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Marchetti, Emanuela; Dai, Zheng; Omarsson, Olafur

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Taarnborg: becoming history

Emanuela Marchetti
IT Product Design
Mads Clausen Institute
Alsion 2 Sønderborg, Denmark
e.manum@gmail.com

Dai Zheng
IT Product Design
Mads Clausen Institute
Alsion 2 Sønderborg, Denmark
guandai@hotmail.com

Olafur Omarsson
IT Product Design
Mads Clausen Institute
Alsion 2 Sønderborg, Denmark
oli@omarsson.com

Focus of this project is an inquiry in the materialisation of the historical heritage of Taarnborg (Ribe, Denmark) once a place related to local religious authorities, now a private home and museum, where visitors attend to musical events and lectures about history and theology. Following the desire of the owner of the museum, we studied how to alter the material-semiotic configuration of some rooms, so to elicit spiritual emotional responses in the visitors, together with a sense of belonging and involvement that could trigger a deep, implicit learning process.

Since the museal religious setting was unfamiliar to us, we applied user centered design method: observed and questioned visitors, to study their bodily interaction with the spaces in Taarnborg. The result was the creation of a new atmosphere that transformed the feeling of the place, by using quite ordinary artifacts, such as fragrances, candle lights and music; limiting in this way the impact on the historical setting.

We conclude that it is possible to turn a place of learning into a context for embodied interaction, where explicit learning activities are enriched by implicit learning experiences. The design space became then alive and engaged visitors in a discourse about the past, by instigating a change in group's behavioural pattern. They felt like prayers in a sanctuary, sitting silently immersed in a sacred atmosphere. They did not simply attend just another lecture; they experienced how the old building was crowded with historical memories and felt that they were becoming part of them.