

MANAGER AS ARTIST

Dégot

'APHRODISIAN BLISS'

Chytry

POEM'E'; MANAGING 'ENGAGEMENT'

Guimarães-Costa & Pina e Cunha

PERIPHERAL AWARENESS

Chia & Holt

FUNKY PROJECTS

Garcia and Pérez

AESTHETICS OF EMPTINESS

Biehl

POETRY PLAY

Darmer, Grisoni,

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AVANT GARDE ORGANIZATION

Vickery

AESTHESIS//CREATE

AESTHESIS

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FUNKY PROJECTS

IXIAR GARCIA, THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF FUNKY PROJECTS, TALKS TO ITS DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER, **ASIER PERÉZ** *translated from the Spanish by Martin Hardie.*

Funky Projects. Ltd [www.funkyprojects.com] was set up by interdisciplinary artist Asier Pérez in late 2002. He defines it as an 'ideation company for social innovation and strategic design'. It is a business that will engage in almost any project, social, cultural, and commercial, utilising their own distinctive creative and entrepreneurial methods.

Ixiar: What was it that gave you the idea of moving from art to business?

Asier: The art projects I had been doing were all the time becoming more complex economically, and at the same time our attempts at having some social influence were always reduced to the field of art representation. The projects lost their potential for social transformation as they were always labeled with the tag of 'art'. I started to think about the economy, not only the idea of money, but as a better field of social relations. The idea was to move to an economic field and to have a platform with a business form that offered services to clients, within a service economy and within a liberal market.

Ixiar: When you were working in art, did your projects have this objective of social transformation?

Asier: Yes, but it was impossible to exercise any social transformation because we were in this area that was protected by the idea of 'contemporary art', both in the way it was financed and undertaken. There was neither a valorisation nor an assumption of the transformative capacities of the projects.

Ixiar: Can you remember now which project it was that gave you the impetus to make this change? What was the moment or phase that gave rise to this necessity?

Asier: It was with the realisation of two large projects. One was in 2000, Funky Baskenland, that I did with Casco Projects of Utrecht, and the other was Kissarama in Belfast in 2001 for the Belfast Festival at Queens. The last project tried to beat the Guinness World Record for couples kissing simultaneously at the same location. In the development of these projects I was now within the field of economic logics and I was learning more each time how the system of offering services functioned and how to be economically recompensed for them. We also introduced criteria to measure the success of the projects in relation to their stated objectives. I had started another business, earlier in 1999. It was a business that, when I look back at it 8 years later, I think you can see that I was playing more with the aesthetics of the business and the aesthetics of contemporary economics (like it is understood in the symbolic fields of art), rather than exercising a social interlocution as a result of the economic activity of that business.

Ixiar: Did the fact of being in business inspire you aesthetically or was it a structure that ...?

Asier: Yes, it was very attractive. It is going to sound very tacky, but I remember reading a book by Bill Gates and how he created Microsoft etc. Perhaps Bill Gates was a bit of a b*****d, I don't know if he could extract any creative value, but it was like a transformation of many social habits. There is something that still continues today to be fundamental to any process Funky Projects is involved in, that is to learn and to generate knowledge from whatever practice. I believe that in the field of art I was simply fenced in; the apprenticeship was not exciting and didn't generate any greater knowledge. I decided that I had to explore other fields of work where I could have new adventures with knowledge. Now we have other problematics to deal with, like how to make the various knowledge of the components of the business *subjective*, whilst at the same time sharing in a work team that is made up of six people within Funky Projects.



'THERE IS SOMETHING THAT STILL CONTINUES TODAY TO BE FUNDAMENTAL TO ANY PROCESS FUNKY PROJECTS IS INVOLVED IN, THAT IS TO LEARN AND TO GENERATE KNOWLEDGE FROM WHATEVER PRACTICE'

Ixiar: What were the first things that happened in creating the business? The creation of the business started to develop new forms of working, with other people, you moved in other circles ...

Asier: We were very ingenious and a lot more spontaneous than now, including the way we valued the economic aspects, we thought that some of the services that we were offering were high quantity and that we were going to make a lot of money. On the other side, we believed that we had to dress up in suits everyday, and stupid things like that. The wealth that we produced wasn't just economic, and the knowledge that we generated wasn't only for suits. I remember one of the first meetings that we started with, for example, with Athletic Bilbao (Bilbao's professional football team): these meetings were super fun and it was exciting to be next too a whole lot of super executives with us proposing de-structured ideas and at the same time with these ideas we gave them a creative strategy with which to reach their objectives and even to widen their objectives. I think that since I started Funky Projects nearly 5 years ago I have learnt a lot about the business world, how it functions, about working with teams of people, how we could manage creativity and the incrementation of these projects through creativity and client relations. As the founder of Funky Projects, at times I think that I invested 10 years working in contemporary art as an artist, and maybe within 5 years, when I will have been in business for ten years, I don't think that it will have stopped feeding me intellectually such that I will want to change my field of work. In any event the energy of Funky Projects doesn't fall back solely on Asier Pérez as founder -- it is an entity with the capacity of going much further than the biography of any one person.

Ixiar: What do you think is the difference between what we do in Funky Projects and contemporary art? Have you got anything to say about this?

Asier: In art there exists an a-priori or axiom that art is whatever, or it is anything that is presented in the field of art. We aren't putting forward our activities as being within the field of art, evidently we rework many ideas from art and I believe that our art education (three people who work in Funky Projects have studied Fine Arts) has served us as an apprenticeship for the generation of ideas, like in the investigation, production of projects of reflection in action ... with our current activity



everything is creativity and everything is ideas that have to be orientated to achieve the objectives that our clients request from us.

Ixiar: Do you believe that art could come to have more repercussions, or more effect in the social transformation or could it participate more in society?

Asier: No I don't think so. It is a debate that I think has lost its force, it's tired and won't take us anywhere. It surprises me to see art, the way it is now presented in the Documenta or in the Venice Biennale, seems to be the same as it was presented 8, 10, 20 years ago. The economics of the art market, the working conditions of the artists, and the other situations aren't very contemporary. If we accept as a fact that the economy, that the economic relations that we establish, are an important part of any social intervention/interlocution, that which they present as contemporary art has not much to do with the contemporary economy. And so for good or for worse, today, and more so in the free market, one acquires more presence by being active in the economy, and from the economy social changes are produced; but none from art, maybe not even in aesthetics. Maybe the only thing that they are producing that is much more sophisticated is in the way art is being used to transform the perception of a city. This year (2007) the tenth anniversary of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is being celebrated, and it is funny that the Guggenheim put on their first brunch function in Bilbao, the city from which Funky Projects works. Thanks to the Guggenheim a change has been produced in the way Bilbao and the Basque Country is perceived, but you can't say that anytime have its *contents* produced any change, none of the works in the museum have produced the slightest transformation, or better said, it has not been artistic works that have produced a change in Bilbao's international image. At this level the use or the sophistication in the uses of the 'art' tag, has produced changes which have had a great economic repercussion; but at no time has this change proceeded from the contents of the museum, nor has there been any change produced from the artistic productions of any of the artists represented in the Guggenheim, the Documenta, or in SkulpturProjekte Munster or in the Venice Biennale.

Ixiar: In respect of this could you say that society takes from art what interests it by making something that has 'tourist' or cultural value from it?

Asier: I think they turn something from an artistic domain into something financial: whether it is being promoted by a public or private organization it is part of a program of producing cultural consumption. But not at any time do they produce better cultural knowledge, nor any social movement through art. It involves only the *stylization* of art, and tourism that is generated by art.

Ixiar: Does Funky Projects have an opinion concerning the 'Guggenheim effect'?

Asier: There is one notable thing to say about it, and that is that the most important brand in the Basque Country is ETA. The Guggenheim is part of an attempt to change perceptions of the Basque Country through the mechanism of contemporary art. It seeks to cover things over by means of the Guggenheim Museum.

Ixiar: Over the years has Funky Projects evolved in the manner you thought it would?

Asier: Evidently there has been an evolution in many of its aspects. On the one hand the total work process, getting clients, having a working system ...and so on.. I didn't think that it would end up being so 'heavy'. It's been very complicated, as much intellectually as economically, and now it is at the point at which we are finishing up a very important period of strategic reflection for the business, and we are looking hard at the future in a very ambitious way; with knowledge and the objects we generate, we think we can offer much more interesting and sophisticated services.

Ixiar: Can you talk about any project that you think has been important in the development of the business?

Asier: *ShowBar* is a project we are preparing with Park & Ride in Manchester, UK. It is a complete project in that if we are capable of getting it up and running properly, it will, in its first phase, be very explosive, very spectacular; we also anticipate criticism from 'outside' because of its experimental nature. It will try to be a 'pop up' in the logic of identity creation by consumption of global brands in the Northern Quarter of the city, in order to generate 'a point of encounter' in an area where they are establishing creative industries. I think that another important project that we are working on is one concerning housing for young people in Basauri (a town on the edge of metropolitan Bilbao). In Spain housing is more than a problem; it is extremely expensive, and this has produced a situation of housing inaccessibility, in a country where the tradition has always been to purchase your own home. On top of that, the project, which entails the construction of 35 dwellings, is an exercise in social pedagogy, seeking to change living habits and to promote a logic of *use* rather than ownership. Our collaboration with the architect Santiago Cirujeda will eventuate in the construction of 35 dwellings, but what interests us is the community of young people that can come and make use of these places over time, and the capacity of this community in movement to generate participatory projects and change the area that they live in.

Ixiar: How does Funky Projects approach its work, each project and day by day?

Asier: We have a lot of difficulties finding and contracting the right people. We are always looking for people with a very creative attitude and with the attitude and capacity to work in a team. These are not the 'logics' of working in art, where you can be more of an egoist and selfish.

The clients assure us that with a lot less than we deliver, they would still be satisfied. But we think that we have to challenge our clients, without losing them, which would be possible; we have to try and generate as much knowledge for our clients as well as for all the other stakeholders in the project, and for ourselves. Never have we had to adapt ourselves in a way that might imply lowering our standards to meet those of the client. Projects are never initially designed as 'complete'; there is always a framework, but this simply marks the way in which we go via various strategies. Along the way we have to maneuver, manage, drive, both human resources as much as economic ones; you always seem to discover things are not quite as we had imagined in the first place. So it is this process which takes us along – both for us and for the clients; this need to be very creative during the whole process, in working through its implementation, and not only in a project's conception.

Ixiar: Are there any possible new ways that Funky Projects could produce knowledge?

Asier: We have just produced a framework based upon three axes. One axis there are the services that we provide our clients: here we are like a consultancy – strategic creativity advisors involved in the ideation of experience. Another axis is in the logics of dissemination through publications, like the book we put out a couple of years ago, *El verdedero historia de Kalimotxo* (The True History of Kalimotxo*). We want to publish things outside of conferences and 'research', things that are not 'academic', with which we try to maximise the socialization of the projects so that they become both economically and socially sustainable. The third axis is the systemization of work projects. The most developed example we have is *Karma Cream*, a system to translate corporate identities to ice cream flavours. We are going to start working more in this area of systems logic in the coming months to offer our clients specific rapid implementation systems. Then the client will be able to understand very easily some of the things that we do, and from these systems we believe that we can commercialize other types of more complicated services. Within this area we are starting to give experiential creativity workshops. There actually exists a horrible tendency on the edges of creative methodologies: it is a 'super fashion', where every business and arm of government talks about creativity and innovation. Nearly all of these businesses put into operation methods that are tried and tested; we are not part of this. We are anti methodological philosophical thinking (Paul Feyerabend). We have had to meet the different demands of clients and now we are about to start preparing two experiential creativity workshops. One is for a university business faculty and the other is within a cultural heritage congress, where they will be bringing together cultural heritage management issues; we are going to put on for them a experiential creativity workshop.

Ixiar: You also have an idea to make a type of workshop involving casting and contracts?

Asier: Yes, maybe it is a situation similar to that of the experiential creativity workshops, but it comes more from a logic in which all business give their employees training once they are contracted. What we want to try and do is give this training to a large group and make choices, nearly like the way the logics of the UK TVs *Big Brother* operate, the logic of competitive television, to choose people who potentially could work within Funky Projects. It will be like a proper selection and training process, fun, enthusiastic, proactive and creative.

Ixiar: Earlier, you expressed some criticism of the art world, but you have clients who work in this world. Can you tell me about an example of this?

Asier: *Smart Project Space* is a client in Amsterdam for whom we develop a lot of very ambitious creative strategic projects. Smart Project Space is an Amsterdam foundation that recently moved to a new building. One of the things we have designed for them is a concept of the functioning of the spaces outside of expositions. We have created a concept of space that can be consumed by any person, so that they have a fun and enriched experience in any of the services space. We have worked with the orientation of their

publishing and editorial work, developing the user experience of the full range of Smart Project Space services activities. We have worked a lot on the restaurant concept, maybe because we have a special interest in food and people services, also because the Smart Project Space restaurant is one of their own revenue sources. The system that we have proposed is a residence that accommodates two high quality chefs each year, in a way in which they could develop their own project over the six months of their residency. It started out as a way of not simply falling into the idea of working on the 'interior design' of the space, but generating the attention of consumers through the media, and through the 'experience'. That way we will have a restaurant that will change twice a year in all of its concepts of cooking, and in that way will enrich the clients, as well as the chefs in residence, and all the other personel that work in the kitchen. Another part of the proposal that we have put together is to mount a few modules on the flat roof of the building, and they will be very special hotel rooms, special because of their experimental architecture, their location, and their very nice views of Amsterdam.



Ixiar: What interested you to give this turn and get involved in these things? Is the final intention to change pre-existing conceptions?

Asier: The vocation of Funky Projects is always to be progressive, starting with the logics of creativity and social innovation. This progressivism makes us try and change pre-existing ideas, very established ideas like cultural habits, the way people relate to each other, the times and shape of consumption, and the time to enjoy different moments of life. Thus our vocation is to enrich all the project stakeholders that we work with, from the starting point of enjoyment practices and knowledge through reflection in action. But to consolidate is not necessarily the same as to improve. In producing a qualitative jump, and by looking for approximate situations within other, different, fields, we seek to produce in these experiences a cultural sophistication of the surroundings in which we put on each project.

+ Translated by Martin Hardie.

* Kalimotxo - a popular Basque drink consisting of a mix of cheap red wine and coca cola.



The wealth that we produced wasn't just economic, and the knowledge that we generated wasn't only for suits.



COMING SOON

THE FOURTH ART OF MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION CONFERENCE





WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS EMERGE FROM A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH ORGANIZATIONAL SPACE – IT REPRESENTS A POST-BAUHAUS CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO DESIGN, WHERE AESTHETICS AND ENGINEERING, ART AND BUSINESS, ARE INTEGRATED. ‘DESIGN’ IS DEFINED AS A FORM OF CREATIVE INTELLIGENCE AND THE DESIGNER A PROBLEM SOLVER, USING ANY MEANS AT HIS DISPOSAL – FROM GRAPHICS, TO BRANDING, PHOTOGRAPHY, PRODUCT DESIGN, INTERIOR AND SPATIAL DESIGN. **WORKPLACE PROJECTS UNDERTAKE A TOTAL RE-THINK OF ORGANIZATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY.**



TREVOR JAMES

workplaceprojects.com

Workplace Projects began when designer Trevor James met J. Paul O’Keefe, founder and Managing Director of The Projects Company in Reading, UK (now one company of The Projects Group). The Projects Company had already carved out a niche as designer and fitter of high-end commercial interiors, providing blue-chip clients like GlaxoSmithKline with state-of-the-art high-tech office space. James has extended the original Projects vision, providing integrated solutions in a way few designers are intellectually equipped to do.

James is sometimes frustrated at the way even hugely successful companies do not think in terms of spatial strategy – in terms of the interrelated ways in which they use the limited space they have to work. At least, they do not think of it until they move premises, in which case they call in the designer at the last stage when every other consideration has been made in maintaining business productivity. James, however, excels in re-thinking the entire space and the way in which it is used and developed, how it facilitates basic human needs as well as the outer realms of innovative productivity. This task entails the designer analyzing the space first hand – as if conducting an ethnographic study – observing how people use their environment, their work tools, how they interact, walk around, sit on their chairs, use their desks or laptops, have meetings, spend time thinking, or relaxing, drinking coffee, or negotiating. The language and behaviour of space-use is under scrutiny and design problems quickly begin to present themselves.

The manifold tasks conducted through any one working day in a business environment are actually inhibited by an environment full of detached objects and tools, all of which are standardised and rationalised, often inhuman and impersonal. Bespoke ‘designer’ office furniture is one such response to this common situation, however this offers no sustainable answer for large dynamic companies, given staff movement or turnover, team work, and the costs it would incur. What is needed is an integrated spatial approach, where the form of the organizational space is developed from within the kinds of activity undertaken within it, flexible

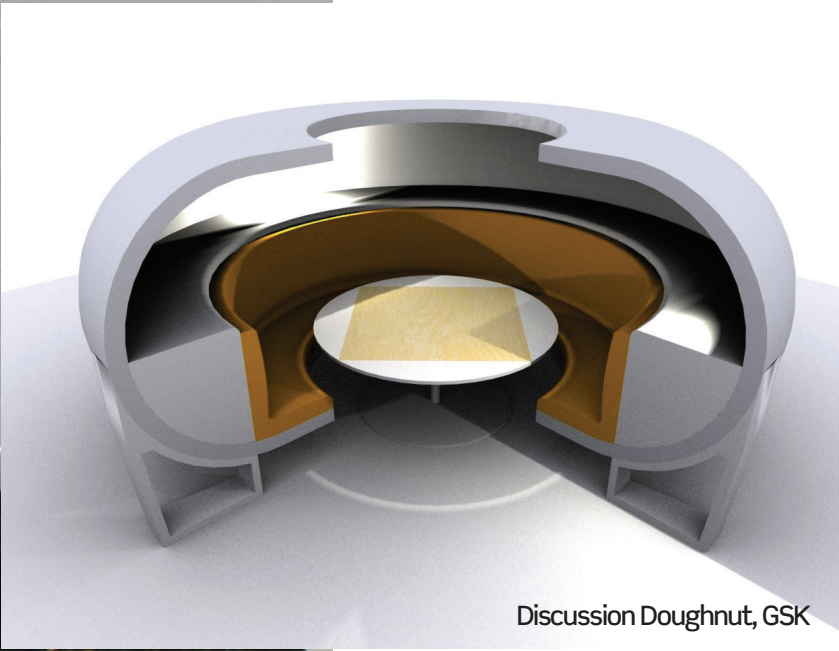
and intelligent enough to be able to be adapted to multiple forms of usage. Most of all, however, the standardized and rationalised environments of corporate life have emerged not from an advanced understanding of human productivity, but an impoverished understanding of it, involving deeply engrained conceptions of ‘people’ as corporate tools, not self-determining individuals.

James is no idealist, but begins with the hard economics of a company’s needs – the finance and statistical facts of business demands. Neither is he a visionary artist-designer, protective of his inventions – ‘I just continue throwing ideas at the client, and see what sticks’. Like the lineage of constructivist designers before him, he is concerned to integrate the outer realms of aesthetics with the hard technical demand for productive facilities. James is probably most distinguished for his product engineering – developing new kinds of objects: from tables, lockers, small CD stacking systems, to laptops stands. Laptop computers have the deceptive appearance of a sophisticated tool yet are a radical contributor to workplace health hazards and low speeds of productivity. Even the basic design of desks presuppose (and thus enforce) mundane uniform patterns of work practice. James re-invents the concept of the desk, where it becomes a vehicle for multiple forms of activity, both individual and collective.

For James, organizations need to move into a post-open plan understanding of office space, where new forms of interactive space, cross-departmental meeting space, individual reflective or thinking spaces are standard; and they provide the conditions for creative comprehension, facilitating chance-encounters, or just allowing moments of silence. Territorialization and hierarchies – uses of space that create opposition-dynamics, confrontation and mechanisms of control – are dissolved. The aesthetics of space is not about decoration, it is about facilitating extended human development.

‘Space’ is a synonym for ‘waste’ in corporate life. We need CEOs to understand the productivity of space.

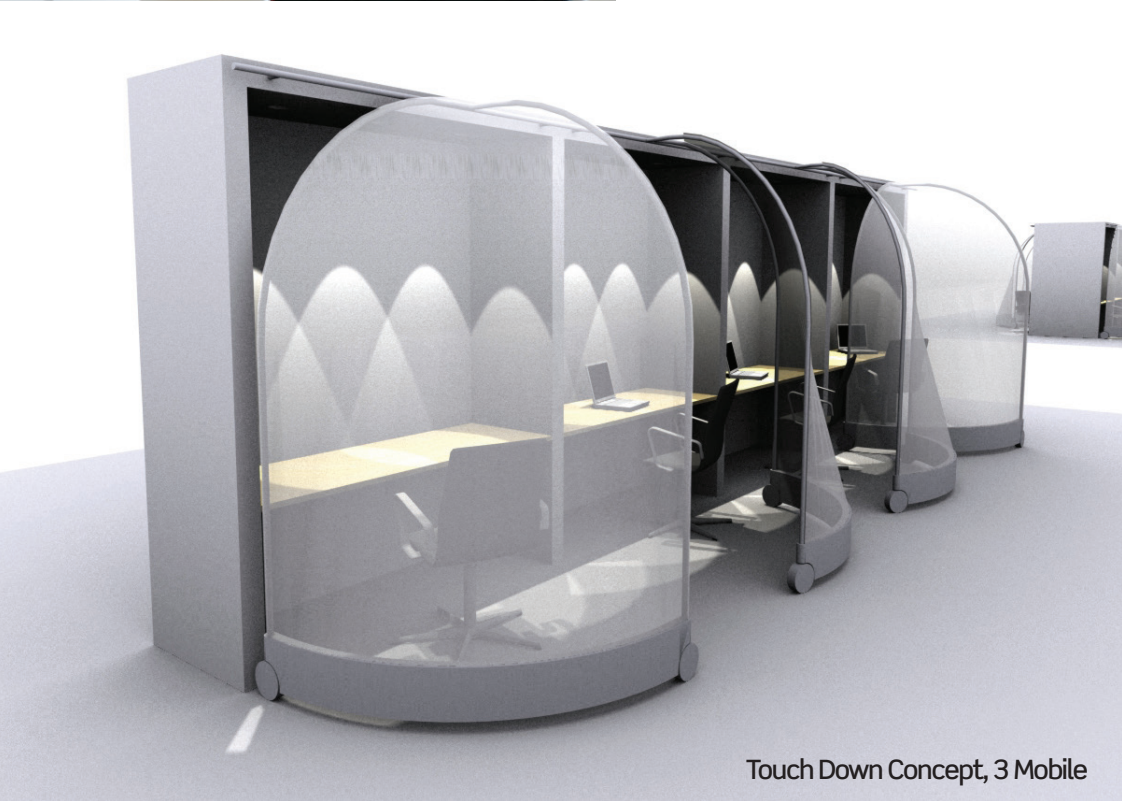




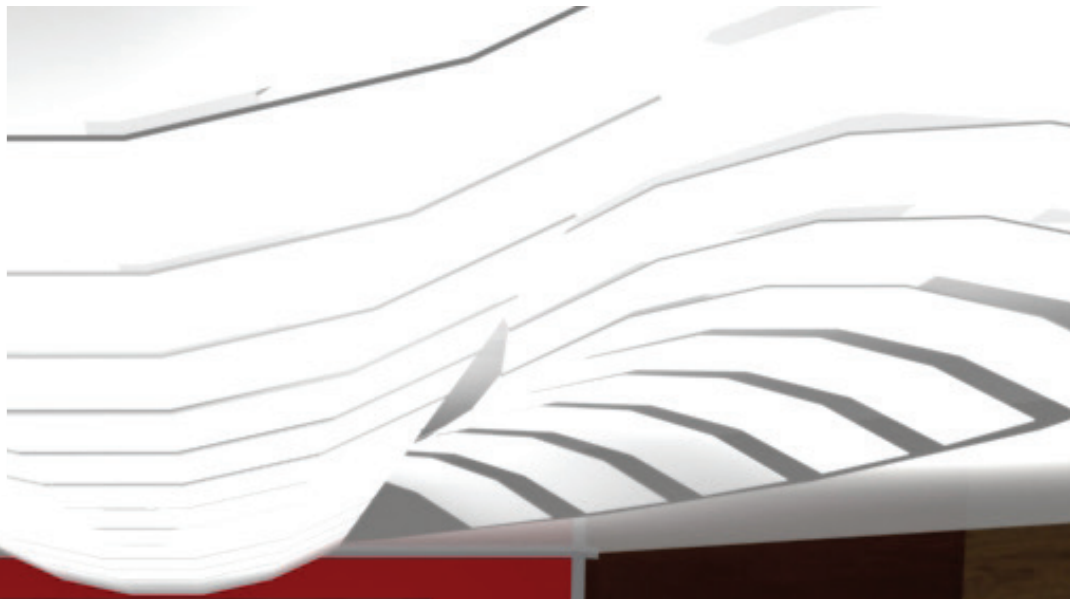
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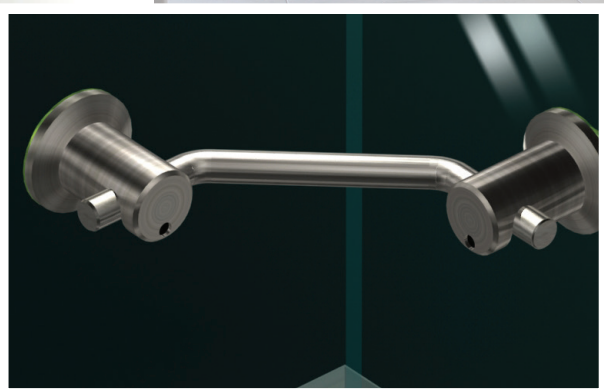


Touch Down Concept, 3 Mobile



Touch Down Concept, 3 Mobile





Boardroom, Al Muthana



Laptop Stand, WP Products

A

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