



**Title:** *Nonspheres – the shapes of cultural production*  
by Luis Berríos-Negrón, February 2007

*Nonspheres* is an ongoing investigation that explores today's tension between nature and technology and how it may facilitate new modes of art production in Berlin.

**Method:**

Nonespheres will aim to provide five applications:

- a succinct set of oppositions defining *Nature*,
- a robust background about the relations between technology and art production in the last 50 years (focusing on the *performative*<sup>1</sup> arts);
- a catalogue of **CADCAM/digital fabrication tool facilities**<sup>2</sup> in Berlin with the respective materials sources, costs and respective environmental impacts;
- the creation of 6 artworks by Berlin-based artists\* addressing the aforementioned dialogues and production methods;
- and an addendum of the catalog documenting the methods employed by the artists in order to develop the work.

**Datum:**

The essay titled Acid Visions by Felicity Scott is by in large the inspiration behind *Nonspheres*. Scott's elucidation of Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome and its cultural dimensions demanded further inquiry... it lead to a revisit Lamarck's *biosphere* and then Vernadsky's *noösphere*<sup>3</sup> in order to provide greater ground to support Scott's exemplification: that they, despite their genius as natural scientists, fell victim to their own unwitting countercultures<sup>4</sup>.

1. conceptual art, performance, digital art, including coding and scripting. Spanish curator Paco Barragán says - "In recent years, interesting debates have arisen around the adjective 'performative' and its noun 'performativity', involving a host of interpretations which transcend the domain of art to find new relevance in political and social terms." From the text of his upcoming exhibition at Miami Dade College – 'No lo llames performance/Don't Call it Performance.'

2. automated 3.5 and 5 axis routers, laser, water-jet, and plasma cutters, 3d and FDM printers, etc.

3. *There is a new incipient phase in biospheric evolution – the Noösphere, or sphere of intelligence -- wherein humanity could employ evolutionary gifts as a creative collaborative agent of evolution. An era in geologic time, the Psychozoic Era, in which humanity as a whole is a powerful geologic entity able to transform the planet. We are currently in the psychozoic era. Within the last two hundred years, humanity has arisen as one powerful geologic force, moving more mass upon the earth than the biosphere.* V. Vernadsky, The Noösphere, written in December 1943, and published in English in the *American Scientist*, January 1945

4. [And]...this raises questions on how we can trace distinctions on how contemporary aesthetic practices responded to the emergent technologies and reorganization of this global system of domination - whether they forge antispectacular strategies or efficient diagrams of a transformation in that system's very logic...These historical practices point to the danger not only of mysticism but also of an unwitting integration into contemporary articulations of geopolitics and digital tools. I stress unwitting to distinguish between the modes of experimentation from the savvy, even self-conscious strategies of uncritical integration that gave rise to, among other recent events in architecture, the "Bilbao Effect." - Felicity Scott, Acid Visions, Grey Room, MIT Press, Cambridge-New York, No.23, 2006, pg. 36

The risk of an unwitting integration of technology and art is the very spirit of Nonspheres. These new tools for fabrication are at a vulnerable moment: either they are misused, *unwittingly*, for representation without considering the byproduced excess material and energy, or they are applied with an educated predisposition for potential new standards & economies for material, labor, and energy.

This cultural configuration should not be based on enforcement or responsibility, as prescribed spheres, but networked through an interdependent, discursive environ. One way to spur this dialogue is through the proposed exordium and practicum, where this catalogue of recent production methods and the ensuing artworks become alibi for revising the complex relations between human creativity and the biosphere, the *oceanic*<sup>5</sup> contradictions between mysticism and Darwinism, and the reoccurring misappropriation of these systems for the purpose of ideology, self-reference, and power.

#### **Schedule:**

Within the allotted period, I intend to use three months to continue the reading and gathering of relevant data to configure the discursive background. The following three months will be spent meeting and gathering the types and costs of services of these CAD/CAM facilities in Berlin. The last 6 months will be spent having month-long workshops with individual artists leading them to produce the experimental artwork. The project would require the minimum stipendium of 1100€ for the first six months, which will cover basic living expenses and regional research travel. In order to offer viable commissions to the selected participating artists, it would be ideal to receive the maximum stipendium of 1600€ for the remaining six months, ie. yielding 500€/month for the production of the monthly workshop and artwork. Hopefully, you will find this material of purpose and relevance so that an exhibition and accompanying catalogue can ultimately be realized.

#### **Publication:**

The exhibiting and distributing of the results of Nonspheres will firstly aim to offer your communities a platform for *general intellect*<sup>6</sup> through the access to new technologies, new economies of production, and new economies of materials. Secondly, to provide me with further knowledge in this matter so that I can best serve as a dependable resource, likewise enriching the realization of my own body of work.

5. Freud noted the troubling nature of his friend Romain Rolland's identification of religion with "a feeling of something limitless, unbounded - as it were, 'oceanic.'" Freud sought a psychoanalytic explanation of what he regarded as a crisis in the demarcation of the ego and the external world. Rather than accepting it [as a counterpart to a mature "ego-feeling"] as religious, he recast it as a symptom of regression to "infantile helplessness," a defense against suffering that in addition to the "mass delusion" of religion might manifest in other pleasures such as art or even eroticism. If civilization was supposed to protect man from the destructive forces of nature though advances in science and technology, just as it would protect one man from the brute force of another through the notions of civil rights and justice, even in the late 1920's, it was evident to Freud that something had gone awry. – ibid 4, pg. 33

6. [In the Postfordist era] we are no longer confronted with the well-known processes of rationalisation of the state; on the contrary, we now need to oppose the accomplished statalisation of the intellect. For the first time, the old expression 'raison d'etat' acquires more than a metaphorical significance. Paulo Virno, *On General Intellect: Lessico Postfordista*, Feltrinelli: 2001 (translated by Adrianna Bove)

7. 'Life' migrates into quotation marks - not just in cultural studies of science but in recent theoretical biology as well - because it is at once so quotable and so definitionally unstable... Derrida's claim is too singular; a signature might rather be a family of differences, rendered related by witnesses that attest to their similarity, not their sameness. The paradox that then follows, as astrobiologists are more than aware, is that the search for extraterrestrial life is strongly constrained by what we have witnessed of life on earth. Stefan Helmreich, *The Signature of Life*, Grey Room, MIT Press, Cambridge-New York, No.23, 2006, pg. 73

\*Potential artists: Jan Family (Nina Beier/Marie Lund), Ettina Schultze, Hannes Schmidt, Axel Kilian, Mason Juday, Jordan Wolfson, Elena Bajo, Michel de Broin, Targa, Monica Bonvicini, Oliver Lutz, Dan Rees, Jan Christiansen, Oliver Lutz, Yngve Holen, Elina Productlove.

**Tensions:**

*“Still, living displaces false sentiments  
And now, when shrill pups are prodded to drown,  
I just shrug, ‘Bloody Pups’. It makes sense:  
‘Prevention of cruelty’ talk cut ice in town  
Where they consider death unnatural,  
But on well-run farms pests have to be kept down.”*

**excerpt from *Early Purges, Death of a Naturalist* by Seamus Heaney 1966**

The hubris of human as ruling species results in a toxic sense of the Natural. But, in the current negotiations between the local and global, opportunities emerge offering space to transform this culture. This shifting environment, where the historical continuum is conveniently constructed and massively mediated, the role of technology, now more than ever, radicalizes the “signature of life”<sup>7</sup>. This is keenly problematic considering the peaking prioritization of capital and god over and above any value. Is it futile for new practices to infiltrate the logic of commodification instead of confronting it? Should we amplify the organic intellect<sup>8</sup>?

Perhaps artwork reclaims production into a valuable carrier of questions that re-siting of human production as geological force, questioning structures that operate in the logic of excess power. Artist Peter Fend reflects on the matter:

*Edmund Spenser, the English Renaissance poet, wrote that “Art is that by which nature makes more nature.” Reading that, you have a choice: either accept this proposition or reject it. If you accept it, and if you acknowledge--as almost anyone would--that Nature is in serious decline, in serious trouble, in serious reduction of power, then we must conclude that with Art we can restore Nature’s power. Science only allows us to know nature and exploit it. Art is required if we are to restore it.*

The extension of this experience is not about being ethical, conclusive or metaphorical but about bifurcation. Contemporary art practices employ a variety of plastik, performative and discursive tactics that simply yet endlessly split a broad sense of related ideas. This split reduces the linearity of these repressive and consensual super-histories that depend on fear from church & state and the selective amnesia of a ruling society. The split allows for a dialogue, not based on a counterculture and a set of consumer-based “green” strategies, but about the configuration of an environment that aims to allow the public to viscerally reshape their place *in* Nature. There is limited space for minimalism here, and surely not for reductionism.

This is important if we consider previous attempts to form countercultures against these superpowered histories. Activist resistance, minimalism and the self-serving armchair criticism too often result in these “unwitting” applications of technologies for the self-serving ideological interests of the market, mysticism and even militarism. These crass mutations can best be represented by preeminent examples: Marx’s socioindustrial propositions turned into Fordist conveyor-belt democratizations<sup>9</sup>; Lamarck’s biosphere evolving into Vernadsky’s noosphere as ideological weaponry for the colonial aspirations of the Soviet project; the simultaneous emergence of Fuller’s geodesics in both the hippie landscape and the military milieu of USA’s reconnaissance systems; all which clearly, whether known or not by their respective authors, enforced the undesirable alliance between “new technological forces and new modalities of power”<sup>10</sup>.

8. *All men are intellectuals, but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals... everyone at some time fries a couple of eggs or sews up a tear on a jacket, we do not necessarily say that everyone is a cook or a tailor.*  
– Antonio Gramsci

9. Natalie Fizer, *The American Monument*, from exhibition talk at the Parsons School of Design Department of Architecture, New York 2001

10. *The conjunction of Fuller’s structural prototypes and psychedelic culture appeared, not by accident, in the context of Fuller’s ongoing attempts to reterritorialize dissident practices upon his own technocratic ideals. But importantly, and not unrelated to Fuller’s earlier attempts to capitalize on the energy of the counterculture, we find a symptomatic alliance, in the very nature of such practices, with new technological forces and new modalities of power.* – *ibid* 4, pg. 24

Geodesics are symbolically pertinent when we come across the simultaneous application of Fuller's systems in both the hippie movement (domes for communes) and in military installations (domes for reconnaissance system protection). This reminds what Felicity Scott refers to as a slippage of scale and application, where questions about technocratic aspirations for end-all-be-all hegemonic solutions put the geopolitical on a "disco"<sup>11</sup> mode. This slippage further reveals the growing fanatical disposition for that seductive, oceanic escapism found in religion and technocracy. This false sense of promise, of paradise, forms a marketable, ideological future, or as Freud calls it - "a crisis in the demarcation of the ego and the external world".



It is in this mindset where we revisit the fragility of ideas. At this very intersection, i.e. where geodesics split into off-the-grid communities like Drop City (above left) or to loaded monoliths of militarism like the NATO Abhoerdestation in West Berlin (above right), we can quantify how power structures consciously misappropriate the genius of the artist. It is at that moment then that any resulting pleasures such as art, even eroticism are determined and cannot escape. Providing creative groups with further autonomy, with new modes of production, may very well expand the art experience, facilitating a natural release.

One of these recent methods is the popular access to computer aided fabrication technologies. As practices move from mass production to mass customization, and as the multiplicity of the product and the singularity of the artwork confuse, an opportunity emerges to revisit the datum of design.

Can the origin of an artwork sustain its character of production, not as product serving the object, but where cultural, material & creative economies can emerge, prolonging perception while reducing their embodied energies?

The fostering of general knowledge lets the remote form of an idea become laterally continuous, beyond the confines of Life and into *imaginary time*<sup>12</sup>. In the risk of fomenting general knowledge, of going against the grain of specialization, Nonespheres hopes to nurture an environment where the artwork is responsive to these new tools and methods, where the resulting compound experiences<sup>13</sup> reticulate constellations informing a broader, networked image of the Natural. This seems most adequate at a time when the democratic project is at its most precarious moment, where the public sphere disintegrates, where there are no skins without bones. It is there where the Noospheres replaces the oceanic tensions between technology and religion back into the domain of our current psychozoic era, of the *noösphere*. There is no new nature. Nature just is.

11. *In thinking through the slippage of registers and scales is the question of whether the rapid commodification of amorphousness (think of disco) might also tell us something about the problematic aspects of the geopolitical claims common to both Fuller and the hippies.* – ibid 4, pg 25

12. *Humans seem to be extremely unimportant in the grand scheme of the Universe. But a metaphysically distinct blow to our importance came with the introduction of the idea of imaginary time and dark matter -- we are not even made of the same stuff that comprises most of the Universe.* - Rees, M., *Our Cosmic Habitat*, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, 2003

13. *...compound meaning in architecture are clouds of suggestive meaning that can be read by the public at large.* - Sarah Whiting, recorded from her participation at the Loopholes Conference at the Harvard School of Design.

### Experiments:



**‘Verde que te quiero Verde’** (title is excerpt from ‘Romance Sonámbulo’ by Lorca, 1st iteration of the Nonespheres, video, 3m58s, Kabul, Afghanistan 2006) was never intended to be. It was a solution to a fear of failure in the complex, war-torn urban environment. Instead of being its initial conception, a seminar in public art for Afghan art student-members of the Center for Contemporary Art of Afghanistan, it became a practical workshop for conveying the transforming possibilities of performance and installation. Atop Bibi Mahro, a hill right off the center of Kabul, there is an abandoned soviet-built pool and billboard then used for propaganda. After being a strategic site for urban warfare during the anti-Soviet war, folk stories tell that this pool became the site for clandestine executions during the Taliban period. The project was commissioned by Professor Rahraw Omarzad, director of the CCAA, and supported by The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture of MIT. The piece was largely documented in this video by the artist and photographed by Massoud Hosseini.



**‘Nonspheres IX / Fledermäusehaus I, for Sculpt the Future and Phillips de Pury’** was created as part of a group exhibition organized by Sculpt the Future and Arts&Co at Phillips de Pury London in 2008. The artists were asked to make a house for either birds, bats, or bees with found materials. I asked Phillips de Pury to provide old catalogues to be combined with a triangulated mesh of recuperated magic foil (.5mm aluminum wrap for studio lighting) all in order to develop a house for bats. The piece was purchased at auction by David de Rothschild.



**“Nonspheres VIII / Verde que te quiero Verde II at SOS4.8 with Eric Adamsons”** The Horse is built of found construction formwork during the available 48 hours, evolves into a ‘Green Screen’ stage for performing a tragedy based on obsessive rituals of love and torture. The audience must then penetrate only to find themselves hooded in green, involved in the performance and transpositioned through videoworks made in Berlin, Obersalzburg, Kabul and San Juan. The art and the audience are flattened into darker truths about green, fascism and colonial history suggesting the deployable, transgressive emotion found in the Trojan Horse’s viscera.



**“ventiocho de diciembre del dos mil siete”** is a series of seven collages assembled on collected posters of Félix Gonzalez Torres. The images come from publications gathered on the day after Benazir Bhutto’s death. The one above is titled “The Guardian Freitag/Viernes 28.12.2007 (76cmX144cm) and was on display on a 3 day solo show at Nice & Fit Gallery in Berlin.



**‘Teufelsburg’** (or Devil’s castle, the 2nd iteration of the Nonespheres, video, 2m49s, Berlin, Germany 2006) is a memoir to the experience in Kabul. The video was produced during the summer and winter of 2006. It was filmed at Teufelsberg in western Berlin at the abandoned NATO Secret Communications Survey Station. Teufelsberg (or Devil’s hill) is literally a mountain built out of the ruins of WW2 bombings. Being in Berlin, the edge between the once opposing superpowers, now a critical mass of contemporary life, reminds the blowbacks of the Cold War. It reminds the ensuing selective amnesia over actions during the 70’s and 80’s that facilitate a cozy erasure of events that otherwise would easily explain the seemingly ‘unexplainable’ political environment of today. The forgotten yet beautiful figures, domes and weeds speak of nature as it reasserts itself, as reminders of misappropriated ideas distorted into brutal, futile projects of control and ideology.

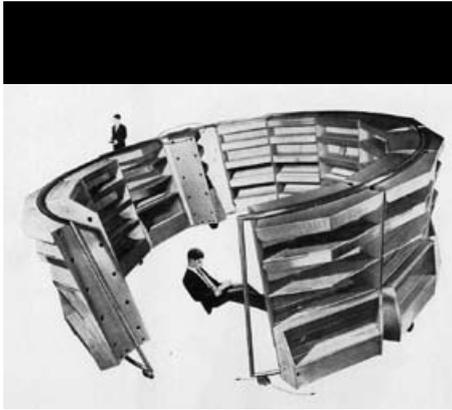
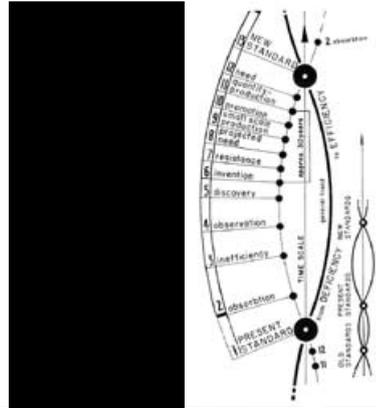
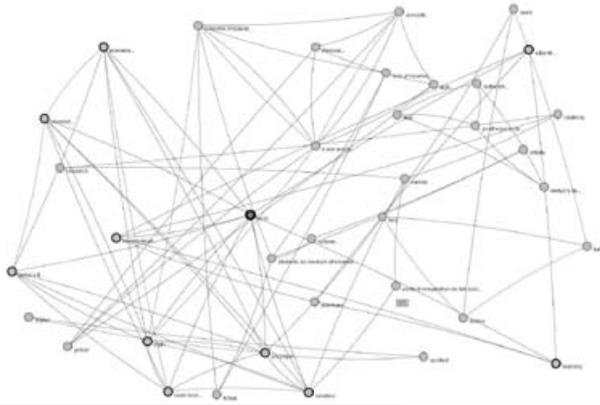


**‘Nonespheres III’** was presented as a happening at the 2nd Moskow Biennial’s parallel program in the Central House of the Artist. The initial purpose was to present a live-set audiovisual environment about Kabul in Moskow. A green painting with black spraypaint-stencilled weeds was made to be used with a videocamera as an alpha-channel contemplation space for the audience. Simultaneously, a live editing of the videowork filmed in both Afghanistan and Berlin were projected in a remote area of the gallery space where the audience could see itself in the contemplation space with the videowork in the background. In all its experimental vigor, it intended to evolve in realtime, providing the Moskow audience with a compound reminder about Afghanistan. Ironically but not surprisingly, the televised image seduced others to intervene and wallow in their own reflection. In its most primitive sense, the installation was a successful microcosm projecting the frailty of ideas, a polemic that emerged in the ‘Teufelsburg’ video. “Nonespheres I” took a life of its own as yet another artwork unwittingly misappropriated and literalized into a failed ideological project...

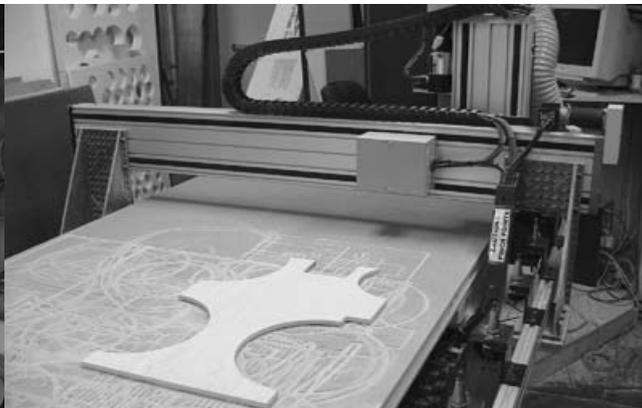


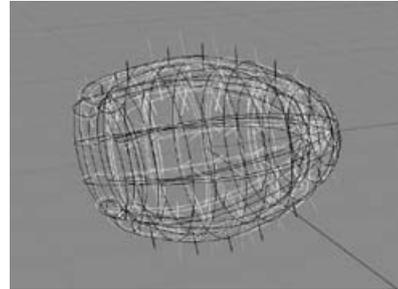
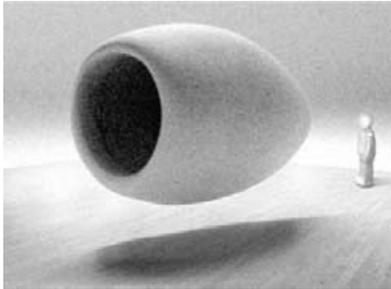
**‘Nonespheres IV’ at Program-Berlin (July-Sept 2007)** is the 4th iteration of the project. This installation is mainly a digitally generated lattice. This lattice will fill the entire gallery room. Likewise, a green anamorphic shape is laid out as a background. The lattice is composed of a precise system of recycled polyethylene ropes suggesting a continuous yet remote set of relationships intended to incite Freud’s oceanic feelings. The lattice will suggest more than its physical form - commenting on remote, interdependent productions that celebrate local, rather than global significance. The entire environment will be a tool for reciting networked knowledge into the space of the gallery through bluescreen/greenscreen technology. While in the exhibition space, the visitors will then see themselves flattened in two offsite locations within the lattice - Teufelsburg, Berlin and Bibi Mahro, Kabul. Essentially, becoming geographically absent through the video replacement technology, the gallery finds itself in a past, present and future to provoke a lateral world of imaginary time representing mind, presence and consequence; where human production is Nature.

**Related Work:**

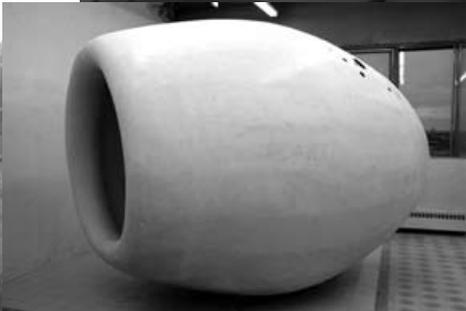
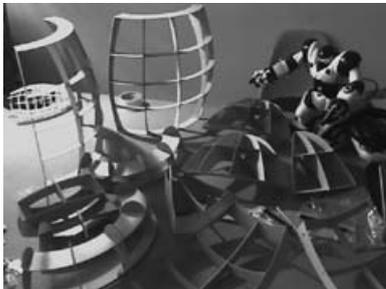


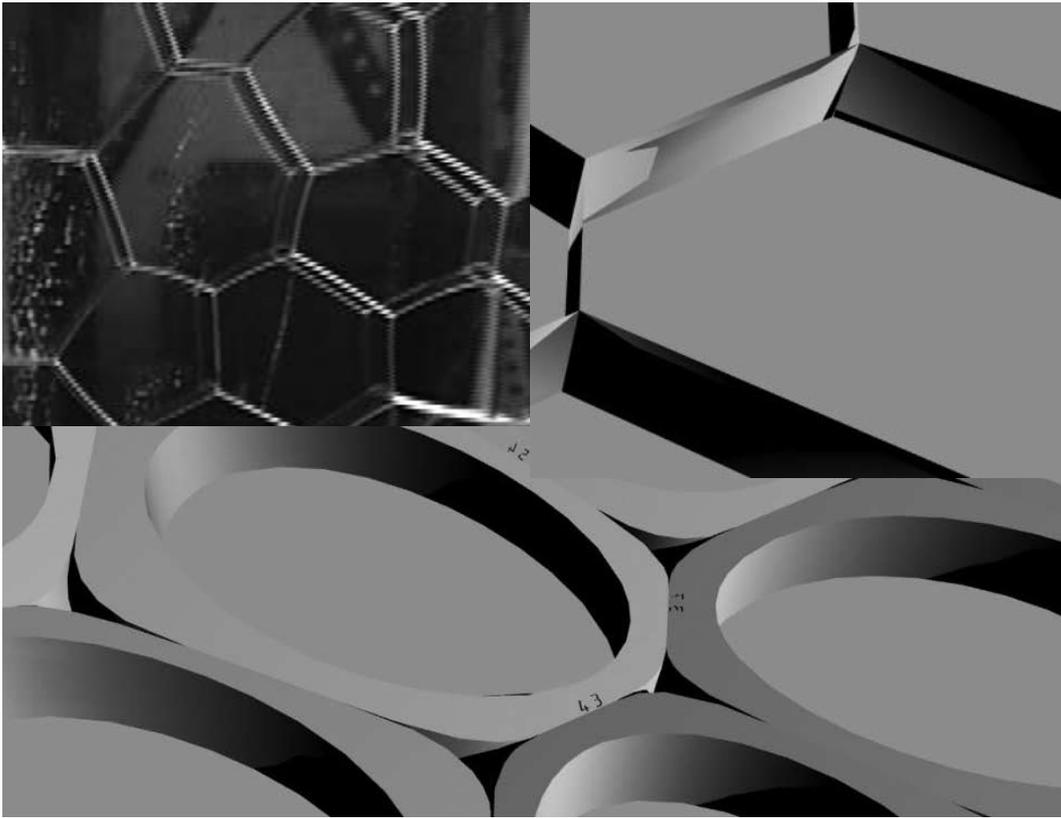
**Thesis Project** - Mobile Thesis Depository, MIT 2005 | Prototyping & Fabrication, Rhino - H2O, Laser, and 2.5 axis cutters (please see attached Turtle Pamphlet).



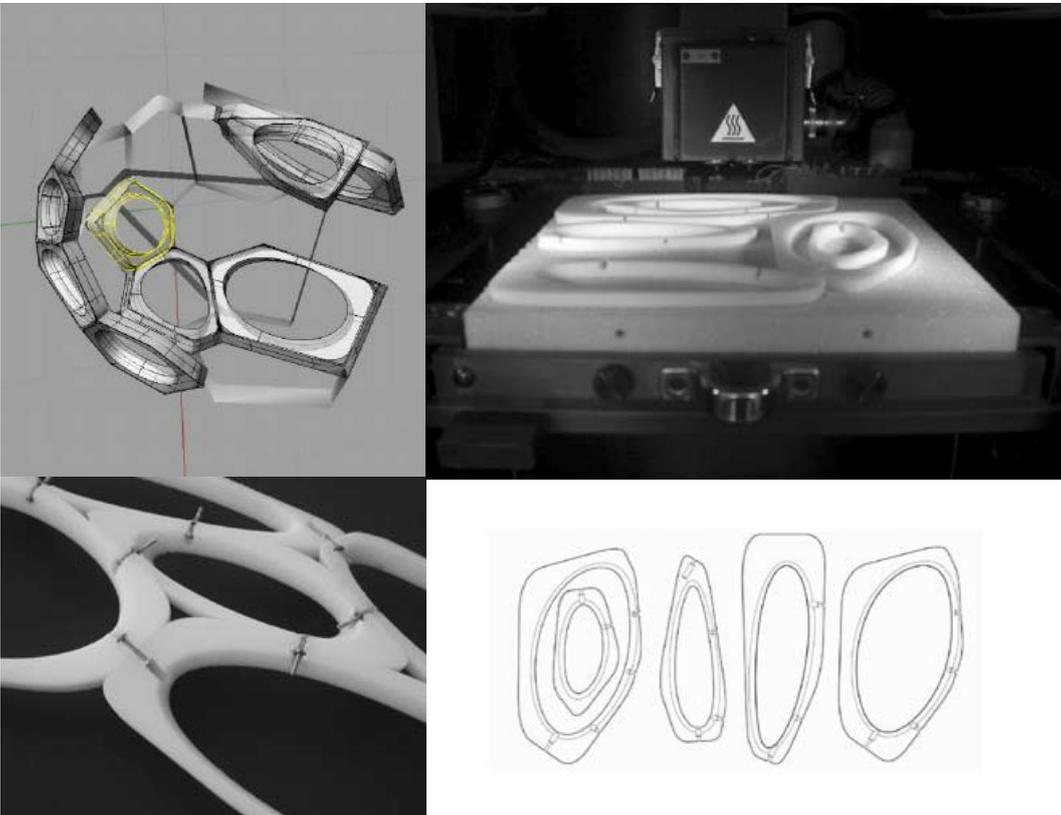


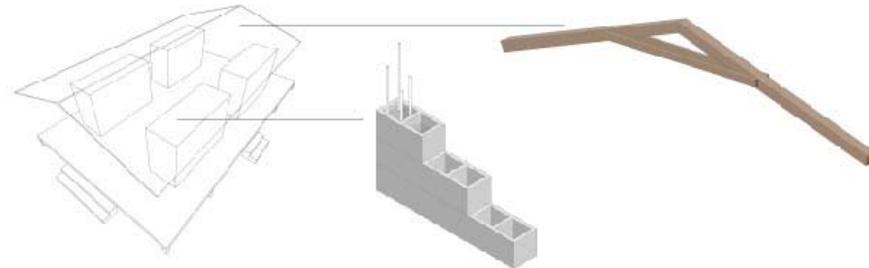
**Engine** - collaboration with Michel de Broin, digital fabrication and production management of sculpture, 3d modeling in Rhino, fabrication programming & documents, laser cut MDF and foam.





**Sinthome Workshop** at MIT directed by Mark Goulthorpe, Barbara Cutler and Dr. Axel Kilian, development of Voronoi structural skin system for modeling and fabrication of Sinthome sculpture, Rhino, Catia, laser cutter, 5axis milling, FDM printer, participant.





**Tsunami Safe(r) House** : co-designer of prototype housing system 1000 units currently under construction / MITSenseable City Laboratory, Prajnopaya Foundation and Harvard's Tsunami Design Initiative, Sri Lanka 2005-7, 3d modeling and digital simulation of structural integrity, local materials and community workshop for construction.

