

## VAS and the Tao Metaversity Manifesto

As a society, we have become so obsessed with an understanding of the objects around us that we have become socially incompatible and strangers to ourselves. And while we continue to progress with scientific breakthroughs and technological advances, our social structures are failing and our self identity has become distorted. We have become so encapsulated with our own obsessions and greed that we have isolated ourselves from the world around us. And in the process we are beginning to express an incapacity to interact and communicate with our fellow human beings affectively. And what's worse, we have no understanding of who we are as individuals. We impulsively collect and consume the materiality around us attempting in a very real sense to buy our own happiness. We identify ourselves by what we do (such as architect, stay-at-home mom, and salesman) or what we possess (money, cars, McMansions) and by so doing, fall short of sincere self enlightenment. If we continue down this slippery slope, we will inevitably experience social isolation and the complete destruction of the soul of man. This cannot happen.

There is a better way. We proclaim that a developed awareness of self and society is pertinent to the soul of man, and that an occupation with these qualities is sufficient to bring harmony to our world. We must rethink the value we have given self enlightenment and social enlightenment. Although an understanding of the objects around us is important and relevant to the progression of mankind, no amount of over achieving in one level of awareness can compensate for the lack of awareness in the other categories. As we begin to grow and developed harmoniously within ourselves, our society, and our world we will surely find the happiness that has escaped us for so long.

We declare that a concern for the individual is essential to the existence of humanity. Our own blend of passions, interests, motivations and virtues are original and unparalleled. As we become aware of our own strengths and weakness, we become conscious of ourselves and our nature. And in the process of self-awareness, we begin to develop a morality that influences our thoughts, emotions, and actions. In the practice of this morality, we begin to develop the virtues of humanity and understand our own existence. We can see ourselves in the big picture of things, and by so doing we find the peace and contentment that has eluded all our lives.

We declare that a proper understanding of society is necessary for the progression of mankind. We cannot succeed on our own. It is only through a complete investment in our communities that we begin to fulfill the purpose of our lives. As we begin to develop within our social framework we find comfort and safety in our lives.

We declare that the natural world plays an integral part to the survival of humanity. We must learn to live in harmony with the world around us. We must become educated about the objects of this world. We must learn not only how they can benefit us, but also how we can benefit them. As we begin to comprehend the world we live in, we will begin to live in cooperation with the life forms that we live among. We will develop a kinship and feel an obligation to protect all life. This awareness of life will give us a sense of completeness and comfort.

Currently, our educational institutions, as a reflection of our society, have oriented its instruction upon the understanding of the external world, neglecting self and social understanding. This external-oriented focus has created an unbalance in the progression of our understanding. As a consequence of this focus, the individual becomes lost within the masses. Self identity becomes all but abandoned, obsolete, and unnecessary. Furthermore as currently constituted, our schools leave the student socially mal-nourished and on some occasions unable to function in the society that they are a part of. The Tao Metaversity represents a revolution to counteract the object orientation of these schools. It acts as a counter balance to the traditional school. It is a sanctuary that is dedicated to the development of self and social awareness. It emphasizes the self enlightenment and social understanding that our education system lacks to develop. To put it quite simply, it's an institution that is not occupied with the getting of knowledge (although that would naturally occur), but in the developing of 'being' or in other words, experiencing.

In the very beginning of the design process, we began to create quick and simple rip-and-tear models. During the process we created a particular model that began to speak of our concept. As we began to analyze our model, the thing that intrigued us the most was the interstitial tissue between the buildings. We used this as the inspiration for how we began to look at the project. Up 'til now, the educational campus has been about the buildings and the space between them was just circulation space. These spaces can take up to 80% of the campus and served no educational purpose, other than to get you from one class to the next. What if the way we saw the campus was reversed? Suppose that these spaces traditionally seen as circulation spaces were seen as a place for learning? This interstitial space in our project is where understanding and education occur. Like a petri dish, the space can stimulate and encourage thought, communication, and understanding. These social interactions serve as a fundamental learning method within the Metaversity. In a very real sense, our project is about the space between the buildings. It represents the 'We' condition within the structure of the campus.

The first experience within the Metaversity is the canopy. The canopy is the connective tissue of the campus while providing a space that encourages interaction. It is an open space and is intended to provide the students a place for:

1. Social engagement, learning, communication in the form of a café and study areas that provide the students with forums to meet together to discuss issues, all the while, having visual connection with the all students within the canopy.
2. Self expression and communication in the form of the exhibit hall, where artwork has communicative value, open art studios that have the flexibility to increase in size to meet the needs of those who use the space.

The learning experience functions much like that of a child first learning to talk and walk. There was no one great moment where the parent sat the child down and explained how to talk or walk. The child learned through interaction with his parents and siblings, seeing them do it first, and with through the process of time, he learned the necessary tools to succeed. The canopy functions much the same way. As students interact and engage each other, they begin to develop and learn. By so doing, all become enlightened and greater understanding is achieved.

In the greater context, the canopy shares an unobtrusive relationship with the outside world, both that of the city and nature in the form of the hollow. The curtain wall is designed to be operable as to allow the entire canopy space to open up to the environment that surrounds it. This provides accessibility by multiple entries and paths that surround the campus. It also forms a connection to the natural element adjacent to our site, the Hollow. By so doing, the canopy allows all to become participants of the dialogue within the Metaversity. The canopy thereby is the expression of social awareness. It creates the conditions for horizontal relationships (human social) in the context of up and down: earth (or nature) being the ground below, and the spiritual/divinities, being the sky above. The floor's materiality is expressed as concrete and stone to reaffirm stability and longevity of the earth. The canopy, made of insulated carbon fiber panels, is light and it undulates to allow light to penetrate the vast open space, almost foliage-like.

The visuals necessary to communicate the values of the canopy are the site model, showing the connection to the city and the Hollow; the floor plan, demonstrating the open quality of the space (also showing how the space is separated with the undulated floor); experiential renderings, showing the social nature of the space. Maybe we should consider little vignettes showing how the curtain wall operates and how the canopy allows light to enter

The buildings themselves exist in the framework of the canopy. They are the representation of focused knowledge or pedagogies and an expression of traditional, formal education, which is still necessary to some extent, but not central to the Metaversity. They represent the 'It' consciousness within the framework of the Metaversity. Their primary purpose is for directed instruction. They are where man meets external knowledge (objectified experience), whether it is a library, a lecture hall or classroom, or a lab. They're the representation of externally-oriented awareness. In this setting the pupil gains an understanding about the world around them from the instructor, whether the instructor is a book or a professor. They participate and engage within the framework of the campus. They share a relationship with the meditation space, which represents the "I" consciousness. This relationship is that none are alone in this world, and the dialogue that between us can bring us greater awareness of the world we live in, the people we interact with, and of course, ourselves. From the very beginning we understood that the buildings had to feel different than the canopy space. At the floor level, their opacity acts in contrast to the openness of the canopy space. The building structure is enveloped in a prefabricated Kal-Wall system and glass. It then has a metal cladding substructure which is attached to the building envelope. The metal cladding substructure provides the necessary opacity to establish the building's presence, yet allows for light to penetrate the building envelope through a series of openings. As the building breaks through the canopy, the openings become larger until finally, the building opens up embracing the sky.

The visuals necessary to communicate the values of the building are the large building section model and the additional building section, showing the tectonics of the buildings; experiential renderings, showing the quality of the space; the floor plan, showing the articulation of the buildings.

One building plays a specific role within the structure of the campus. From the beginning it was perceived as being individual, unique and special. It represents a specific individual: each of us. It represents the 'I AM' consciousness. This is not a reference to egotism, but of true self, true nature. It is the heart of understanding and the highest level of awareness.

At the heart of the Metaversity, and the most expressive part of the campus, is the meditation space. El Corazon, as we have called it, is part of a larger experience that begins at the South end of the plaza. The plaza represents the transition and connection from the existing social structure of the city to that of the Metaversity. There you begin the initial steps of awareness. The building at the South end of the plaza acts as the introduction to the Metaversity. Where individuals can find information about the campus as well as a campus store that among other things, presents the students artistic expressions. As you enter into the plaza making your way towards the meditation space, the first thing you encounter is a reflection pool. The building and the reflection pool are representations of the beginning of enlightenment. They manifest the individual's recognition that they are need of understanding. The water of the pool then falls into the channel that acts as the conduit which brings the individual toward awareness. As you continue to follow the channel approaching the Corazon, the substantial presence of the Corazon becomes apparent. The large concrete edifice is firm and enduring. When you confront this large edifice the water disappears into the massive structure. You are then met by a ramp that wraps around the Corazon, dropping the experiencer below the floor of the Metaversity. At this point you are confronted by a single opening in the Corazon. The floor of the Corazon is entirely of water except for a platform in the middle of the space. It is a dark and intimate space. The only light within the space are the small sliver-like apertures that allow the light to penetrate the massive volume. On the south wall, water trickles from the channel in the plaza above down a narrow shaft feeding the pool that surrounds the platform. This dark, intimate, and reverent space represents the highest form of enlightenment: personal awareness. For this very reason we see the meditation space, El Corazon, as the heart of the campus. It is the culmination of human understanding.

The visuals necessary to communicate the values of the plaza and Corazon are the floor plan, showing the procession, with accompanying vignettes and experiential renderings. Specifically the large 48x96 rendering of the interior of the Corazon is necessary to express the quality of the space. Sound would be an interesting addition to the presentation and we should consider whether presenting this part of the presentation in a dimmed space would be the best way to present it.

We see the Tao Metaversity as the manifestation of the principles of understanding and awareness. The Metaversity provides a necessary component that is seldom available in our educational system. Its concern for self and social awareness expresses a revolutionary approach to learn how to relate to our subjective, objective, and intersubjective worlds. It is a sanctuary that provides balance in our instable, externally-oriented education system, and in the process brings balance, insight, and happiness into our lives.

