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By Hani Rashid and Lisa Anne Couture

Review by David Matthews

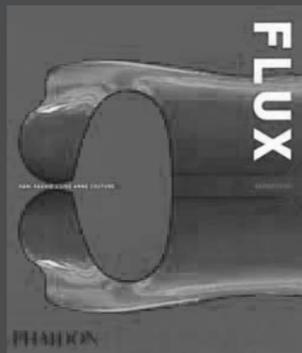


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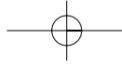
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Flux's value is the combination of rich visual imagery organized around the chronological projects of Asymptote with insightful interviews that reveal the process of design that blurs the distinction of physical architecture and cyberspace. Asymptote actively experiments with the contemporary meaning of space while embracing physical and virtual notions of experience and meaning within a hybrid model. The descriptions of the projects reveal an evocative insight to process and meaning but lack critical, or alternative, points of view. However, this does not diminish the overall use of *Flux* in revealing the importance of a critically based understanding of digital technology, cyberspace, and new directions in architecture.

The text can be broken into three primary components. The first component is the descriptive analyses of projects. These analyses tend to concentrate on objective descriptions of the design process and product. The second component is designed to contextualize the work within a broad understanding of the investigation of cyberspace. The third component is interviews in the form of questions and answers. These interviews personalize the understanding of how the architects bridge the relationship between abstract and concrete or how the lucid nature of cyberspace is brought into reality. An obvious limitation of *Flux* can be revealed in the quote by Hani Rashid, "We will continue to see experiments with the virtual that leave the confines of the screen, and merge the virtual with the real, spaces that will ultimately blur the distinctions of what we currently think constitutes a real experience versus a virtual experience." The printed text exposes the limitations of the real and the desire to experience the projects within the virtual format in which they were created. A companion CD/DVD or website would have expanded greatly the virtual experience of *Flux*.

Putri Trisulo of Asymptote states, "We approach each project, whether it is first reality or virtual reality, as holding the potential for new experiences, forms, and meaning." *Flux* introduces one design firm's methodology of transforming design and architecture from the formalism based in the industrial revolution to the plasticity of the information age. The text and illustrations in *Flux* provide an overview of projects, interviews, and project statements completed by Asymptote between 1996 and 2002.



The approach of the firm is not to use digital technology to “re-represent” architecture but rather to investigate technology as a transformational device. It is easy to become enraptured with the visual depth of Asymptote’s work and rely on traditional/formal methods of architectural evaluation. The diverse work, ranging from material architecture, cyberspace architecture, and industrial design, requires investigations that engage the potential of traditional architecture synthesized with information/digital architecture. Processes and environments outlined in the book require a new method of critical inquiry. Architecture transformed by digital technology creates the potential of infinitely flexible space and form and introduces a reality of an architecture that can be devoid of material.

The nature of space, form, and time are redefined in the NYSE 3DTF Virtual Reality Environment. In the design of the environment, Asymptote had to synthesize the navigation of traditional architectural space with the navigation of information. As information becomes more valued in our society, it displaces traditional architecture. The designers involved with this project were challenged to present a spatial experience that mutated and evolved to enhance the understanding of information required to trade stock and the ability to occupy space on the exchange floor.

Asymptote demonstrated their flexibility of scale in the design arts with the Knoll A3 Furniture Systems. The office system was created in a manner that increased the spatial manipulation by the user. Efficiency, enhanced communication, and flexibility were all aspects of the “new cubicle.” Office space can be reconfigured to engage contemporary corporate organization with lightweight, translucent materials. The design provided opportunities from glimpses of workers between structural elements and shadowed figures through translucent textiles. The system demonstrates flexibility through a limitless configuration that can remove barriers for team collaboration. The spatial and visual flexibility of the Knoll A3 reflects the nature of the digital tools the office workers used in the space. Asymptote provides system bridges the material needs and the use of digital tools in the contemporary workplace.

The Dodger Stadium proposal fused traditional materiality and the potential of information technology. PVC fabrics used to enclose the stadium would darken and lighten with atmospheric conditions. The fabric would also be used to display graphics using digital technology. The architecture would become infinitely flexible—changing to meet the needs of the team or sponsor with digital graphics woven into the form. This proposal gives the corporate entity unprecedented ability to change the core experience of the architecture. Evaluation of the project questions the responsibility of the designer and the potential use of the space in a manner that may have more to do with ethics of information dissemination than traditional architectural form giving.



The text presents many other examples of cyberspace projects and proposals for material-based architecture and installations. The Mercedes-Benz Museum investigates fluid curves to allow the flexible presentation of the automobile. The curved spaces and forms provide dynamic inclined surfaces to on which to present the automobile. This approach engages the curator with a potential to change the experience and view for the museum patron. The space is conceived to allow for multiple non-linear experiences similar to those of engaging information technology. The project suggests that architecture conceived with the computer allows for new forms, as well as new experiences, based in a world we know through the computer.

The text provides interviews and project descriptions which illuminates insight into process and significant issues to the designers. The underlying theme of technology influences form, collaboration, and a process that merges the "virtual with the real." Many examples of the processes are presented to link conceptual ideation with the realities of practice in the information age.

Flux is an essential piece to understand one firm's approach to engage computational, or digital, projects in design. It is limited to Asymptote's scope and therefore should not be viewed as a broad description of the relationship of cyberspace and architecture, but rather a text that is essential in gaining part of a complete understanding. A compelling rationale for including *Flux* in design education is the highly experimental vision of new potentials in architecture and design.

Flux is useful for any designer interested in the integration of digital technology as applied to design process and product. The projects span architecture, product design, and the visual presentation of information. It is difficult to imagine this text being adopted as a singular reading in a course. However, it could be implemented as an integral component in a collection of readings. *Flux* should be incorporated in any library interested in providing information, which spans the design of traditional architectural space to the dynamic potentials of cyberspace.

The potential fluidity of this new architecture places into question the transformative nature of the experience by engaging the computer on a conceptual level. As our culture enters an age of unprecedented access to data, *Flux* illustrates how architecture may be transformed with the computer. Many of the examples illustrated in *Flux* contradict traditional forms, space, and experiences of architecture. The strength of the illustrations and supporting text in *Flux* is that it often raises more questions than it answers.

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