

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
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PLANETARY DEFENSE AND THE DESIGN OF EXPERIENCES AT THE SETI INSTITUTE. A
CASE-STUDY: DISASTER PLAYGROUND**Abstract**

The Design of Experiences embraces both: -the development of a cultural spatial intervention, – the design of emotional and critical systems and a chain of reactions from members of the public. Taking inspiration from theatrical methodology, critical design and radical architecture, it responds to scientific research with the design of extreme physical installations and live performance for the public. Often, it is considered as the engineering of a situation that can generate disorder and critical thinking both in the institution and amongst members of the general public.

Disaster Playground (2014) is a creative platform exploring the human condition and the craft behind space exploration. By speculating on the techno-catastrophes caused by an asteroid impact and by meeting the people in charge of the emergency procedures to manage it, the project aims to reconnect the public with the real actors of Planetary Defense. Far from the slick Hollywood CGI version, it introduces the raw realities of the ‘chain of commands’. Disaster Playground plays out through a series of filmic ‘Programs’, shot at cinematic quality that function as training scenarios for planetary defence. Shot on location at NASA Ames Research Center and the SETI Institute, California in April 2014, Designer of Experiences Nelly Ben Hayoun worked with senior disaster mitigation specialists and space experts to perform and record reactions to ‘off-nominal’ events and potential hazards yet to happen.

Disaster playground has been conceived during Nelly Ben Hayoun’s unique position as Designer of Experiences at the SETI Institute. A position she has held since May 2012 in the Education and Public Outreach program. Her work at the SETI Institute focuses on extending outreach activities in terms of scope, scale, and methods of engagement towards architecture, installations, environments, social system, performances, experiences and narratives, as events.

This paper will present the basics of the Design of Experiences and how this can be implemented in Space Public Outreach, and it will study how Disaster Playground acts as a platform for debate and critical thinking both within NASA and the SETI Institute and amongst the general public (we will focus on the digital, film, art, design, theatrical and academic audiences). It will reflect on the project and present some of the outcomes produced and impact.