[This article is a summary of a thesis project directed under the supervision of Wassim Jabl and Mehrdad Hadighi]

This thesis is based on the premise that space can be created by the interaction of physical and ephemeral elements with the human body. The physical elements create a frame on which the ephemeral rely, but it is the interaction between them that produces a distinct experience of space and place. Extensive and diverse preliminary explorations range from the use of digital media in the design process, video and multimedia as a revolutionary element in 20th century art and light as a way of expression for architectural installations exploring new media. From this body of information it was conceived that certain new media add an important and particular dimension to the traditional physical medium of architecture. This constitutes a controversial and innovative approach to the creation of space and most importantly to the experience of place.

The Panama Canal, one of the world’s engineering masterpieces, has been since its construction an innovative medium from transportation and world commerce. Analogous to today’s World Wide Web, the Canal combines technology, various medium, communication tools and time saving features; making it appropriate to the theoretical interest of this thesis. These elements, along with nostalgia and the celebration of the Panama Canal returning to Panamanian administration, support the selection of the Panama Canal as an inspiration theme for the exploration of the physical and the ephemeral. The project was set up as a travelling gallery installation that would address issues about the Panama Canal while examining the interaction of various media. The installation is therefore thematic in nature, abstract in methodology and neither a literal representation of the experience of the Panama Canal or of its tectonic elements.

The result was a created experience that enveloped the participants. The experience was divided in three segments: “Body as Body”, “Body as Ship” and “Body as Canal” “Body as Body”: the experience was more purely physical linked to the ephemeral as part of the cybrid space. It literally became a frame on which the ephemeral relied. The tectonics of “Body as Body” almost disappeared in the dark, while their subtle visibility was overwhelming and intriguing. It had the rigidity and massiveness that was needed to imply the scale relationship between the body and the lock gates.

Light and projection guided the path throughout the installation. The rotated placement of “Body as Body” did not provide a path for exploration. This rotated placement in space provided an opportunity for the participant to create his own path within it.

“Body as Ship” was the section of the project in which the participant played an active role in the experience. The movement of the participant, transferred to the water, produced distortion of the projected images. The degree of distortion was directly related to the movement of the participant. This phenomenon created an awareness in the par-
participant of his/her power of modifying space. The horizontal path created with projection from the “Body as Body” constituted the linking element of the whole installation. The path created was visible at “Body as Ship” through the layers of acetate, but evident in Body as Canal, as the shadows of the participant on the projecting wall revealed any shifting from the path.

In “Body as Canal”, media fulfilled the boundaries of space. The reflection of the moving images from layers of acetate completely occupied floor, ceiling and walls of the library. More than an interior experience it became an exterior experience. While in the interior the beams of light almost blinded the participant, the infinite space was then most closely related with death. The body, covered with moving images, and surrounded by them, was almost in a virtual space.

This project was an exploration of the creation of architectural space by the juxtaposition of real/physical with ephemeral/virtual elements through a series of cybrid tectonics; a layering of information belonging to both the physical world and the virtual world.

In this case, the installation used the juxtaposition to create a spatial situation analogous, but abstracted from the Panama Canal. The fact that the installation was thematic and abstract in nature, produced initial misconceptions of the agenda of the project. However, the experience of the installation and the results were both though provoking and beautiful.

The possibility exists however, to apply this idea to real, inhabitable spaces. The implications are huge, they require much more work along the lines of the nature of imagination. Can virtual space ever replace augment real space? If so, will one be able to interact with it, how?

Lorena Itzel Rios-Castro is a recent graduate of the Master of Architecture Program at SUNY - University at Buffalo.