

SIBYL

PROJECTS 2010-2012

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At Toronto's 2010 Nuit Blanche, I watched as tens of thousands of visitors came in contact with Philip Beesley's *Aurora*. Approaching the piece with a mixture of awe and tentativeness, visitors could not contain themselves. The lines were long, the night was chilly, and the slow movement of an anxious crowd was like a steady pulse of the heart – bringing people in and pushing them towards the egress. Visitors responded to Beesley's built environment as if it was alive, but was the work responding to human presence? Perhaps there was also a certain fear factor: how would something so transparent react if one ventured too near? Once visitors understood that *Aurora* could no more harm them than it could amuse them, they moved on – yet it left a lasting impression.

The 18th Biennale of Sydney's title, *all our relations*, corresponds to Beesley's concept of the 'hylzoic': that all matter, both animate and inanimate, has life.¹ To this idea, we can now add artificial or technology-based worlds. Beesley's built environments begin to address the subject/object relationship in such a confounding way because the so-called objects are now responding to human presence, thus giving the work almost subject status. When we come into contact with his work – with all its highly integrated systems of interactive fronds, filters and whiskers, built around an intricate lattice of transparent acrylic links – it appears to come to life. The visible membrane is so highly interconnected, with an infrastructure almost too complex to imagine, that it's beautiful to see. He calls this 'benign geotextile', an idea he's worked on since the mid-1990s, in which organic installations are eventually absorbed by the surrounding natural forces.² This relationship between a visual signifier as geo-textile and the environment is one that closely considers the importance of integration and composition – ideas that stand in stark contrast to earlier modernist paradigms – and that *all our relations* attempts to articulate. The new dimensions that shape our current reality do not constitute 'a spectrum – along which binaries compete – but multiple, mutually inclusive dimensions'.³

1 Neil Spiller, 'Liberating the Infinite Architectural Substance', in Philip Beesley (ed.), *Hylzoic Ground: Liminal Responsive Architecture*, Riverside Architectural Press, Toronto, 2010, p. 51

2 Geoff Manaugh, 'Synthetic Geology: Landscape Remediation in an Age of Benign Geotextiles', in Philip Beesley (ed.), *Hylzoic Ground: Liminal Responsive Architecture*, Riverside Architectural Press, Toronto, 2010, p. 44

3 Charles Stankevich, 'Sewing/ Sowing: Cultivating Responsive Geotextiles', in Philip Beesley (ed.), *Kinetic Architectures & Geotextile Installations*, Riverside Architectural Press, Toronto, 2007, p. 43

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