for the duration of the visit. This mode of attention is more commonly experienced in situations of anticipation about the unknown or apprehension that comes with disorientation. Blur trades the „spectacular“ for the „oracular.“ The focused attention of spectacle is replaced by an immersive acoustic encounter.

As disorientation is structured into the experience of Blur, navigation is put to the test. At the entry ramp on shore, every visitor to Blur will „log-in“ and receive a „braincoat“ with a smart system embedded in its skin that electronically extends the body’s natural system of navigation. Rather than rectifying the loss of vision, this system acts as an acoustical prosthesis to super-sensitize the sense of hearing. Using integrated tracking and sound technologies, with transponders and speakers on every mobile viewer, the system uses navigation in a performative engagement with the fog medium. At the log-in, the visitor will select a language from among English, French, German, and Italian.

The word „babble“ is the acoustical equivalent of „blur.“ As vision is out of focus in the building, so too is hearing. Added to the white noise of the fog nozzles, the hum of babble is audible throughout--many indistinguishable voices with no discernible meaning. However, in this space of disorientation and unregulated movement, a very precise spatial logic is invisibly mapped: space is acoustically digitized and can only be comprehended through physical movement. Intelligible words and sounds in the babble can be discovered by following invisible axes. A visitor wandering through the fog can navigate along these discernible text tracks, discovering intersecting links that lead in



nightshow: projected against the fog



log-in station on shore



water bar

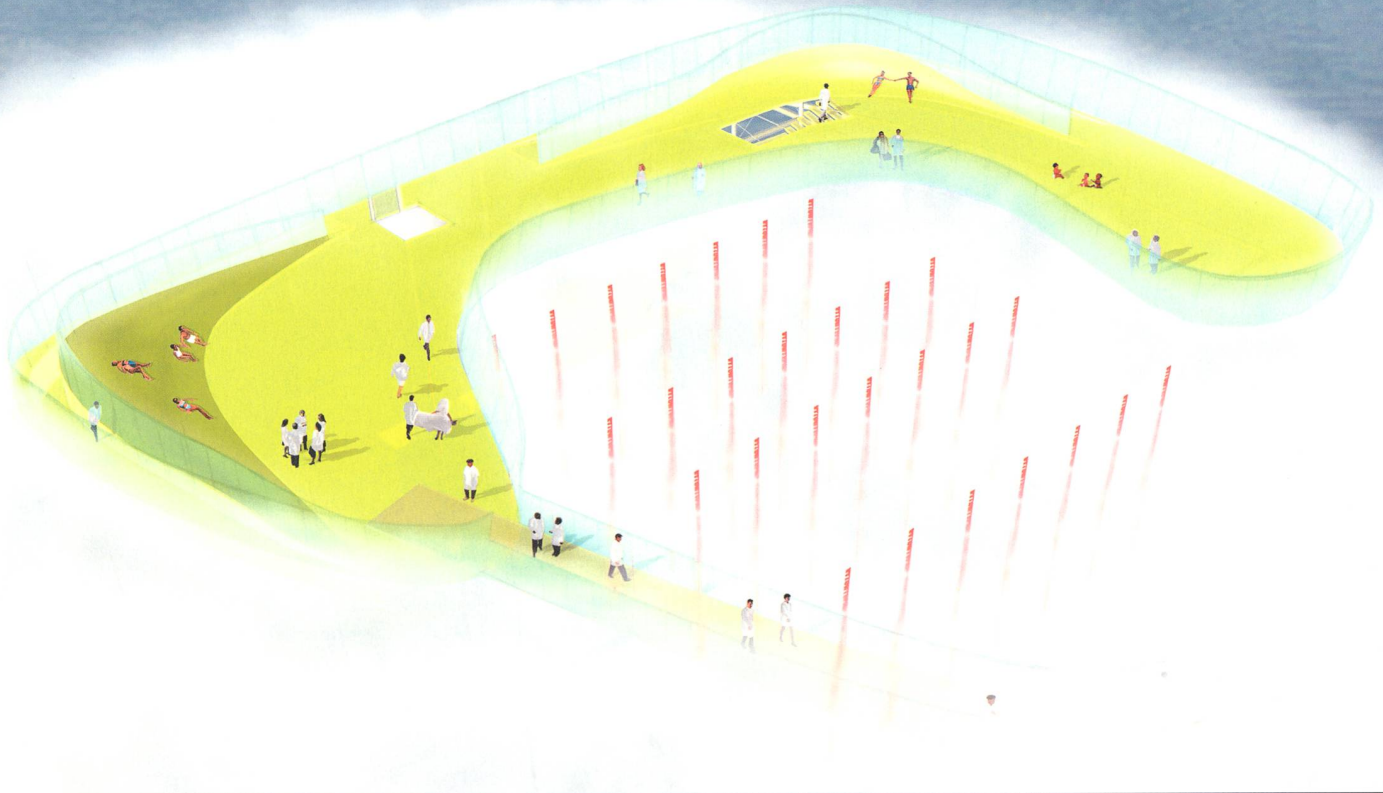
new directions to new content. Sound will be transmitted through the braincoat and thus will be audible to others. Each visitor will become, metaphorically, a phonograph needle, drifting across the cloud, finding grooves and playing the sounds contained in them; as the visitor slows down, speeds up, or changes direction, so does the sound. Thus, each participant becomes an acoustic interface to an audio database, and the often passive act of listening is changed into an act of willful discovery.

Weather

The weather is both the physical form and the thematic content of *Blur/Babble*. When we speak about the weather, it is assumed there is no other common ground or that more meaningful forms of social interaction are being repressed. But, is not the weather, in fact, a potent topic of cultural exchange, a bond that cuts through social distinction and economic class, that supersedes geo-political borders? Is not the weather a tangible and meaningful thread that stitches us together locally and globally?

In truth, contemporary culture is addicted to weather information. We watch, read and listen to weather reports across every medium of communication, from conventional print to real time satellite images and web cams. In an era of reality television, the weather channel is exemplary, providing round-the-clock, real-time, meteorological entertainment.

Weather is at the center of a technological debate. Our cultural anxiety about



angel bar platform

the weather can be attributed to its unpredictability. As a primary expression of nature, the unpredictability of weather points out the limitations of technological culture. While advanced methods of detection and tracking help to warn and thus protect us from the ravages of an indifferent, tempestuous nature, the weather is unstoppable. It's beyond our control.

At the same time, global weather disturbances, like global warming, are proof that weather and climate are not impervious to human intervention. If we can alter the weather inadvertently--through technological recklessness--we can also alter it willfully. We can play God. Weather modification has long been speculated as a political and economic weapon. As with our power to affect genetic structures, both our dread and fascination stems from the possibility of actually controlling weather. Thus, technology is our tool not only to protect and shelter us from the ravages of an indifferent, tempestuous nature, but also to control human destiny.

Babble will present weather not only as a natural process but also as a cultural phenomenon. At stake is how we interact with each other through weather, not only as a shared obsession but also as a process of global communication.

Client: EXPO 02 by extasia
 Architect: Diller + Scofidio, New York
 Principals: Elizabeth Diller, Ricardo Scofidio
 Project Architects: Charles Renfro und Dirk Hebel,
 Engineers: Passera & Pedretti, Enich & Berger (strukural),
 Toni Riesen (mechanical)
 Media Collaborator: Ben Rubin, EAR Studio
 Media Associate: Mark Wasluta

Dirk Hebel hat während seiner Studienzeit an der ETH massgeblich dazu beigetragen, diese Zeitschrift ins Leben zu rufen.

Team extasia:
 Diller & Scofidio, New York
 Delux, Zürich
 Morphing Systems, Zürich
 Vehovar/Jauslin, Zürich
 West 8, Rotterdam
 Management: Techdata, Bern



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