

PROJECT MAYHEM

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Computation in Architecture should be handled like Brat Pitt handles Fight Club. "Welcome to Fight Club. The first rule of Fight Club is: you *do not* talk about Fight Club... The second rule of Fight Club is: **You DO NOT talk about Fight Club!**" That is to say, use computation, but stop f*cking talking about it. Your project isn't any better because you told me it was scripted from the secret code found in the lost book of the Bible handed to you by your Merovingian great grandmother. Nor because you spent a semester producing the most intricate parametric network ever seen by man, & still ended up with three dumped potatoes in glossy grey.

Architecture today is facing a terrifying obsolescence, produced by our own inability to verbally, conceptually or intellectually connect with the world.

And our continuing insistence on justifying our work by virtue of its (however-novel) processes is only making things worse. Architects are by nature a talented lot. We have always been, probably as far back as Vitruvius, on the cutting edge of combining high technology with operative theory. This edginess continues today, architects are pioneers when it comes to formally innovating with technology. Case in point: a few years ago at Yale I taught a studio with Greg Lynn, we invited Chris Bangle (then BMW's Head of Design) to chat with our students. He said, verbatim, "*I truly believe that what we do in cars, we do because you do it in architecture first, & where you go we will follow. So it interests me very very much to see where you're going to go...*

(but it scares the shit out of me too...!)" Let's keep this up. Let's be the world's neuromancers of high technology. Let's scare the shit out of people. Important people. But let's not mislead ourselves into believing that our work is good simply because of the novelty of the tools & processes we use to make it. Instead, we have to learn to value our work in other ways, ways more relevant to larger cultural concepts than nerdy discussions of process – computational, programmatic, or otherwise. In a sense we should strive to be like a chef who produces unbelievable culinary experiences, without asking her patrons to think the food is good because they were told it was cooked *sous-vide* in a vacuum bag for 30 hours at 88.4C while being sung lullabies by Amy Winehouse. Food is good because it is good—because it tastes good & looks good. If a chef tries to say that food is good *because* of the intricate process of how it was cooked, as opposed to real sensation-based factors, said chef would soon be slinging chicken udon at Wagamama.

How might architecture develop its own language of accessible relevance, one that allows our work to resonate directly with users without jargon-laden descriptions heavy enough to ruin anyone's appetite? How does architecture begin to extract itself from a nearly two-decade obsession with technical processes, in favor of making larger cultural claims?

In the age of the post-critical, projective, autopoietic, affective or late-style (depending on to whom you speak), we must find better avenues to produce form, map conditions & network information, to have efficacy *outside* of our academics, affiliated offices, & dive bars of our collective discontent.

Unfortunately, the time of bold claims about social change—made by few, followed by many—is in the distant past. The time

for sweeping manifestos is over, & retroactive manifestos are only our acknowledgement that we were incapable of comprehending a period through which we have already been blindly dragged. Instead of relying on these outmoded models as a means to collectively package the fragmented mosaic of mismatched agendas & ambitions that represents contemporary architecture, what we need now is not only new blood, but new arterial means for circulating oxygen outside our self-imposed autonomic & autopoietic boundaries.

The working title of my offices' forthcoming monograph is *Dissensus*. The term is not to be confused with a *lack of consensus*, which implies an ambiguity of agreement. Instead *dissensus* assumes that a state of disagreement is an end – not the lack of becoming something more cohesive. This essentially describes our existence in architecture today as a stable, lasting state of productive disagreement – that aligns nicely with the contemporary architectural allergy to "belonging." Architecture (particularly in the last few decades) is a discipline that overwhelmingly celebrates individual genius over collective action. So in the most optimistic sense, we find ourselves in an age defined by a logic of dissensus – where fierce individual experimentation plays out through the chaotic adoption of new technologies & materials, towards ever new & surprising architectural ends.

The marriage of high technology & new materials with a stable state of dissensus has granted, particularly young architects, creative powers & freedoms never before experienced. This generation is the first to be defined by such freedoms, as opposed to its position relative to existing historical or theoretical frameworks. Instead of forcing new cohesion through ill-fitting manifestos, or attempting to unify work by

virtue of the tools used to create them, our new ideas should be free to accelerate unencumbered in wild & unexpected new directions. Existing in a stable state of dissensus means that you are part of an ongoing explosion of ideas, abilities & ambitions – free, for at least a moment, from the historical gravity that would typically draw such wide-ranging experiments back into a homogenous ideological mass.

Liberated from the necessity to belong to any particular manifesto, this new generation of designers must produce work that is brilliant in more than a self-referential capacity. The freedom that the continuing rise of computational technologies, smarter materials, new forms of information, & the techniques to interconnect them, demands a higher order of responsibility. That should, at the very least, be a directional commitment to make what we do matter, not only to our peers & our professors, but also to a world desperate for new forms of architectural life.

So listen again when Brad Pitt says "Fight Club was the beginning, now it's moved out of the basement, & it's called Project Mayhem..." So architecture, as a club of our own, must now emerge from our self-constructed basement of jargon-laden process into a world begging us to do something, anything, that matters. What our own "Project Mayhem" might look like, who knows, but for the time being nobody is going to tell you what to do, how to do it, what it looks like or where it goes—just know that you have limited time to do it, & what you do is far more important than how you did it.

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