Style and the Pretense of ‘Parametric’ Architecture

The word style is a pariah within the realm of high architectural design. Mention the word in any self-respecting design school and you are most likely to be mocked with derision. After all, an aspiring designer with cutting-edge ideas should not be held slave by the tyranny of history. Unfortunately, the disconnect between how the public versus design professionals see and evaluate architecture directly undermines the ability of the architecture profession to be understood or respected in a meaningful way.

In a recent piece for The Architects’ Journal, architect Patrik Schumacher attempts to counteract this disconnect by fully embracing the notion of style and acknowledging that outside of the design professions, style is “virtually the only category through which architecture is observed and recognized.” Schumacher, a partner at Zaha Hadid Architects, uses this notion to argue in favor a new style dubbed parametricism. He proclaims, “Parametricism finally offers a credible, sustainable answer to the drawn-out crisis of modernism that resulted in 25 years of stylistic searching.”

The ‘25 years of stylistic searching’ refers to the period dominated by the reactionary architectural movements post-modernism and deconstructivism. Schumacher argues that these were not styles per se but rather ‘transitional episodes.’ This is his first mistake. However short-lived post-modernism and deconstructivism were, both movements share particular characteristics that can be classified as a style. His second mistake is to arrogantly assert that parametricism will somehow be above these two in its ability to create a ‘hegemonic unified style’.

Successful cities are living cultural narratives, not museums frozen in time. Their various forms, structures and patterns of development tell the compelling story of history as well as delight our sense of the present. Most importantly, cities must promote innovation and embody the prospect of upward mobility for even their most disenfranchised residents in order to remain relevant in the future.
There are many troubling things about parametricism, not the least of which being that most of the products of this particular style are aesthetically egregious. Yet the notion of parametricism, when thought of as a process rather than a style, is not inherently a bad thing. As a matter of fact, parametrics, or the definition of systems which are based on relationships, is quickly becoming a powerful tool for architects to design buildings faster and more efficiently than ever before.

But in his article, Schumacher is not talking about parametricism as a process but rather explicitly propagating a new type of aesthetic expression that is made possible by the power of computer modeling software. Exploiting technology to create new forms might seem revolutionary on the surface, but without broader social aims the movement is likely to quickly fall out of fashion.

A Modern History of Architectural Style

In his revolutionary 1908 essay Ornament and Crime, Vienna architect Adolf Loos declared that architectural ornamentation was nothing short of a criminal act. He claimed that the truly modern man had no use for superfluous decoration on his home or dress, and compared architectural ornamentation to the tattoos of ‘degenerates and criminals’. Loos was of course rallying against the popular architectural style of the time, Art Nouveau.

With Ornament and Crime, Loos set the tone for the next century of architectural design. His message reached far and wide, influencing everyone from members of the Bauhaus to California-based immigrant architects Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra (both of whom happened to be students of Loos in his native Austria). This new class of architecture, characterized by clean lines, right angles, smooth surfaces and neutral colors, came to be known as modern architecture.

Yet the first participants in the new modern style of architecture did not consider it a style at all, but rather an ideological movement (‘modern-ism’) – a complete rejection of the historical notion of ‘style’. Why should say, a house, be bound to the laws of architectural history when it could instead be, as Le Corbusier famously said, a ‘machine for living in’? The social agenda of the Modernists not only included a rejection of style, but also emphasized a new way of living for the masses. According to the Modernists, the key to living an enlightened existence was to put faith into the religion of technology.

By the latter half of the 20th Century, a backlash against the purist dogma of modernism emerged. Beginning with Jane Jacobs’ 1961 extraordinary treatise against the pitfalls of modern urban planning, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, the not only attacked the destructive policies of development but also the dehumanizing architecture of Le Corbusier-inspired public housing projects. Following in 1966, American architect Robert Venturi released his ‘gentle manifesto’, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, a refutation of the puritanically moral language of orthodox Modern architecture.

Venturi's manifesto is in direct contrast to Loos’s Ornament and Crime. Where Loos derided ornamentation, Venturi celebrated it. Venturi went a step further in 1972 when he released Learning from Las Vegas along with his collaborators Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour. Learning was a major breakthrough in architectural discourse as it signaled a paradigm shift away from the archetypal Modern architect as ‘omnipotent creator’ peering down at his unenlightened subjects from the ivory tower. Instead, Venturi and company courageously embodied a contrarian attitude by discovering the crass banality of American life in the Mojave Desert boomtown.

Venturi's explorations led to what would later be known as post-modern architecture. The related movement, broadly referred to as post-modernism, permeated not only architecture but other disciplines as well (art, fashion, cinema, literature, philosophy, etc…) and sought to come to terms with the condition of ‘late-capitalism’. In other words, post-modernism embraced plurality, subjectivity, and uncertainty as truths (whereas under the Modernist paradigm, ‘technology and progress’ were the only truths).

Although today the world arguably remains in a state of postmodernity, the architectural community has since rejected the post-modern mantra. It seems that despite the attempts of Venturi and others to reconnect architectural expression with the common language of man (in contrast to the cold, geometric abstractions of modernism), consensus regarding post-modern architecture is that it was a collective error in stylistic and aesthetic judgment. This is too bad, as post-modernism is now judged within architectural circles as an unfortunate ‘style’ rather than a useful method to analyze the communicative and symbolic capabilities of architecture.
Following post-modernism, an unapologetically cynical style of architecture emerged. Deconstructivism did not do much to enhance the quality of architectural dialogue among the public but rather established a new basis for formal architecture: the ‘chaotic state of a globalized world.’ Like its stylistic older brother, post-modernism, deconstructivism looked to define a novel architectural language. Practiced by architects such as Daniel Libeskind, Zaha Hadid, Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman, deconstructivist architecture is characterized by its jutted angles, fragmented appearance and rough sculptural qualities.

**Parametricism: A Continuation of Deconstructivism**

In the end, post-modernism and deconstructivism are two sides of the same architectural coin. Both sought to counteract the aesthetic poverty and failed social agenda of modernism. Parametricism is not much different from deconstructivism in its disorderly physical appearance. Yet instead of the tilted planes and sharp angles of deconstructivism, parametric architecture takes on a ‘blob-like’ formal expression. The supposed social benefits of both styles are not much different either.

Schumacher explains in his article:

“Parametricism aims to organize and articulate the increasing diversity and complexity of social institutions and life processes within the most advanced centre of post-Fordist network society.”

It’s a nice sound bite for sure, but contradictory in its execution. Certainly, especially in the Western world, we are living in an evolving ‘post-Fordist network society’. This does not mean we need to make all of our new buildings look like blobs, though. If anything, ‘network society’ is unsympathetic to architectural form and renders it meaningless. What does it matter if we live on the 75th floor of a crystalline skyscraper in Dubai or a cookie-cutter suburban home in Atlanta, as long as we are digitally connected?

Strangely enough, while the physical form of buildings has become ever more meaningless in our network society, the tools which we use to connect have taken on a more prominent role in fulfilling our design needs. Think of the stylish mobile phones, the iPads- these gadgets satisfy the design niche of representing current social zeitgeist better than a piece of architecture ever could.

**Disrespectful of Reality, Better Suited for Virtual Worlds**

Given that there is no social need for parametricism as a new ‘epochal style,’ is there any other value that these type of designs can provide? For wealthy developers looking to awe the public with unconventional buildings, the parametric blobs will most likely achieve a purpose. But after the initial shock of seeing something different, the public will realize just how hideous and useless these creations are and the style will quickly lose favor. Thankfully, parametricism will probably never become prolific within the built environment due to the exponential costs of constructing such unconventional forms. In fact, to this day the majority of parametric designs are confined to the realm of ‘paper architecture’, with few built works aside from small pavilions and art installations.
Parametricism is also disrespectful of cities. Examining various renderings of proposals for parametric designs for infill projects will confirm this. Anti-contextual and disregarding classic architectural principals such as scale and proportion, parametric designs are better suited for the virtual worlds of video games and science-fiction movies. Just because we have the software to produce buildings that look like the ‘pods’ from The Matrix does not mean that we should build them.

Desperately Seeking Relevance in an Indifferent World

Credit should be given to Mr. Schumacher for being bold enough to be one of the first to declare parametricism as a legitimate style. And to be sure, the fact that top architecture schools around the world have adopted the parametric mantra adds some legitimacy to his argument. Ultimately though, his cause ends up missing the mark. Instead of engaging with the real world tackling relevant issues, Schumacher continues the tradition of myopic insularity within the avant-garde circles of the architectural profession.

While post-modernism as a style is no longer popular, the lessons of Venturi and the Postmodernists are now more pertinent than ever. The world is increasingly globalized and absolutes are still giving way to ever-more pluralism. Schumacher directly refutes this reality and even claims that parametricism must ‘combat stylistic pluralism.’ He continues by stating:

“The mainstream has, in fact, returned to a form of pragmatic modernism with a slightly enriched palette; a form of eclecticism mixing and matching elements from all modernism’s subsidiary styles. The inability of postmodernism and deconstructivism to formulate a new viable paradigm led to the return of modernism in the guise of minimalism as the only consistent, ideologically stringent style that confronts parametricism today. The primary confrontation in the struggle for stylistic hegemony is thus between parametricism and minimalism.”

Schumacher never explains why ‘pragmatic modernism with a slightly enriched palette’ is inferior to parametricism. He assumes that it is inferior because it builds upon lessons of the past and is not totally new and flamboyant. But in fact some of the finest architecture being built today is by architects whose work could be described as minimalist. Architects like Peter Zumthor, Tadao Ando, Kengo Kuma, and David Chipperfield design buildings that are formally understated, yet rich in materiality and spatial experience. They rely on classic design principles and a modern vocabulary to create buildings that appropriately respond to context while at the same time remain dignified and novel without resorting to gimmicks.

If anything, Schumacher’s article is timely as it represents the death rattle of the architecture profession as it is now conceived. To posit that parametricism is the ‘next big thing’ is nothing more than a poorly-veiled attempt at desperately seeking relevance and recognition in a world indifferent to the feelings of the architect. As the past 23 years of global economic slowdown has clearly demonstrated, the architecture profession and the livelihood of its practitioners are inextricably tied to the state of global financial systems. Coincidentally, the development of parametricism as a style took place during a time when economies were flush with credit– possibly giving the false impression that such creations would have the unlimited budgets to be built someday.

With the exception of a few Middle East Sheikdoms and to an increasingly lesser extent, China, the potential market for parametric architecture is fairly limited. This is not to say that the style will die-out overnight. Rather, parametricism is likely to continue being promoted in architecture schools as cutting-edge for a few more years before the trend wears itself out. Until then, Schumacher and his ilk would be better suited by spending their time preparing for a career change to video game
Schumacher ends his piece by proclaiming, "Parametricism is ready to go mainstream. The style war has begun." What he doesn't realize yet is that he has already lost the war.

Anonymous said...

This is a great post, lucid and clear unlike Mr. Schumacher's piece. I would have to argue with one point though. You state that modernism was debunked and replaced with Post Modernism and subsequently deconstructivism. I was in school right when that happened, and couldn't be happier that a crack in the intellectual monopoly allowed me the slimmest intellectual backing to veer from the orthodoxy. My argument is that post modernism, I don't think is one style but marking the end of modernism's intellectual monopoly. Most architects that speak derisively of post-modernism attach the cartoony classicism of Graves or Venturi as it's aesthetic shorthand. This, like Schumacher conveniently denies the existence of all the neo-traditionalist architects that currently exist. This is a genie that will never go back in the bottle, and arguably never did, except that academia treated it like the crazy uncle in the attic. Whether under the philosophical umbrella of contextualism, regionalism, or sustainability, this trend belies the false dichotomy that Mr. Schumacher makes. Why would a re-vamped "minimalist" modernism necessarily be the only choice, when current practice clearly shows differently, especially since as you said, it was found to be bankrupt? Modernism as a style definitly has it's style, but rather than worry what the next great style is, it would be more honest to acknowledge the eclecticism of today's practice, and not to lie to architectural students to the reality schools, theoretically are preparing them for. Pardon the pun.

June 2, 2010 12:55 AM

Adam Nathaniel Mayer said...

Anonymous,

Thanks for your comment. I have been wanting to write about the trifling nature of parametric architecture for some time now. Luckily, Mr. Schumacher's piece gave me an opening to do so.

I actually do agree with your sentiments regarding post-modern architecture. A clear distinction should be made between post-modernism as an architectural style (cartoony classicism' as you mentioned) versus the social state of postmodernity (pluralism, simultaneous existence of multiple styles and interpretations, etc...). This is just simply the reality we live in - architecture schools are definitely doing a huge disservice by ignoring this.

June 3, 2010 11:24 AM

Anonymous said...

I find the discussion about style completely irrelevant. Such discussions focusing on the aesthetics of architecture and design merely drive the design profession into obsolescence. Perhaps it had a place in the pre-economic-crash landscape of decadence where mannerist projects in Dubai and China, but in today's socio-economic climate, the discussion quickly becomes a non-issue.

Projects which attempt to triumph parametric modeling and "processes" (in reality, nothing more than a highly subjective and limited exploration of form masked in some pseudo-social or scientific agenda) come across as an attention-starved waif, lost amongst the lunch-time crowd of Manhattan, desperately flailing his arms to grab the attention of a bystander for spare change. Such projects reveal a deep insecurity and anxiety in the designer starved for attention, withering in the shadows of its successful forefathers.

Architects, urban planners, landscape architects--essentially everyone in the profession directly affecting the built environment--have a responsibility in keeping the discussions about aesthetics and style out of the profession. We can acknowledge that we are all aesthetic creatures, and aesthetics drives us in certain occasions, but to make it a primary concern of the profession is an irresponsible and careless act. Discussions of aesthetics...
and style drag the profession further into esoteric isolation and rob agency from the designer.

If aesthetics and style are the only things architects and designers can offer to the world, then one cannot help worrying about the state of the profession in the coming years.

Schumacher will not win this “style war” not because his artistic genius will provide him with victory, but because this “war” is as real as his fuzzy renderings existing solely in ether of the digital realm.

June 3, 2010 2:12 PM

Melanie said...
Talking about style doesn’t preclude any other equally valid aspect of architecture; it’s simply the basis on which Mr. Schumacher decided to elaborate his thoughts from. One point I agree with him is that the public does seem to understand architecture primarily through style, much the way food or music critics do. I think architect’s aversion to discussing style actually alienates us from the public because we refuse to engage the public on their terms. I don’t subscribe to the sophistry of early modernists that their work was above style as a way of denigrating all previous architecture, that was a bit of silly but highly effective marketing. But once you engage the public, by all means expand the debate to whatever aspect you find important or more relevant. The important part is to engage the public, by hook or crook, and then pursue the change you want.

June 3, 2010 10:37 PM

Anonymous said...
Melanie, I don’t think one gives the “public” enough credit if the assumption is made that the just about the only way to communicate with them is through style. Style and aesthetics is a highly subjective issue and we—in the end, cannot win a debate over style, no matter how sophisticated some of our stylistic tendencies may be.

It seems to me that we have to understand that the general public cares a bit more about their built environment than just style. If “style” constitutes the public’s nascent understanding of architecture and design, then I’m sure as intelligent individuals, we can find other issues more relevant to the public to construct a rhetoric about our projects. Whether it is about money, social or cultural issues, such subjects give us more of a leverage in trying to deliver a “Trojan Horse” of a project in which our aesthetic agendas are hidden in. Our primary argument for our projects should NOT be “because it looks good” or “because it’s aesthetically pleasing” or that the project is of a “certain style.” It seems to me your description of the public still looks at your clientele as rich donors who are wishing for a Bilbao effect. I can promise you, this only accounts for a very small percentage of potential clients out there.

I think it’s important to understand that aesthetics is the language of designers, not the general public who operate outside of the bubble the designers have constructed for themselves. If we are to truly connect with them, we should be able to speak “their” language, not their version of our language.

June 4, 2010 9:02 PM

Melanie said...
You missed my point completely. The whole thread began with the assumption that designers don’t use the language of style and the public does. My clients want humble residential projects, not Bilbao’s. But if you think they can’t juggle aesthetics with pragmatic and even conceptual issues, then you don’t know average humans. It’s not rocket science.

June 5, 2010 2:47 AM

Anonymous said...
I think Schumacher misses the point entirely.

Parametricism is a systematic process of generating forms and spaces from a kit of parts.

The Gothic is parametric, through and through.

Schumacher takes a form and slices into ribs and then skins it with metal or plastic. May as well call it ShipBuildingCism
I don’t know if I would give Schumacher’s notion of parametricism the honor of being compared to ship building. After all, ships are built for a specific purpose - to be functionally buoyant in the water - this is where the beauty of their form comes from. The same cannot be said for the superfluous parametric blobs.

June 23, 2010 4:35 PM

Pfunes said...

Dear Mr. Mayer:

Your article is so brilliant! I would like to translate it into Spanish and publish in my blog (obviously linking to yours and specifying that you are the original author).

I think that Schumacher is still drunk with real state bubble and “Bilbao effect”. He will crash with reality sooner or later, but while that happens I think his is hurting a lot to conventional or little practitioners as he is behaving as a boasting illuminate.

Kind regards.

Pfunes

August 12, 2010 4:09 AM

Adam Nathaniel Mayer said...

Pfunes,

I am glad you enjoyed my response to Schumacher’s manifesto. Please feel free to translate the article into Spanish and post on your blog.

Let me know when you do!

August 12, 2010 2:23 PM

Antoni Le Cazals said...

So you can speak also about blob architecture and Greg lynn.

I made a French translation of the "Manifeste Paramétriste" there :

So you stay on Post-modernity when the condition is beyond ou after the modernity (the consciousful subject). Since revit apparition and the critical talking of Thom Mayne about the thirty-minute-made towers, the style war has begun and go on, or then you do things without style :). Your article is very intersting but you reduce the matter. The question in not about disrespectful of cities but about either isolated objects either fragments of cities (like in medieval time). But Renaissance is between the both and style you write the city is the question at the age of skycar cities. Street (respectful cities if you want, first urbanity also) are for pedestrians and malls. I just ask you about the third urbanity after the reign of cars.

With all my consideration.

Antoni

September 5, 2010 8:59 PM

Anonymous said...

I dont think any of you actually understand the true power or meaning or “parametric” you use the term so loosely that it lost all importance. Yes, what Schumacher states as “style” is probably not accurate. If you are a producing architect and not some business model bureaucratic office manager/architect, then you use parametrics everyday with autocad, BIM, 3DS Max, SketchUp.....etc. Every tool we use today is rooted with parametrics. The real discussion should be on how we can use this in the design process to aid design and not drive it.

judging by the critics of “parametricism”: im guessing most of them dont even know how to draw a line in CAD let alone a curvilinear form.
Anonymous,

You must have missed the part where I clarified:

"the notion of parametricism, when thought of as a process rather than a style, is not inherently a bad thing. As a matter of fact, parametrics, or the definition of systems which are based on relationships, is quickly becoming a powerful tool for architects to design buildings faster and more efficiently than ever before."

In my own work I use Revit almost daily so I understand the meaning of parametric. Yet the stylistic blobs that Schumacher is dubbing 'parametric' have little to do with process and lot to do with formal masturbation.

xesque

I think you and Schumacher are completely not on the same page. Being digital does not mean being parametric at all. A good(many of them are too bad) parametric design logic contains consideration far beyond the pure formal movements (I hate people abusing Voronoi diagrams too). The form is merely a tool and an expression to achieve/realize non-formal ideals. I understand that some architects totally deny that forms have such a power, yet if you do agree that formal movements changes the architecture beyond the level of a physical shape, I think to you parametric designs could mean more than fancy crazy blobs.

February 13, 2011 4:53 AM
February 13, 2011 4:54 AM

Luke Clayden

A universal direction sets out a general prerogative, Clearly understanding what demarcates an elegant contribution to 21st century Architecture. A clear idea of what that is should always be in thought for the sake of the client's needs and wishes first and foremost. What is the most wonderful state of the art thing that I can do that is not modernism that is not just another Post-modernity such deconstructivism, but is something new and relevant to the times.

I fully support the ideas and values encompassed within most of his writings however maybe the name "parametricism" is wrong and only contributes in a big way to some other universal direction.

And the work he does is important, However my own universal values which i am currently writing helps to establish my own approach to projects. You can see my notes on my website these have not matured into a full blown essay as yet. The reason i do this is a sense of place in the world, Evaluating the current condition of architecture and having a positive content evaluation of the condition.

Fluid diverse freedom and Diversism (ideals in parametricism although not named in this way ), provides a much needed reconnection to achieving clients needs more profoundly through efficiency. Providing a universal set of values. That are deep values that connect society and provide a diverse built environment for all, avoidance of segregation chaos, and segregated ghettos. Respectful of demographic core values of the locality. avoidance of individualism in terms of where The city becomes a collection of objects which demarcate their own taste or their identity not in the means of wholeness. But at the same time in support of individualism where individuals can contribute their own identity and contribution but to a deeper core set of universal values which contribute to the universal ecology of cities as a whole with interwoven relationships.

I cant stress enough the importance of exploring and thinking about the possible future core universal realistic ambition values and design approach for the next 89 years. It is about real change for a better starting point for the next generation of architects.

Patrick Schumacher can only be praised, and politely constructively criticized for his ideas to my mind.

Luke
In terms of these blobism forms, a lot of people think need to remember the world of nature's blobby forms. Schumacher's architectural ideas, maybe blobism for no particular reason more about iconic or fashion promotion maybe.

But if this guy can eventually get us to a point where fluid diversism is accepted in society then the real diverse forms that really do work like nature can flourish in our cities.

I have a sneaking suspicion that many architects know they are not doing the right thing in the 21st century when they construct these square and rectangle buildings. I think this is because they are fully aware that buildings need to be thought of as living species for efficiency, biomimicry, and biological architecture which is integral can only flourish through fluid form diversity found in nature.

The evidence is becoming clear. Biological Architecture works best when it takes on the form of nature. Parametric tools are integral to achieving these forms which create these energy-efficient buildings. We know we have to master this and the values in parametricism are useful, however, I think the universal integral direction is Diversism.

A universal direction sets out a general prerogative. Clearly understanding what demarcates an elegant contribution to 21st-century Architecture. A clear idea of what that is should always be in thought for the sake of the clients needs and wishes. I fully support the ideas and values encompassed within most of his writings; however, maybe the name "parametricism" is wrong. And the work he does is important. However, my own universal values which I am currently writing helps to establish my own approach to projects. You can see my notes on my website these have not matured into a full blown essay as yet.

Fluid diverse freedom and Diversism, provides a much needed reconnection to achieving clients needs more profoundly through efficiency. Providing a universal set of values. That are deep values that connect society and provide a diverse built environment for all, avoidance of segregation chaos, and segregated ghettos. Respectful of demographic core values of the locality, avoidance of individualism in terms of where the city becomes a collection of objects which demarcate their own taste or their identity not in the means of wholeness, but at the same time in support of individualism where individuals can contribute their own identity and contribution but to a deeper core set of universal values which contribute to the universal ecology of cities as a whole with intertwined relationships.

I can't stress enough the importance of exploring and thinking about the possible future core universal realistic ambition values and design approach for the next 89 years. It is about real change for a better starting point for the next generation of architects.

Patrick Schumacher can only be praised, and politely constructively criticized for his ideas to my mind.

Regards
Luke

Interesting article. I'd like to engage, if you don't mind.

I am an architect and had a newfound love in the form of Parametricism. At this point in time, in my opinion, the term has been misrepresented and bastardized extensively, and sad to say, by Mr. Schumacher (to some extent).

In its purest form, Parametricism is all about Algorithms being used as a tool in architecture. The issue comes on its users. Schumacher uses it in a different manner the way, say, Greg Lynn does. Utilized wisely, Parametricism would optimize time, form, architecture, tectonics, sustainability and technology to its fullest. It is a tricky process and takes time to learn. I do believe, boldly stating, that Parametricism has connected itself to several laws of nature thru Biomimicry (larger components built by smaller entities). With technology at hand, we are able to build better environmentally-responding structures than the humble mud block.
April 15, 2011 2:15 AM

Adam Nathaniel Mayer said...

Unarchitecture,

I think architects and designers do a huge disservice to themselves when they promote esoteric concepts like "parametricism" or "biomimicry". Sure they might sound cool and cutting-edge but in reality what you are doing is alienating the public. Buildings are about people, they aren't about serving your own individual experiments.

I understand that parametricism is a tool architects can use to design buildings...but clients don't give a shit how you make a building as long as you deliver the drawings in the end.

Regarding biomimicry...well there is absolutely nothing wrong with being inspired by nature or natural processes...but learn to express yourself in a way that is not so arrogant and repelling.

April 18, 2011 11:05 AM

cipyboy said...

Adam,

thanks for the reply.

I think were facing common enemies here: arrogance, impracticality and some hints of elitism.

I see Parametricism as an opportunity to upgrade basic building block components (eg bricks, wireframe) as something else thru technology. Your article shouldn't be against Para itself, but on the manner of its current use (evil marketing).

On its purest goals, it actually coincides with global necessities: optimization of automated technology, adaptability, digital fabrication, replication, ease of installation -- it is a poetic measuring stick of our technological progress. For Urban Planning, I would never use form over welfare of the public - I would opt towards Ecological and New Urbanism

I have read your dispositions against Schumacher and the current progress of Architecture, I would like to hear your proposal of where our architectural direction should go to.

April 19, 2011 10:37 PM

T said...

Dear Adam, I agree with your reply to Unarchitecture, that buildings are about people and much less about your next architectural masturbation. However, I do feel that parametricism may or may NOT run its course over the next few years. After all, it all comes down to market demands. And while some people over at archdaily may say that parametricism and its produced designs is impractical due to costs, I do believe that over the next few years, advancements will indeed make parametric forms possible. So, in 50 years, we run a risk of living a a world with 'cool' forms (there will be some architects who won't conform to this masturbatory act). I'm guessing soon enough the next architect who produces work out of simple geometry will be the next big hit.

April 23, 2011 3:20 PM

Adam Nathaniel Mayer said...

Hi T, thanks for your comment.

I guess I should clarify again that I am not against using parametric modeling programs as a tool to design buildings...we may very well see in the future that programs like Revit and Rhino/Grasshopper become standard and widely used in the industry.

What I take issue with is exploiting these tools to design 'crazy blobby forms' or as what Patrick Schumacher refers to it as: 'parametricism' (the name he gives this particular style).

You also make a good point about market demands...even if we have the tools to design these kind of buildings will there be a market to build them?