

TGarden



Imagine, if you will, a room that changes its media and mood as you move and dance within it. No prior experience required. You aren't weighted down by cumbersome and unfashionable gear on your head, hands and other appendages. Instead, you can wear fabulous designer costumes made of the wildest textiles imaginable. In fact, the textiles are live fabrics, sensing how your body moves and flexes. Furthermore, imagine that this room is being played not just by you alone but by you and others around you. You have come upon *TGarden*, a responsive environment built by an interdisciplinary, international

collaboration between by two cultural organizations: Sponge, in SF, USA, and FoAM in Europe. Both Sponge and FoAM build and study deep, embodied experiences and how technology increasingly shapes such experience. Sponge and FoAM are committed to the idea that both art and its conceptualization must be immanent in everyday economy. This applies not only to aesthetic practice but to new media, matter, symbols and social capital. The *TGarden* project explores economic, ethical, social and architectural questions that are critical to the construction of advanced technologies.

So *TGarden* is both a particular responsive environment and a way to conceive and build such environments.

Room: *TGarden* is, first and foremost, a built space you can inhabit. The costumes you get to wear act as a second skin, helping you and others to shape the media and environment. *TGarden's* nervous system is a computer network which interprets what you do and choreographs a series of complex, evolving responses.. The nature of the activity is up to you, although the clothing you wear, the other players you encounter, and whether the room is in a good or bad mood might have a lot to do with your fun factor. The room's behavior can be manipulated by you, but is also the result of autonomous processes. You are not a user and the *TGarden* doesn't have tasks for you to solve. You don't have to deal with a GUI. The space is not there to be navigated or searched but rather to hang out and dance in, to show off, people-watch or just chill out.

Performance: In the *TGarden*, you can oscillate between being both performer and spectator. There are no signs or instructions telling you what to do or what not to do. *TGarden* realizes a new model of of-the-cuff "performance"—something that exists in the club and fashion world.

Experience: *TGarden* is not a pre-fabricated experience like a theme park ride—rather, we are interested in building layers of technology allowing you to engage in experiences that we don't dictate. There is serious method underneath the fun. Let's just say that we are building a responsive, dynamic field which registers your play in the room. Sometimes it's loosely coupled to what you do, sometimes more closely.

Play: *TGarden* is also serious when it comes to play. Sponge and FoAM are toying with

what play means in a broader sense: how does play build new modes of meaning-making, particularly in a fluid environment? How long and how intensely can people play with one another and the room when they can improvise everything: their voice, gesture and body? How do social conventions of play drive experience? *TGarden* challenges those who believe that play comes purely from a disembodied, cybernetic experience. The project focuses on play in a body-based environment—wet with computational possibilities.

Interdisciplinarity: In order to make *TGarden* work, it draws on an extensive range of disciplines. The *TGarden* team comes from six countries and includes collaborators with expertise in philosophy, computer science, fashion, textile, media and interaction design, mathematics, physics, computer-generated music and sound, electrical and mechanical engineering, information architecture, human-computer interaction and project management. *TGarden's* realization is built essentially on the fusion of all this expertise.

Collaboration: With the stakes in the economy, intellectual ambition and presentation/distribution being so high, *TGarden* is forming a consortium to explore the project's strategic themes. The members of the consortium are like-minded technology/media arts centers such as Banff Center, V2, Ars Electronica, STEIM and C3. There are, however, other supporters engaged as well: the Daniel Langlois Foundation, Creative Disturbance in San Francisco, Georgia Institute of Technology, Ground Zero in Silicon Valley and lurkers who haven't revealed themselves. The consortium will eventually include industry partners as well as larger non-profit foundations, because cultural institutions alone can no longer bear the costs of such a project.

Research: The consortium will use the *TGarden* as a laboratory for a spectrum of research ranging from models of responsive, real time computation, new authoring languages for designers and heuristics for measuring audience experience in novel location-based entertainment. Results from the research will be generated in appropriate forms of reports, symposia or experimental technologies and should have the same status as other academic or scientific work published in the public scholarly domain. The ideas will be materialized and fed back to subsequent productions of *TGarden*.

Economies: *TGarden* is attempting to use other models of exchange beside the conventional market model. The economies of aura, play and gift may in the long run prove to have much more globally sustainable power. With its partners, *TGarden* is building from and extending open source principals into the industries of media, experience and knowledge. We like to think of *TGarden* as a living garden—we and our partners seed it with our time, and capital. People who pass through the *TGarden*—the room and the project—come out of it transformed. This may be the real takeover.

sponge/foam <sponge.org> <<http://fo.am>>

Collaborating artists/designers/researchers:

Project Initiators: Sha Xin Wei, sponge + Georgia Institute of Technology / Maja Kuzmanovic, FoAM / Chris Salter, sponge / Laura Farabough, sponge

Project Management: Chris Salter, sponge / Maja Kuzmanovic, FoAM

Clothing/Textile Design: Evelina Kusaite, FoAM / Maja Kuzmanovic, FoAM / Cynthia Bohner-Vloet / Cocky Eek / Peggy Jacobs / Marchel van Doorn

Sensors + Wireless LAN: Ozan Cakmakci, Starlab / Mark Scheeff / Stock, V2

Vision Tracking: Yifan Shi, Georgia Institute of Technology / Aaron Bobick, Georgia Institute of Technology

Room Logic: Sha Xin Wei, sponge + Georgia Institute of Technology / Nik Gaffney, FoAM / Steven Pickles

Sound Composition and System: Joel Ryan, STEIM / Chris Salter, sponge

Graphics and Particle System: Dave Tonessen, FoAM + Starlab / Systems Administration: Nik Gaffney, FoAM

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