

Pulp Architecture Goes Yale

The Brendan Gill Lecture 2003, Yale School of Architecture.

... dedicated to all those glazed hams who,
in spite of what anyone thinks, find all this so obvious
and recognise their only duty to resist an architecture
already scripted and well, simply,
to take over architecture one day.
and it'd better be soon!

*

"Not a shred of evidence exists in favour of the idea
that life is serious'
Brendan Gill

There's a crack in everything
that's how the light gets in
Leonard Cohen

200 years of American technology has unwittingly
created a massive cement playground of unlimited potential,
but it was the minds of 11year olds that could see that
potential
Craig Stecyk (1975)

Nasa Visits us in Our Dreams

Pulp Architecture left the Hotel Architecture in North Wales and was on its way to Yale. I was writing these pulp papers sitting in a white cabin in Fort Worth, Texas. That morning as luck would have it some hundred of miles to the east, debris had fallen out of the sky and landed in the back garden of houses in east Texas. The hunt was on for the parts of the puzzle that would put back together the story of how the Columbus space shuttle disintegrated. Now somewhere in Houston, all the collected fragments of the shuttle lie in a huge hangar.

My mother, hundreds of miles to the east of Fort Worth naturally imagined the space shuttle had come down right in this garden and that I was already dead. In fact, though she didn't know it, my mother was obviously thinking along the lines of Richard Brautigan. She saw me not only in *Watermelon Sugar* but in *iDeath*. Others ill-minded and optimistic thought the shuttle debris might have come down on a ranch in Crawford, Texas. No such luck, they cried, the world must go on.

I had in fact escaped the debris by the skin of my teeth and could get on finishing these pulp papers ready in fact to take Pulp Architecture to Yale.

The Professor of Night

'First we take Berlin then we take Manhattan' was scrawled on the remains of a wall in ground zero in New York. There was no time to lose, the future had to be envisioned and the moment taken. Newspaper reviews were ferocious, defeat calculated. Faculty were shocked. How could architecture play such hardball?

"I smell a lawsuit"! the Professor of Night said.

The Professor of Night was however somewhere else entirely. His apartment in Manhattan had been near *Ground Zero* but it had survived the attack.

Is this not how architecture in the 20th century was perceived, he thought to himself. Were we not to go forward, tempted by the inventions and ideas of those greater than ourselves?

The last twenty years of the Twentieth Century presented a slightly different version of this. It was ruder, harsher than any of us imagined. Architects played hardball. No one was safe. Students began happily jumping off the shoulders of the giants. Many of them took up living under the armpits of the new giants.

He knew the names of these new giants. He had even had to teach them to the Glazed Hams. Koolhaas, Nouvel, Ito, Holl, Perrault, Herzog, Lynn, Eisenman, MVRDV, Nox, Tschumi, UN, Foreign Office, Rotondi, Dinari, Arquitectonica...he could reel off the name like a litany.

The new architecture, he felt, was already in the shadow of the minorities who were on the way to becoming the majority. His old friend Winy Maas from MVRDV, the well-known and well-marketed Dutch team, used a radical diversity and collaborative practice. Though the mix of disciplinary categories allowed these new architects to use experimentation to undo the usual systematic methods, the Professor of Night didn't buy this.

But the glazed hams loved it.

Everyone proceeded as a team today, inviting different and at times unexpected practices to join forces with them. Inside the Academy, there was a growing feeling that all architecture was increasingly about all other architecture. Further, there was a growing feeling that the 20th century was about to be realised in the 21st century.

"This is no longer a paradox beyond any of us," The Professor of Night stated with some aplomb.

The audience stared back. Fire up the barbecue, he laughed to himself recalling a joke doing the electronic rounds during the mad cow disease.

The World According to Pulp

Does Pulp exist?

Yes certainly, there are countless pulp mills mostly on the eastern, forested side of the USA.

But does it exist in architecture?

Possibly!

Is it useful?

Again, possibly!

Well, can it explain something in architecture so difficult to explain, the contemporary?

Impossible, wouldn't even try.

But if we did, if we attempted one more critical scheme, would it help us be contemporary?

And, while we are at it, do we really need another way to be contemporary after all the last century threw up?

Everything's possible.

So, what would 'pulp' be, as a notion? Corresponding to the genre 'pulp fiction', would it be lurid, ordinary and excessive? Or excessively ordinary? Would it be something we could relate to a soft fleshy substance, something malleable, the pulpiness of movement?

Prod it, like a de-stressing palm toy and watch it take another form. Any form?

Or could Pulp be the core of something else brought in from the suburbs of our minds, from the edge, residual, marginal even? Could pulp be an articulated longing, post-ideological, occupying a post-critical space? Might it be a new architectural programme, or a strategy, a parti, an alibi, a motor, a resistance, an optimism, an ethic.....or could pulp be something that exists merely to avoid being what it already is?

Outside all, was there nowhere else to go but back inside?

Certainly, we could make a case for this. We could see Pulp responding to changing social, cultural and economic conditions. We might even imagine Pulp responding to political uncertainty, terror, surveillance and deceit, shifting the goalposts once more.

Would this help us out a little? Does it help us know where are we going, if indeed we need to know such a devastating direction as the future?

We might be braver, or more arrogant.

Surely if Pulp exists to avoid being what it already is, it cannot avoid all the talk of the New Media? But it might though programme its potential uses within an architecture augmenting itself so unhappily. Pulp might be so obvious as to border all ideology with its own barbed wire. And what about the post-critical space, lonely until theorised? Then there's that ugly attractive idea of re-programmed architecture.

Or do we get more immediate signs, the fresh pulp of architects delivering news flashes, architects running press conferences and architecture about to turn again, whilst the limousines wait down in the street? What about the cowboys and cowboy architecture? Is it useful to follow the New York Times style section? Those hand-stitched cowboy boots made not for drafting surely, but for walking from lecture to lecture, 200 times a year? On the road has never been so literal!

Is this Pulp? Yes, certainly and more.

To come in at the edge, to resist an architecture already scripted and an architecture to come; are these not attractive notions to the outlaw in us all? But the future: remember what Marguerite Duras said, "if I had the slightest idea about the future, I would still be behaving as though I possessed power."

Pulp architecture: a new movement in progress

For me to plan something like a lecture six months in advance is not only dangerous, it is impossible. To be asked to give a title assumes I would have something in mind at that time. It also assumes that I wouldn't change in the course of the intervening months. This is even more dangerous as I seem to change much these days. But if I did change, then at least the title could remain the same.

When the letter came to invite me to deliver the 2003 Brendan Gill Lecture and I was asked for a title, I had no idea what to speak on. Having tried to put the tongue away for some years now, I could see no decent way to respond to this dilemma. I don't know why but the title, the idea of Pulp Architecture popped into my head.

However, I do know why.

I had just returned from Tokyo, Nagoya and Kyoto. I had just taken the Shinkansen train. The fastest, smoothest train I had ever been on. I had learnt about an even faster train called the Magnaleve; a train that will hover over tracks at a speed of 200 kph. I had witnessed the purchasing power of the Pokémon Centre and seen the Swedish Embassy turned into a cyber café. All was food, flow, data, absolute vodka and the culture of the launch. This time, it was the revolution in the 'rucksack', all promoted by Japanese DJ's, hip hop music and Abba. There was an increased competition for time, a need to fill in the redundant spaces of an old world. All vacuums had new noise.

There was much talk of crossovers as the newly dressed outraged the old. New reality groups were desperately signalling their desire to be at the cutting edge. Talk was of a constant border condition. Stay there, where you are. Never try to reach the other side, seemed to be the message. New ways to display art, music and television outside the more traditional media were less important than staying outside the traditional media and commercial music industry. 'Please wait for tracks to load', the web site announced.

'No stress!' flashed onto the screen.

I was witnessing the changed role of diplomacy. Embassies had become travel agents, promotion centres, trade fairs. No longer was it worth reporting back to base when machines do that quicker. How, if we were to never leave our homes, our states, or our countries out of fear, would we be conditioned by this condition?

In Japan I had been with some architects, of course, but mostly I had been with electronic artists, new media artists, DJ's, soft-porn photographers, publishers, furniture designers, graffiti and rap artists. These young artists seemed to be doing things in between. Not necessarily tired of fame, they certainly appeared to show indifference toward it. And luxury was itself a luxury, tired out. The 20th Century felt more like a rumour than history. Importantly, these people all around seemed to be travelling, uninterested in arrival.

What might this mean?

Did it represent a wider urge for the unfinished, the incomplete and the unasserted? Were they wary of closure when the last century had closed on itself so brutally? Call it anything you like, but could this represent a new movement? Would that make any sense in a period constantly moving?

In a fit of panic I called this Pulp. So, when asked for a title for a lecture I had not written, for a presentation I wished to put off for as long as possible, the word 'Pulp' jumped out at me and the title offered itself clearly: Pulp Architecture, a new movement-in-progress. I naturally imagined Pulp might have some relevance to architecture today. I have spent the last six months thinking about this in the hope that it might go away.

It hasn't.

Pulp Architecture Goes to Yale

I must admit when I was asked to deliver this lecture I had nothing of this in mind. In fact, though I had worked on various books and was teaching graduate studio at the University of Texas in Arlington, I had not lectured since 1995. It was there in Cornell I gave four lectures which became the book 'How Architecture Got its Hump'.

I expect the book by now has been pulped.

But during that period, I showed no images of spectacular buildings, brought with me none of the usual flourish of the world architectural scene. Many of the images presented during those lectures were blemished if not artificially darkened. There was a rough, kind of deliberately 'pulpish' edge to the images. To gain more than the usual information, it was necessary for the audience to work harder. It was also necessary to look at the periphery rather than the centre.

Usual scanning did not work.

Now 8 years on, I feel somewhat the same. I could have brought examples of a shining architecture, many from Finland, a country I have written about regularly. But I desisted. There was, in the wild technical polish and individuality of many contemporary buildings something strangely time warped. In spite of huge advances in technology and the sophistication in construction, there was something distant about the closeness and intimacy of material.

The spectacular buildings possess taste, aesthetic balance and blaze. There is a discomfort invited by the very achievement and spectacle of these individual buildings. Their warring ideologies give a little, whilst fame gives far too much. Not a hair is out of place, not a person to be seen, not a single image is displaced or misplaced. Celebrity is celebrated. And photography replicates this.

The result is chilling! So much so, I lose myself. We see these buildings but are no longer really interested to go there in reality or on the page. They ignore what much architecture in its spectacular individuality has gone on ignoring.

And what is that?

Is it the street? Is it the pulpy mess, the upset and unpredictability that we find on the street? Is it surprise, the art of un-planning and dis-order? Post, Dis, Ex, De, Super! Or has the moment arrived when our only duty is to resist all architecture already scripted?

Is this not where Pulp comes in?

Googling Pulp

Let us for a moment 'google' 'pulp'.

Pulp is allusive. The immediate resonances are obvious: Pulp as in paper, pulp as in cheap, pulp as in lurid content, pulp as in the fictional tradition of the Manga comic in Japan, or the same-named film (Pulp Fiction) by Quentin Tarantino. Pulp is a response to known conditions. It is a response that can either re-emphasise them, make fun of them, or then plays off known conditions to re-order them.

Pulp re-frames, re-creates, renews.

Pulp fiction operates this way. Under conditions of known excess, the pulp fiction writer plays up the expected violence and steaminess, in the manner of a dirty not magic realism.

Existing in the conditions of a culture already underground, Pulp is a contra-strategy. Tarantino's film 'Pulp Fiction' invites us to consider the absurdity of a known script. The slight of hand is never so slight, the street never so trivial. Tarantino demonstrated immense skill in re-interpreting what we think is too well known!

Might we not then choose such a fleshy, pithy resonance if we wish to stay away from anything like a new movement in architecture? At the same time might this not introduce us to all the talk of hybrids, crossovers, partial, trans-programmed and software architectures?

Do we do this merely to capture a transition?

Look around!

Everywhere there is, though often hidden to the untrained eye, a new architecture appearing. It is not easily identified. Its position is made uncertain by its own process. The main protagonists may no longer only be architects or students of architecture. This pulpy mass, this informed and unformed architecture, usually acknowledges influence and interference. Carried out by architects, designers, other professionals and students, it acknowledges influence precisely because we know more about previous architecture, styles, histories and critical shapes than ever before. Outside it is there, virtual and real. In cyberspace or in Central Park, in networks or on the street; we may seek a history in the illusionary spaces that can indeed be traced back to antiquity. But it insinuates and does it well.

Hence pulp!

But surely, you say, there is nothing neat in the fleshy, messy interior, for example, of a pumpkin as it is gouged out during Halloween. And though neatness may not be our objective, it does not lessen our critical responsibility to the present. Publications continue to locate the latest contemporary architects in relation to previous performance, previous signatures. The discourses are controlled by the games played. Where signatures cannot be identified, mutual theory is sought. Branding turns recognisable moves into a community of like-minded designers. Thanks to the Internet we know more about the shapes of contemporary architecture going on in our neighbourhood right here, or as far away as Tokyo, Sydney or Alaska. It doesn't really matter where the contemporary takes place, it is accessible and available.

Days Like These

If I can go ahead and use a word like 'Pulp', if there is indeed a new movement out there, somewhere in the air, where are its signs? Have I imagined it? And why this need for the 'next big thing'? Is it naivety and cleverness that can orchestrate it into an invisible and impossible movement-in-progress?

Perhaps! I do not know, yet!

But apparently the 'next big thing' in art - to go by one British newspaper The Guardian - is represented by a new show at Tate Britain called 'Days like These'. Not a new idea, the curators admit. But they do try and subvert the notion of any new generation or movement by linking together a kaleidoscopic range of work. This isn't difficult to grasp. It means that artwork by established Modernists exist alongside scratch and video artists. Guerrilla filmmakers just out of art school are put alongside grown up painters and shy photographers, just as they would be on the street if they remained unrecognised. The show refuses the tag of any one idea or movement. Again, not a new idea of course, but it is something we recognise; that movement once again denying any membership, that movement to which none want to belong.

The curators - Judith Nesbitt and Jonathan Watkins - insist there is a 'gentleness' in this contemporary kaleidoscope. It is a gentleness which they claim runs counter to the sneering partisan games in contemporary art. It is an attitude which ignores the accepted judgments in conceptual and popular art. This is an attitude which does not mock but is indifferent to the gangs that have identified and divided artists throughout the 20th century. These young artists are no longer snapped up by this or that entrepreneur. Instead, the new work lives in the backrooms, warehouses, underground dens and on the street. Dreamy, reflective even, this is not hard-edged work but drifting. It is an ordinariness brought out by the street and on the street; it invites the possibility of reverie and discovery.

It is the here and now. Nothing more, nothing less!

'Days like These' suggests an art - why not an architecture? - that requires little prior knowledge. Like the work of Pierre Huyghe currently on show at the Guggenheim in New York, it shares a fascination and comfort with the journey, not the point of arrival. "I don't have an atelier practice," Huyghe says, "I get my ideas from encounters - with people, books, films, artistic collaborations. I need the polyphony."

Creating a logo and defending a territory are strategies denied by many young groups today. Lack of any artistic logo or branding is not a hindrance; more than a sense of pride, it is irresistible. Things appear, dissolve, are re-framed and reappear as in a topological system. The painter Margaret Baron displays her painting in and around Tate Britain on walls and lampposts. Taking a photograph from the spot the painting will be placed she then paints this scene and affixes it back on the lamppost. Thus the view and the painting exist alongside each other, like club stickers or flyposters, exposed to the rain and the anti-graffiti teams.

The curators speak of correspondences. We might extend this to collaborations. The link to architecture is obvious and not only in Rachel Whiteread's latest casts, the stairway of an old synagogue in the East End of London and the reverse space of a flat nearby. New communities share points of connection then spin off into other work. There is no one brand, no single direction, nothing which unites the contemporary and announces a single understanding of it. Refused to be drawn into any coherence, might we not say these practices are pulping?

Here we have our conundrum.

If indeed there is something happening in art and in architecture which refuses to be drawn into any coherence, how are we to recognise the signs and characteristics of communities and works that are potentially journeying? How do we recognise ideas that are ill-formed though not unformed? How are we to re-assess days like these when structures, spaces and building wish to express flux itself? Not only that, but if so much of what it means to be contemporary today involves constant change, short attention, insistent movement and rapid denial, where can we see these signs without being fooled? The absence of stable narratives should not put us off. Flow, motion, the ephemeral, the provisional, unrest and uncertainty, are all aspects we negotiate whether we feel comfortable or not.

So where can we see these signs assuming they exist in architecture and why might we call this pulp architecture?

The University of Glazed Hams

Well, look around. Considering the word 'architecture' has been hijacked by software designers, interactive artists, cosmetics adverts, golf course planners, peace negotiators and anti-terrorist war planners, it is probably reasonable to look for something a little wider. The lash architect is on the rebound. I would suggest we see Pulp in students, in practices, in interdisciplinary teams, in unusual collaborations not only of artists and architects but wider, in research papers and novelists. Yes, in novelists too.

At the university where I teach faculty speaks good-naturedly about young architecture students as 'glazed hams.' Well-meant, it is often a symptom of embarrassment and confusion within a changed and changing curriculum. These young students look up, mystified by tectonics and trigonometry, repulsed yet seduced by fashion, fame and 3D Studio Maxx. But as the students start altering the conditions by which they learn each day, do we as faculty miss the point? Life for many of the faculty is always elsewhere. Partial destinies get us there, and partial architecture keeps us there, whilst the 'glazed hams' begin to show an increased unwillingness to be content with any banner, any branding.

I also sense a desire in some students to complete their education with more than a little guerrilla strategy. Many in relation to a conventional, often rigorous architectural education, have learnt, been immersed in, and demonstrated their talent in everything the older faculty members have often thrown at them. Many have learnt to clone architecture from the famed and the damned. And many graduates leave school having perfected their talent of producing, what I think we can fairly call a simulacrum of Modernism. We might begin to speak of cloned neo-Modernism.

Much of this is of course highly ordered, cleverly designed, and wonderfully assimilated to some of the latest materials and technological developments. Fostered by the fame academy in architecture, we see a sort of meme machine replicating architectural image from school to school, from discourse to discourse, from city to city. Meme Machine is something we recognise from recent genetic studies, from the work of Richard Dawkins and Susan Blackmore.

Remember what Douglas Rushkoff said in his book *Cyberia*: may the best meme win!

Recognising this, it is possible to observe how many students and graduates in architecture remain unfulfilled. Whilst confirming to some of the miracles of contemporary design and advanced visualisation systems, they desire more from an unpredictable, unknown contemporary talent. Many have a further untapped talent to see architecture in a wider, much wider sense, without always knowing how and why this should be put into practice. Their professors, many of them grounded in solid 20th century thought, pre- or post-modernism, pre-or post-structuralism, believe their time has now come.

I have witnessed this in the University of Glazed Hams in Texas, Stockholm, Prague, Innsbruck, Venice, Tokyo, Graz, Toronto and Helsinki. Combined with added computing skills, new software and advanced CAD modelling, much architecture is seen as a brilliant continuum of the 20th century offering the promise once envisaged in the Modern Architecture movement. There emerges a gospel of restraint. It becomes a battle with the contemporary itself. The result is a significant emergence of what we might call an augmented modernism. For many students though it suggests a replicated, generative process. The replica implies the pulping of the known world.

Architecture becomes a meme machine.

The meme machine

Many new buildings look as if they are versions of an accepted kind of contemporary architecture. The replica is something the public identifies easily, accepts easily, but which invites a continual itch. The glossy publications demonstrate how these buildings perform well to new material, space and function. Like those lifestyle shops peddling all sorts of plastic containers now seen in any city in the world buildings begin to demonstrate their own ubiquitous programme. Technological and material sophistication often disguise the generative nature of this architecture. Accepting the nuances that many architects can identify within such new works of architecture, the public however thinks differently. They see versions of architecture always done elsewhere, always down the street from where they live.

This is architecture elsewhere, but not here!

For the professional the narrow range of representation and spectacle that such architecture holds out begins to look ominous. Advanced visualisation programmes seduce where previous versions failed. Already the computing software and advanced modelling systems prove able to produce replicated versions of just about any contemporary expression. Interestingly, in my experience, it is often the younger more talented students and graduates who are being hired in the big architectural practices in Dallas or New York. It is these students who work up projects through the latest 3D modelling software. Their credentials are Form Z, Macromedia Flash, Photoshop, Microstation, 3D Studio Maxx, Director or After Effects.

Where the older convention of drawing, rendering and perspectives no longer suffice, sophisticated digital representations of a previously un-charmed Modernism begin to convince. We see the meme machine at work. It is like a late flowering lust. Versions of Bilbao Guggenheim will not only flow from the consoles of Frank Gehry's office they will self-adjust and re-appear in any country in the world; the pop-digital will be born. Lifted out of the brilliant critical scaffold and agonised parti that an architect like Daniel Libeskind uses to generate his caring 'chaosmotic' works, soon every student, every office will be able to enter competitions with 'chaosmotic' look-alike shards of agony and memory. The result is a cloned architecture of spectacle and detached representation, rather elegantly represented in Salford Quays Manchester where Michael Wilford (the partner of James Stirling) has produced a somewhat carnivalesque Lowry Building, and across the canal, Libeskind has abstracted air, water and earth into his diagrammatic Imperial War Museum.

Meanwhile there is still something in the air. And it is not debris.

Today we are sensing if not always seeing in many young collaborative practices an informed architecture that tries to avoid using the term 'architecture'. We are sensing hybrids, crossovers in architecture, design and environments. These are not only appearing in books and manifestos about liquid space, portable architecture, trans-architectures or cyber-architecture, they are slowly beginning to establish their own difference from those that closed the 20th Century.

There is also an urgent possibly political sense that one must resist the architecture that is almost scripted to appear. It is beginning to seem increasingly more reasonable for the moment to call this process 'pulp' and

Architecture passing through

We begin to see why there is an attraction to imagine architectures that resist closing too quickly on any critical neatness. Trans-architectures is a phrase heard more and more. In the shadow of the architecture of event and event spaces, these new architectures begin to diagram a new inter-personal space. Like the notion of Tele-urbanism from Japan, these might be new forms of urbanism which may ultimately take us onto the next level, as they say, in computer gaming strategy.

In the process of journeying, we are always on the way to somewhere else. This is becoming as comfortable as it may be challenging. Students and young design practices speak more of partial destinations as if we need not arrive anywhere.

The professors at the University of Glazed Hams look increasingly worried!

Are they right? Should we not be cautious about claiming too much, too quickly for such altered and altering conditions? Certainly! And yet is it not appropriate that we should speak about something like 'trans-architecture' that wishes to remain fleshy, juicy, a seductive, soft mass? Are we to stay away from such ideas that have no critical hardness yet? If we are unable to establish difference, if we are wary of announcing a position, should this make our enquiry less valid? Do we need to invent a pulp theory and attitude to do this?

When we think of 'pulp' we need also think of the rags, the detritus and the wood that is used to make paper. Soft and shapeless this mass of thinking may be at present, but it will not stand around and await the crushing and beating of less encouraged minds. Whether these are strategies produced simply, accidentally, whether these *trans-architectures* are the result of easy connections made to incomplete discourses, whether these are environments shaped by more economic means, or whether these are pulped ideas with wilder, uncontrolled vision utilising huge sums of advertising funds to embed sensational ideas matters little. Instead, we are being offered new dynamics and new strategies. We look likely to enter new urban conditions.

In some cases, considering recent work in France or Tokyo, we may already have entered the world of 'Trans-urbanism' and 'Tele-urbanism'. The internet society changes urban conditions, as space itself is colonised by new media. The flow of people, meet the flow of data for example in central Tokyo, in Shibuya. The J-phone, with digital imaging systems built-in, begins to alter the urban space. Community, society, trading and dating, become more than mere urban games. The emergent field that will shape such architecture includes telematics, immersive VR, mixed reality, hypermedia, advanced data imaging systems, tele-presence, transgenics, trans-urban generative processes, robotics, technoetics, nanotechnology etc. Life itself is being re-shaped through the architecture of these systems.

But: indistinct or partial as these models of an architecture passing through may be, the forms denied and the forms manipulated from these processes will not prevent these *trans-architectures* emerging in all cities, in all countries.

The Danger of Architecture

But is there really 'something in the air' outside this usual anxiety and stuttering for the unrevealed? If we rightly sense a resistance to an already scripted architecture, we must surely now consider the conundrum: a movement in progress.

We are all familiar with the term 'work-in-progress'. When used by a novelist it suggests a draft work. It is always on the way to being completed. It might be one of many draft versions. Or then it might be close to being a final version. In the 1930s Paris when sniffing around James Joyce, Samuel Beckett came up with a strange collection. It was a sort of celebratory volume about Joyce's then work in progress; *Finnegan's Wake*. Beckett of course could not resist punning on the actual process itself. He suggested instability as the very talent and creativity of Joyce's exercise. Beckett called his volume 'On Exagmination of a Work in Progress'.

'Exagmination' is neither the word 'examination' nor is it the word we associate with 'exacting'. Does this not remind us of how a culture like Japan, continually misappropriates the English language and make from it such thrilling hybrids. Or as William Gibson puts it in his novel Idoru, 'one of those slogans the Japanese made up in English, the ones that almost seemed to mean something but didn't.'

Is this not intriguing; something that seems to mean something but doesn't? In other words, might we suggest this also close to an architecture that almost seems to mean something but doesn't, a work-in-progress perhaps. By suggesting a movement in progress however, we accept the idea that this is a movement on the way to becoming a more defined Movement. At the same time we must accept the conundrum once more: the word 'movement' is also necessarily in progress. I think we can now begin to suggest what our new movement in progress might be.

If it is an architecture as a work-in-progress, never quite completed in the conventional sense, is it an architecture soon-to-be-real? Is it a dangerous architecture? According to Sanford Kwinter, Architecture becomes dangerous when it forgoes all that is 'pregiven'. Gone are the fixed types and predetermined matter. A dangerous architecture, Kwinter continues, takes the actual flow of historical connections as its privileged materiality (not the habitual discrete domains of geometry, masonry, stone and glass), and works these, adapts these through transformations and deformations, in order to engender and bind its form."

A pulp architecture then might be a dangerous architecture taking volatile steps to resist its own script, its own destination!

When Cool is no longer cool!

To try and capture a new movement is often a thankless task. It usually requires theoretical and critical work. How quickly identification can turn into critical triumph often depends on this. Bilbao Guggenheim was seen as the high art of architecture meeting the brief of all possible leisure and icon. Advertising has now become the final insinuation in this architecture. The logo meets the icon and becomes seamless. The next stage is cloned projects.

When cool is no longer cool, when modern is no longer modern, when it is exhausted, memetic, unquestioned and unchallenged, when it is timeless, when it is an age where intelligence is not particularly emphasised, when celebrity even saturates architecture and art, it is necessary I would suggest to fall short of any new name, category or movement.

Is there any doubt that Pulp is a new movement?

Or are we too keen to see the next big thing and think we have the critical brilliance to have spotted it? Should we sacrifice our intelligence for its ambiguity and uncertainty? New relationships to architecture, to urban ideas, to collaborative practices, to the New Media may not have trickled down to the local offices but they do dust the radical surface.

Not all Pulp architecture is of course predicated on the new media and inventive warped space and worm-holing. But all of it will probably be shaped in some way by advances in new media techniques. Architects are naturally involved in this. But the important thing; they may no longer work alone, nor need to, nor indeed want to.

Pulp architecture then would desire to alter the responsibility of the architect. The time for pouring over the journals and surveying the latest star architectural turns is passed. Mongrel, hybrid works of Koolhaas and Holl are only slightly more influential than the re-created modernity and neo-expressionism seen in new computer enhanced works. Some act out the lost beginnings of the 20th Century, others act out the lost ending of the same century.

Today, do we not live in that Pulpiest of all moments, the Karaoke world? According to Malcolm McLaren this is “a world without any particular point of view: where high culture and low culture have their edges blurred. Karaoke is mouthing the words of other people’s songs, singing someone else’ lyrics. Karaoke is an amateur performance of other people’s ideas. It is a virtual replay of something that has happened before. Life by proxy - liberated by hindsight, unencumbered by the messy process of creativity and free from any real responsibility beyond the actual performance.”

Remember Malcolm Maclaren? Remember The Sex Pistols? Remember The Clash? Should we stay or should we go? Should we rock the Kasbah, or is that not what is happening right now as I speak? Architecture primed by redundant ideological warring ready for the perfect fictional take-over? Pulp architecture then would not be an approach to architecture that believes that it can rescue a type of architecture that might otherwise have gone missing. Pulp architecture would be an attitude that may ultimately have nothing to do with architecture at all! This is hardball time!

This is hardball time

The last 20 years in architecture has made serious fun of language, philosophy and theory. Nothing was believable, when all was believable. The mediation of architecture important for the star architects became a critical act for those following. An architecture opened up to 'narrative management' and spin could also be infinitely re-applied, re-appropriated.

This was hardball time.

Fame became more important than ever. Increased pressure on architects to communicate, to write their own press releases for buildings and environments led to a new way of pitching works. Fame mis-appropriated movements like 'Deconstruction' and innovated architecture from it. Controlled suspicion of the star architectural discourses appeared regularly in schools of architecture around the globe.

This was hardball time.

Elsewhere, an unlikely, even untimely utopia for architectural thinking on the fringes of built architecture failed once again to convince. Game strategies were introduced. No fear of theory but no fetish for theory. Theoretical exercises ran up against a structural glass wall. The 20th Century became a repertoire, distanced and distancing itself from its original promise.

This is hardball time.

There is no longer any crisis of influence. Hyper-architecture operating much like hyper-text rejects influence and originality and slowly begins to widen the site of architecture itself. Ideologies began to weed themselves out. There was no direct relationship to French theory, yet Rhizome was practised around the world. Now as a website it is considered a social sculpture, more than an electronic field.

This is hardball time.

Pulp architects began to invent their own ways to negotiate this encounter. Creative digitalisation arrived and suggested a future hallucinatory architecture. Whilst the star architects continue to design specular and spectacular buildings the pulp architects operate within new menus of radical individuality. Radical pragmatism and public relations exercises ensured an opportunity for partial architectures, architectures without a destination.

This is still hardball time.

Slowly an operative knowledge of architecture began changing, a new vocabulary took over. Notions so beloved in the 20th century began disappearing. In their place, rhizome, sampling, prototyping, nomadism, meme-theory, blur, liminalism, streaming, adjacency, texture mapping; all words like those unhappy mistakes of a Tokyo cooktown restaurant.

For pulp architects cycles of dissent and rebellion are secondary to constant invention. Reading is not dead, but it is less on the agenda than electronic cruising. In the popular television game 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?' if you do not know an answer you have a chance 'to call a friend'. Imagine this in global terms. Using the Net and networks, if you wish to work up and design something, anything, that appears impossible without the help of a specialist or inventor you may – literally – now call a friend, google an expert, date a partner, or fish for a new collaborator. You may even complete the work-in-progress, call it architecture, pulp it – literally - from anywhere in the world.

Articulated longing

Pulp architecture then? From the street up?

In common with street culture, there is a 'horizontalness' which the young, glazed hams take for granted. Inter-disciplinary and collaborative work no longer needs definition. There is not only a thrill in contemporary unrest there is that licensed accommodation of uncertainty. Take contemporary 'hip hop'. The main dynamic behind hip hop is sampling. Sampling is a way that pulls beats, bass lines, loops and rhythms, (whole) melodies, even vocals from previously released tracks. The very question as to whether this is a creative, artistic process, or piracy and plagiarism is part of the dynamics involved.

It does not require a huge leap in the imagination to observe that the more architecture looks over its shoulder and sits comfortably with the rise of the media and the pace of trends, 'sampling' is a creative, artistic process similar to what architects are now faced with. A technique where recorded sounds or extracts are incorporated into a new recording can be extended to architecture. 'Sampling' implies then a technique and vision of incorporating extracts from past and current architecture into new provisional hybrids.

Street culture is model and influence. It has proved more than attractive to shape architecture from the fragments and fusion within other architecture, other disciplines. Old boundaries no longer exist. New attitudes invite new gaming strategies and imaginary soliloquies for architecture. Artistic influence is nothing to be anxious about anymore. As Pierre Huyghe said, people, books, images, encounters are all departures for art as well as architecture.

Diagramming and prototyping alter architecture's departure whilst postponing architecture's arrival. Ideas innovate, replicate, loop and fuse. Sampling, transformation, simulation are new tools expanding the site of a practiced architecture. A process whereby things can be changed by rotation or mapping one configuration or expression onto another, 'transformation', is not confined to mathematics or linguistics. It offers a set of rules for weaving and transforming the supposed underlying structures of another language into potential architecture. A procedural method which can make a functioning model of another system or process, 'simulation' can also function memetically as a diagrammatic alteration but is itself transformed into an architecture beyond any superficial likeness or imperfect imitation of an 'original'.

There results a privatization of architectural meaning and a globalisation of new ideas. No longer uninhabitable, these are hybrid architectures. The rave dancer has no purpose, no agenda. Software architectures, the hacker ethic and digital engineering have begun re-defining community and privacy, communication and debate. Architecture becomes inter-textual, open to the seductive commerce of influence and exchange.

Is there any such thing as a hostile field in architecture?

From the street up

Pulp practices, like Richard Brautigan in *Trout Fishing in America*, are working on the fringe of praxis itself, continually fraying the edges. Heroes are individual, dangerous and alienating. Buildings representing the sculptural outflow of such heroism are of little interest, though the technology that makes some of them possible is naturally of extreme importance. Pulp is a hunchback strategy. It takes for granted the obscenity of fame and the star architectural system.

I do not see these individuals or young pulp groups attending world conferences on architecture and swapping stories with Charles Correa or Daniel Libeskind. Nor do I see them appearing at biennales, although they may be tempted soon enough. When someone like Peter Eisenman says 'we'll be seeing you again' I don't think these 'pulp architects' would be rude, but I fancy they would not be seeing him again. They may not even turn up at these events at all. In this way our imagined new movement-in-progress is an underclass including those whose thinking might not conventionally impact on architecture.

There is nothing visually or identifiably similar in the pulp practices that appear to be working at the edge of architecture. As yet, they have not branded their work so that we can recognise their future projects or identify a common practice. In this case they are not and may never be a community at all outside these papers. They move, their work is in progress; their solutions often partial, their destinations restless. From Delhi to Tokyo, from Graz to Texas, from Terezin to Toronto, from Arlington to Yale, they are working in the seams of other disciplines.

Such a new movement would under usual circumstances come to a stop. The usual circumstances involve the critic, the world and the text. The critic organises a critical enquiry suiting the strategies. The written project becomes a tactical way of expressing larger strategies, greater agendas. There are many examples of this in the 20th century. We are familiar with this way of scripting architectural practices and work into critical groupings like Post-Modernism, Late Modernism, Neo-Modernism and more recently Liquid Architecture and Neo-Expressionism. Charles Jencks is one of the more well-known critics. He demonstrated a brilliant, fluid talent at addressing change before it received critical recognition. From Post-Modernism to the new paradigm, chaos, and Morphogenetic Architecture, often his own critical recognition stood in for the professional triumph.

No mean feat!

But it is the inherent ambiguity implied in the phrase a 'movement in progress' which naturally resists this kind of grouping. Many are architects who have left but haven't arrived yet. Some are practitioners in other disciplines displaying a new approach and thinking that will re-shape our environments. Many desire to stay away from more conventional terminology: the city, the town, the streetscape, the road.

Even the word 'architecture' proves too narrow for the vision-to-come.

The Pulp Challenge

The Pulp challenge here then is both to architecture as a discipline and as a profession. To many of these Pulp practices, architecture as a profession is already defunct. Much contemporary profiled architecture is propelled by the self-arranging processes of fame and the media. Meanwhile there is a gentleness in some new architecture that rejects such developments. This gentleness does not preclude rigour, is not as velvet as it appears, and rebellion dusts more than the radical surface.

How, they ask, faced with urban decline, dead-space and unsafe environments can architecture make a difference? And how might it do this without the hubris in the profession creeping in once more? And without spectacular but irrelevant contemporary neo-modern buildings, how can architecture make a difference?

There is nothing naïve or ridiculous in these questions. And - almost a hundred years later – it is timely to ask that question again, architecture or revolution? Perhaps it is a naivety that rejects spectacle and representation without yet knowing what this rejection leads to. This includes the new experiments in mixed reality, ubiquitous programming and trans-programming, A-life, nanotechnology and various other soon-to-be-named processes. It is possible that these experiments will no longer be confined to the narrow utopia of digital art and virtual reality.

Then there are those outside the discipline and there are many – graphic, fashion, web-designers, systems architects, computer scientists, engineers, bio-geneticists, mathematicians, skateboarders, interactive artists - who are sitting and working at the edge of architecture. These various individuals and collaborations work without always knowing that they possess the talent and ideas that could re-shape our cities and our lives .

Sampling, transformation and simulation are all options incorporated within pulp architecture. Put these along with topologies, surfaces, weaves, patterns and folds and we begin to see the new adventure. Or do we miss the point, avoid the mediocre and elevate these strategies beyond their usefulness?

Would this make Pulp merely a freshly repetitive intelligence like those pulp novels re-framing the sensation of the underworld? Or could this be a long overdue, sophisticated refusal to negotiate architecture as we see it? Could it represent what many of these new practices think: dazzling metaphors and alibis for a future architecture stealthily leaving architects behind? ‘Hip hop’ and ‘house’ may appear unassertive in its looting of a musical past, as horizontal as it might be unintensive. but a rave flattens out of course, identifies its own subversive power and moves on. It must. Intense as it might tempt the reckless, pulp architecture may prove to need the edge of irresponsibility to appear so talented.

Where did Pulp come from?

So where did Pulp come from? Is it chance invention, a ground swell or a critical calculation? It was no coincidence that I had just returned from travels in Japan, from visiting Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto and Osaka. It was also no coincidence that as I stood in the middle of the Roppongi crossing in Tokyo the word ‘pulp’ seemed to jump out at me.

On looking back, it is possible I should have rightly called this *Punk Architecture*. There are obvious similarities between the relentless branding and celebrity cults in architectural spectacle and the situation at the end of the 1970s. The recent death of Joe Strummer, the lead singer of The Clash gives us an opportunity to consider whether this may have resonance to that time past, and lead to a growing street activity of gentle or less gentle outrage.

Are the parallels ridiculous? Strummer, real name John Graham Mellor, was a punk rocker born in Ankara, Turkey. He went to public school in England, founded in the late 70s one of the most important bands of the 1980s, during an era when extravagance began creeping back into society. Who can forget the Guns of Brixton or Lost in the Supermarket?

It was impossible to miss the coincidence of the death of Joe Strummer at the same time as the release of the 6 architectural visions for the new World Trade Project in Manhattan. Was I alone in thinking this a rather predictable spectacle for an architecture, an action, an event which we wish not to be so predictable.

Surely not!

Pulp architecture does not exist yet, but in a way it does. For if it is work in transit, then those transitional stages exist at all time. Pulp architecture is not the work that becomes the museum of the future. Pulp architecture would not offer a vision for New York that must last for eternity. Nor is it work that makes these visions possible. Pulp architecture is a rehearsal. It is that stage before accepting what architecture knows it can become. Youthful in its excitement, much of it might be in the hands and consoles of the young, but it is hardly immature.

Pulp architecture is more at home with the Citroen car as the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals as Roland Barthes claimed in the 1950s. Pulp architecture is the final frontier, the anti-thesis of slick. It reviews the production values connected to architecture. It may need luxury to create it but will always lie beyond luxury. From the street up, it is an architecture generated by game strategies. Ultimately like pulp itself it is a manipulation of code. It is an intervention in a system that has no predetermined form.

The Final Frontier

Pulp is arbitrary, random and a fruit machine, a flash of orange in Tarantino, the manga frame broken by Japanese pain, reflection, excess, redemption, a passage from Ezekial, a tarantula on an angel cake, an *idoru*, a yahoo lounge in Narita airport, a character called Hiro protagonist or low-rez. Pulp is a samurai sword talking back to its future user, a French girl softly asking whose chopper is that? Like everything, pulp is only the street, lying in wait, just as Duchamp said, waiting to take over from the dead museum, the dead malls, dead architecture.

If movement itself is essential to our contemporary existence, then Pulp Architecture can only ever be a movement-in-progress. Pulp is theory and anti-theory. Pulp is an architecture that seems to wish to stay on the edge. It may be an architecture that respects but rejects the star architecture system of individualised spectacles.

No total architectures!

Pulp challenges existing architecture as much as it challenges architecture already on the edge. In a contemporary condition 'between' rather than 'within', Pulp is an architecture informed and fashioned from and programmed by, film, street culture, art, play, terror, surveillance, the hacker ethic and new media.....

Of course, the list can never be closed!

It is important to remember: Pulp architecture is not an approach to architecture that believes that it can rescue a type of architecture that might otherwise have gone missing. Pulp architecture is an attitude that may ultimately have nothing to do with architecture at all! Or Pulp may be a naive attempt to resist the architecture that already appears to be scripted by forces beyond. We toggle architectural parti, we google the future, we scroll through other lives as we scratch out other buildings and scrawl our own future

Pulp may resist an architecture we have no right to resist!

In the abstract I had to send to Yale for the Brenda Gill Invited Lecture I wrote the following: Pulp Architecture already exist. There are no books yet, no theory, no critical discourse, no analysis, no anxiety, no critics, no champions...

(There might never need be)

Which, I continued, might be the suitable contemporary triumph for such pulp architecture. We will see!

Was I wrong? I couldn't have been more wrong. There are books, there are symposiums, there are new interactive practices, there are new monographs called Play, new magazines called Verb, new practices salvaging architecture, there are new video conferences, new concepts like Versioning, Cloning, Eversion, Prototyping and new anthologies of these practices, and what's more they have all come as fast as the war now being fought, and the next war down the road!

Intimacy

I have seen Frank fight with Peter, and Peter fight with Bernard. I have seen Daniel whisper to Frank and Peter fight with Daniel. I have heard Herb rag Daniel and Peter rag Herb. I have seen Peter fight with Michael and Philip fight with them all. And then make up. I have seen Bernard deny jetlag and Rem go off with Jacques to the Nou Camp in Barcelona. I have seen John remain detached and Philip come back again. I have watched people come and go in the lobby of the Hotel Architecture, sit in the Barcelona Pavilion with John Rachman both of us watching in silence, the stars with stars in their eyes, and you think you recognise exactly what I am talking about.

For some reason in the profession of architecture there is a tendency to scorn the ideas and projects of other architects. Taking sides, making waves, occupying positions and destroying others, these gladiators of ideology look for the weakest link. Some think of this a natural dynamic. A creative way to make sure we get the architecture we have already thought about, but not in our own minds. The democracy in this includes rancour, bitterness, envy and personal disaster. Suicide even! It is a kind of natural hardball, as if you should disappear if you cannot play this.

If you cannot stand the heat, Peter will say, or Philip or Daniel, then get out of the kitchen!

Peter, Michael, Daniel, Bernard, Arata, John, Frank...whatever! whoever!

Can anyone really remain detached from the architecture the world has made for itself? Is there in this hopeless task the potential of an architecture gone missing? And if so, what could that architecture be?

The Professor of Night had been preparing his ideas for the faculty meeting. He was working on the idea of a parallel architecture. He couldn't find a name for this, at least a name that would stick. He wouldn't dream of calling it *architecture of nothing*, but he did sympathise with those who thought it was a work-in-progress that never actually progresses. But those architectures forever shifting, informed by the ever-present fear and security didn't entirely convince him. What was an architecture unable to respond to HIV aids? What was an architecture able to respond to the grief of the twin towers in New York? How architecture mourned the hypnotic, but could not deflect the bullet's trajectory, nor heal gun-shot wound of the civilian.

The Professor of Night picked the short straw.

This was a new intimacy, a way of avoiding that degree zero again. Prepare yourselves. Look for the spaces in between. Go for the blind spots in architecture. Look for the pockets. Give back to surroundings all that has been lost, and all that will remain being lost. Alter the programmes as only you can. Re-write the software and re-occupy architecture from the street up. Show others the architecture that they do not know exists, not the architecture scripted before them.

And grafted onto all those buildings that remain in New York might be nothing but the degree zero of architecture. And not only when the sun sets and the light *diagonizes* in on September 11th each year.

The zero is the fullest space from which to start over, the Professor of Night wrote on his 'Powerbook'.

A single sentence.

The first sentence of the book he would write. Everything would flow from these words. Nothing else would be possible. Everything else would be possible.