Preposthuman: An Architectural Propaedeutic for the Digitally-Enhanced

by

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

February 2015

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~ Abstract ~

For users to become posthuman the architectural environment must become a training apparatus, a type of propaedeutic, where our built developments simultaneously develop us. This project fashions waste, ingestion, lounging, and bathing environments as components of our posthuman training grounds. Theorists in the humanities and technology sciences envisioned this next stage in our development as becoming a type of cybernetic organism—a cyborg—in which physical and intelligence-based modifications are co-produced with machines. The recent near-ubiquity of personal internet devices and oncoming wearable technologies bring the posthuman closer, and less like science-fiction. Yet despite our advanced technology, our bodies remain legitimate. Spaces remain legitimate. Within posthumanism, singularity does not occur—we do not transcend our anatomy into some type of digital non-space. As posthumans we will use our environment and our bodies as medium, mediator, and modifier to filter, flavor, and fashion our information. Boundaries blur, consciousness becomes augmented, and architecture and the body act as symbiotic prosthetics not only for each other, but socially and ecologically. Here is a land where telepresence meshes with corporeality—where the digital is also sensorial. Automation and autonomy are no longer antonyms—and our sentience is allowed to flicker between the various realities to which it is tethered. Here, architecture serves as the suture between our digital and physical lives, creating a truly networked body from the scale of the global to the microbial. Buildings can no longer be the wire mothers of Harry F. Harlow’s psychological experiments on attachment. Rather than attempting to chill occupants into humanist superiority, architecture must become the cloth mother, which we posthumans nuzzle, in order to truly connect.

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~ Figure 1 ~
*H.F. Harlow’s Research into Relationship.* Digital image.
The LIFE Pictures Collection, circa 1951. Web.
So.

You’ve decided to develop into the posthuman.
An impossible task in our current environment.

~

You’re part of an intricate and interdependent network.

Our typical developments, however, are not.
Some architects ignore your changes...

...the symbiosis with your devices

...the flickering between your
digital and physical

worlds.
Some architects try to take your technology away, they rely on the purely sensual,

but that’s ignoring the digital half of your mind and body.
Other architects go too far in the other extreme,

~

diminishing architecture to a black box of technological fetishism.
This is negligence.
As a posthuman you realize that you

~ will not ~

transcend your body through technology,
because information is not really '0's and '1's.
Instead your body and environment are essential to development. They are mediums of mediation and modification that filter, flavor, and fashion your information.
As posthuman, you recognize that your body and your space are important and legitimate.
As a posthuman, you recognize the same for your physicality and virtually.
As architects, it is our job to create the sutures between our various realities and bodies.
Despite “advancements,” or maybe in spite of them, understanding the posthuman body and mind requires understanding its primate foundations.

Harlow’s Rhesus monkeys taught us the value of the cloth mother vs the wire mother.

~

Yet most architecture today remains a wire mother, encouraging her chilled occupants to separate and move towards human distinction.

~ Figure 2 ~

But our simian desires become apparent through consumer products and modifications of our environment.

~ Figure 3 ~

The LIFE Pictures Collection, circa 1951. Web.
To become posthuman, architecture will start soft, enabling you to engage with it on the most corporeal level.

~

You select a soft shell.

The flesh.

This is yours and can be modified or replaced as you please. Should you relocate within the network it can be detached and applied to a different node.
Its limbs are sized for your limbs.
You may embrace one or a grouping.
You hug your architecture.

You nuzzle your architecture.
It nuzzles you back.
It becomes one of your prosthetics. When you connect to it, it connects you
...to other realities
...other bodies.
It is recording.
When you are connected to it, you are telepresent and tethered through sensorial activities:

warmth…… vibration…… hardness…… movement……

These become indicators that connect you to a certain version of your loved ones. A certain version of your past. A certain version of your dreams, yourself, and your world.

It can connect you maternally… socially… sexually… posthumously.
But you can’t live only in these alternate realities.

~

The flesh is not enough to stand alone.

It is lifeless when not connected to its other systems.
The most difficult worlds,

and sometimes the most distant,

are the two directly on either side of your skin.
For these are the physical body and the physical worlds to which you’ve become too complacent.
Your mind has allowed you to simplify and ignore them.
Surfaces in your new environment equate operating your environment with engaging your sensorium.
Turning on your lights or opening a cabinet might mean a sensory break.
While your body’s enhancements might bring it closure to being architecture,
your architecture's enhancements might bring it closer to being a body.
Like any body your architecture must breath
and move.
This skeleton is onto which you plug your soft shell.

It provides a variety of surfaces based on your body – whether ergonomic or challenging.

Pivoting surfaces articulated at several levels for your spine, your arms, your fingers, your feet.
The skeletal node, offers some support and some defense…

but it is not an armor.

It is meant to leave you
vulnerable
and at times
uncomfortable.
Yes, you can manipulate your enclosure, but it also manipulates you.
As a posthuman, you recognize that autonomy is not an antonym to automation.
Here, you are always somewhat at the whim of forces shifting your dwelling across the network.
The system serves, to some degree, as a prosthetic device for social organization and behavioral modification.
Tracks embedded in the surface determine where your node will be located within the system at a given time. It listens to your requests, but perhaps prioritizes your needs and the community’s needs.
Although we must first focus on the development of the dwelling prosthetic, it necessitates a reinterpretation of public and private.
As such, a variety of activities have been moved from the private dwelling into the public sphere:

bathing,
defecating,
and cooking.
Bathing

~

An ancient rite of pleasure
(and a flawed, modernist attempt at sterilization)
has been replaced with a center for the

posthuman exchange of microbiomes.

Here, a topography of natural and synthetic materials
(think coral or moss) extends the tactile approach of the dwelling
into a shared wetspace.

A reconditioning medium diminishes the wasteful use of water.
Meanwhile, a delicate ecosystem showcases the effects of any toxins
you may be introducing, from lotions or cosmetics,
that will require reconsideration.

The wetspace’s high visibility allows for the
exhibition of body modifications
and voyeurism.
Defecation

The defecatory eliminates home facilities (like toilets) that were designed to enable humanist separation from our bodily processes and excretions.

This space combines a religious ceremony with a Pilates-type studio.

Through fitness comes control… balance… and bodily connection… resulting in defecation.

A semi-open group activity space ensures that you mingle with your cohorts, passersby, your own odors and those of others.

The defecatory offers, through guidance, a tactile experience… not at the surface of the skin, but emanating from deep within you.

Following group discussion, you carry your feces to a chapel for self-reflection and to provide your creation as an offering to the community. It enters processing tanks, which you pass by upon entry and departure.

Clear, visible pipes carry it to areas of the community where it is needed for fuel, fertilizer, or building material. These tubes, with a certain omnipresence overhead, and gathered in public areas, remind you throughout the day of an important role you play within the system.
Lastly, the participatory canteen balances individual nutrition with food-based senses such as taste, texture, scent.

It is focused around displays designed to showcase the cycles and processes of your food.

At the center is the protein-generation exhibit where, while preparing and consuming food, you may watch the processes of animal reproduction, birth, and slaughter.

Surrounding aeroponic growth pods further act as reminders of nutritional cycles while also allowing for community members to occasionally engage with the food preparation through tactile or nostalgic experiences.

For instance:

growing, picking, and dicing your own tomato.

In some scenarios these features may yield enough nutrients to meet the needs of the entire community, in others the bulk of food may be shipped in from more productive agricultural areas and the canteen’s purpose centers around connecting you to otherwise distant cycles.
As your space moves, it drags you over the cobblestones of your own excretion.

It bumps you into other dwellings and other occupants.
Realities enmesh, colliding into each other.
What was once a state of consciousness becomes a state of no-minded spatiality.
You embrace the vulnerability as an opportunity
to connect with your neighbor.

~

You each push and pull.

Negotiating and releasing control.

In a constant process.
To be posthuman means to hold contradictory viewpoints simultaneously:
You can have your own,
but share with all.
Your space is there,
but it disappears.
Your body can be architecture,
and your architecture can be body.
~ Bibliography ~


