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*Title: Ecology of Foreign Objects / Between Nature and Artifice*

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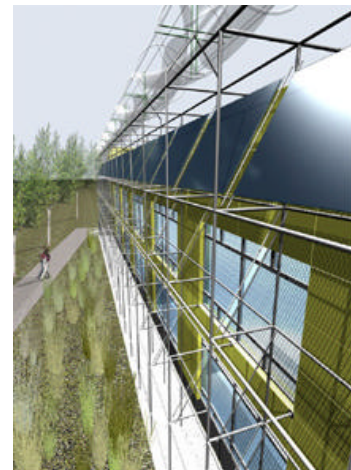


The environmental center sits at the edge of a constructed industrial corridor and lies tangent to an enduring natural ecosystem. The area is colored by the movement and production of man-made goods and by the migration and inhabitation of its wildlife. The industrial image of the factory started as a foreign object on the organic landscape. Throughout time many of these have surrounded the area, aiding in, and developing its history, becoming part of the landscape itself.

The design for the Ford Calumet Environmental Center is based on this phenomenon of adaptation. A foreign object aided by its surroundings: on the North and West by the natural and on the East and South by the industrial, creating a dialogue between nature and artifice. The different skins generate an ecology of foreign objects.

The center operates as a zone of transition between the constructed industrial setting and the immediate natural surroundings. The North and South connect directly to the site and the East and West facades become portals bringing the visitor to a place in between the two. The compact building lies elongated along its east – west axis. The recycled materials forming and protecting the skin of the building establish relationships with its surroundings and heritage.

The car hood brise-soleil sits shading and insulating the East side of the environmental center as the cars, buses, bikes and pedestrians move in and out of the site. The hoods now fixed in location lie in a vertical Cartesian grid that reaches out to greet those entering from the Community Plaza. The traditional parking lot has migrated onto the side of the building to become an environmental icon. The discrete items work together for a renewed purpose.



The West face of the building is overgrown with the site. The seasonal foliage builds a protective vertical canopy from the summer sun, converting energy into structure. The native Virginia Creeper will change with the seasons, providing a green face in the summer, orange and red in the fall, and turning brown and disappearing in the winter. The structure of the galvanized pipe will be woven with the structure of the plant, forming a canopy for the Mud Plaza. This area is a gathering place for those heading off into the marsh for educational excursions, as well as for those returning from the site.

On the South facade, factory is reduced to a surface. Wind and sun are controlled, harvested and converted into energy, while passing through the permeable skin. This production, storage, and distribution reflect the vitality of local industry.

The reclaimed utility poles return to nature on the North face of the center, acting as a visual screen. During the day the vertical orientation of the second skin blurs the edges and form of the building, revealing only peeks of the yellow mass, and at night it serves to reduce light transmission onto the wetland. The guests move out of the classrooms, onto the deck and into the artificial forest before moving down into the site. The poles pixelate and spread across the site, forming five satellite labs around the marsh. The groupings of poles supporting wooden platforms act as resting points along the trails.

The Center is a hub for research and education. Interior spaces reflect ideas of adaptability, permeability and translucency. The two main entrances feed into the heart of the building, which becomes a media orientation center. This atrium space acts as a light filled distributor, where the industrial meets the natural. Frequently used spaces are located around this zone: towards the north the adaptable education area and towards the south the lab and office spaces, creating a relationship between everyday users. The permeable materials that weave around the interior core provide enclosure for these spaces and reflect the contrasting conditions of the exterior. The exhibition space and auditorium located on the second floor also behave as flexible spaces. They open onto one another when needed, or can be separated when not in use to increase building efficiency. Their location retains connection to the atrium while providing elevated views onto the wetland, both from the interior and from the observation deck.

The roof holds an uninterrupted relationship with the site. It is an experimental vegetation lab, an observation area and an extended education space. Researchers will utilize the green roof to experiment with various plantings of endemic species. This introduction of desirable native plants will promote seed dispersal onto the site and act as a genetic memory bank for the surrounding area. The roof is intended for heavy use, allowing all visitors to learn about alternative green roof technologies. It is here the surrounding landscape of both nature and artifice is revealed.

