

# The Digital Self

## An Organic Processor

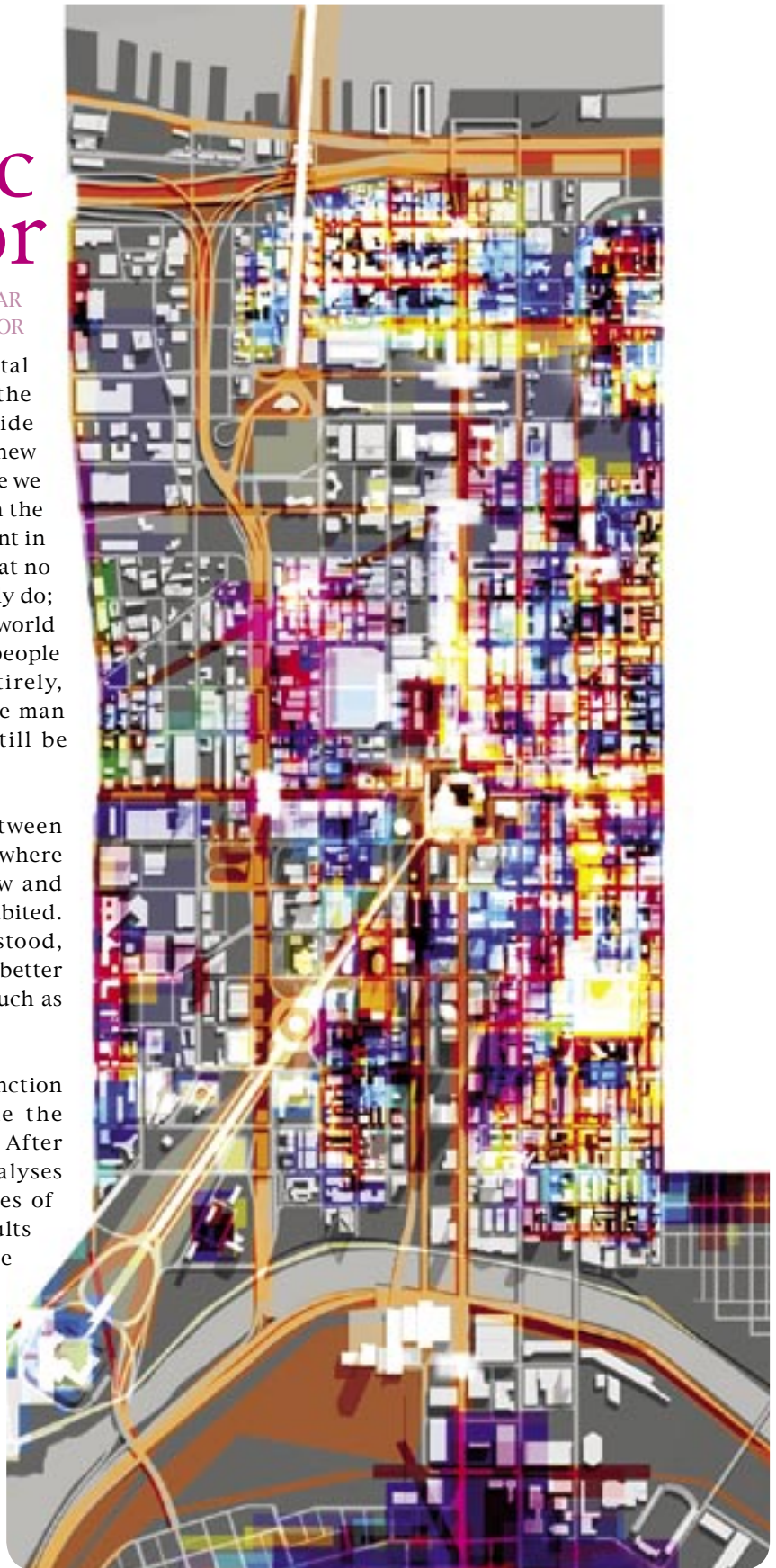
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The idea of exploring the conceptual “digital self” came from a growing interest in the ethereal place known as the “world wide web”. The internet provided everyone with a new type of place—and a new definition of space—where we can gather and share our experiences. Although the web may be intangible and seemingly non-existent in our world of sensory perception, it has done what no other physical space on the globe could previously do; fit everyone in. However, simultaneously, the world wide web also acts as yet another space where people can be displaced, or even excluded from entirely, making it not so different than any other space man of the past. A newly defined space, it can still be similarly grounded.

The challenge then was to find a balance between the digital and physical worlds to understand where this digital place can help us to gain and grow and where it becomes a place by which we are inhibited. Once the “digital self” was found and understood, the physical self—the organic processor—can be better integrated into our newly defined social places; such as the world wide web.

Architecture has long been defined by its distinction of space and place; so, fittingly, it became the means to study the rift in the digital world. After a series of architectural explorations and analyses of the digital processes and physical processes of interaction, research and design, the best results could be found through using both to enhance the other. Regardless of the medium of study, architecture was by no means the answer, simply the catalyst that could provide the change needed to create a balance between the physical and intangible.

The digital world is best defined as a place of information and a social center, so a site that has long been the place of information and social gathering was picked as the context in







which to study this thesis. The Free Library of Philadelphia is home to the traditional method of information storage, books, which have become outmoded and unused, along with the library itself, in today's world where information can be found in seconds on the internet. However, what is still missing and is further supplemented by the internet is social inclusion. Social contact is the key to understanding the need for a balance between the digital world and the physical world; people will forever need to feel and be felt.

From architecture we have identified a latent need to map our embodiment onto the world. Here, users feel the need to maintain a relationship to technological constructs whose dimensions resemble those of the human body in architectural space, attempting to retain a self image. This self image must be shattered in order to allow the digital self to take its place.

Through the architectural studies, it was found that the combination of a newly defined physical space—where the user begins to question his place as

result of comparison to an older space—along with the newly defined ethereal space of the internet was the only way to allow oneself to find their digital self. Hence the project focused on the point where new spaces met the old spaces of the original library. The project focused on the west wing of the library, where the new spaces broke out of the old, creating a new identity for the entirety of the old library. This newly defined place of information would act as storage to new and old information and act as a place where anyone could access both while interacting socially with others.

Only by creating a new form of architecture and by redefining spaces can embodiment provide a place where identity is comparatively unknown—allowing a new self image to take place. Within a digital atmosphere in this new place of identity, one can find their digital self. The digital self is the extension of our physical self, reaching past the identity which we've come to know to an evolved digital state where we become our own organic processors.

- Chris Colgan

#### INSTRUCTORS COMMENTS:

The strengths of this project lie in its attempt to understand the relationship between the physical and digital worlds through an exploration of communication, process, product and representation. An important step early in the research process was the identification of the limitations inherent in many peoples' preconceived limitations of digital technology in architecture as a sophisticated method of representation. The goal of the study was to define the advantages and disadvantages of both physical and digital modes of operation to optimize the use of each when appropriate. This was achieved through a method of "total immersion", beginning first with a period in which communication, research and writing could only be done through digital means and working slowly toward a more balanced approach that was ultimately more effective. Through this method, limitations and advantages were identified and implemented as part of the design process as well as to develop the programmatic spaces of the proposed library. Thus the final proposal is both a process and product derived from an exploration of digital media as a design tool and a space of social interaction.

- James Moustafellos, Advisor/Instructor

