Latent (e)Scapes

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Latent (e)Scapes is a landscape installation in the Susan S. and Kenneth L. Wallach Garden at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. Installations in the garden rotate on a two-year competition cycle and are selected by an esteemed jury of Harvard faculty, including the Dean of the Radcliffe Institute.

An interactive and kinetic media installation, Latent (e)Scapes explores the natural-synthetic landscape through systematizing the implicit and explicit impacts of human and non-human forces within the garden. Finding inspiration in the swaying grasses of the prairies and coasts, the work calls in to question our roles within everyday environments and creates an immersive experience contrasting the typical urban landscape.

Designed to be seamlessly embedded within the natural landscape and therefore integrated within the natural ecology, the installation is comprised of 1600 RGB LEDs embedded within a series of berms each planted with Pennsylvania Sedge and a No-mow Fescue mix. Each RGB pixel is connected to a 3 foot long, 0.125" diameter extruded acrylic rod that transmits and projects the light upwards. Every RGB pixel is mapped spatially within a custom-written environmental simulation interface that controls the lighting behaviour of each individually addressable pixel.

A network of motion sensors tracks the movement of occupants as they traverse the space, as each sensor is activated a series of reactive animations propagate throughout the installation in real-time. While the interactive animations convey the spatial location of human occupancy, the color of the LEDs can be used to imply specific environmental factors such as temperature or humidity, each tied to a RGB value. In contrast to the digital interpretation of physical stimuli, the acrylic stalks and their inherent flexible physical properties react naturally to self-weight, air movement, and human touch, embodying and tracing the kinetic energies and latent forces present within the environment.

The installation can be seen as a physical metaphor of an attitude towards symbiotic relationships between natural and synthetic, the implicit and the explicit, the static and kinetic manifestations of energy. As human impact is registered through the synthetic elements, the interactivity makes explicit the synthetic nature of the ecology, while the effect of natural environmental forces are simultaneously implied in the structure and material of the installation. This interweaving of natural/synthetic ecologies serves as a critique and method in which artificial systems could possibly be designed to mimic, co-exist, and co-create within the natural-synthetic landscape of the anthropocene.

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