

“Parametric Schizophrenia”

The Politics of Parametricism: CalArts

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November 16

(1) My talk today is about the division in Parametrics between parametrics as we know it as a scripting project and BIM. I will call the larger project of using parameteric algorithms – whether BIM related or formally motivated as capital P-Parametrics.

(2) When I go to parametric conferences, I see a world of young hipsters dressed in black, showing images of the screens they have fabricated, talking about the labs they’re working in.

When I go to BIM conferences, I see a world of large firms, production oriented, all doing hospitals, showing pictures of construction guys wandering around with their tablets checking as-built conditions.

At the parametric conferences, I play the role of organizational examiner, wondering why the issues of collaboration, finance, procurement and management aren’t appreciated as empowerment opportunities

At the BIM conferences, I play the role of aesthetic police, wondering how to convince those guys that as long as BIM is associated with aesthetically challenged buildings, it will never be picked up those interested in pushing the envelope.

I know that these characterizations are stereotypes and that there are numerous examples that bridge this divide. But I want to examine the stereotype because it operates on our psyches and takes hold in our worldview, in our architectural imaginary. And I want to analyze this schizophrenic binary in P-Parametrics in terms of Melanie Klein’s psychoanalytic categories. Klein distinguishes between the “schizophrenic position” of the infant at the earliest stage of its development from the more mature “depressive position”. In the earlier schizophrenic period, the child thinks that the good breast that nurtures it is entirely distinct from the bad breast that is withheld from it. The breast, that is, is schizophrenically divided into 2 part-objects, one good, the other bad. In the later depressive position, the child recognizes that the nurturing good breast that it dotes on is the same as the bad breast that it wants to attack; this is depressing news. The good breast and the bad breast are one, whole object. It is depressing, but it is also wise.

(3) Having identified my project here, today, as trying to analyze the nature of this schizophrenia that divides these worlds and to encourage a more mature, whole object, depressive one. I listed the attributes of both, and did so according to the three categories

of aesthetics, namely, the author/maker, the object, and the audience. In concentrating on the images of practice in either camp, I am being faithful to the projections disseminated; the images are objects of Desire, ripe for interpretation.

This is what I came up with. I am resisting the urge to claim that one is good or bad, something which would only prove my own part-object view; rather, these are descriptions of schizophrenic, opposing imaginaries that P-Parametricism has embedded in it. The antagonism of the two camps, if they are not known to you, can be implied I hope from these opposing lists.

(4) I have already described the stereotype of the two different **authors**, but to put it out there again: parametrisists: *boutique, innovation-driven labs; maverick hipsters; designers*. BIM: *large, profit driven firms; AEC professionals; (process) managers*.

(5) For the **objects** of parametricism, we have *objects as algorithmic systems; seamless objects making no tectonic, material or labor distinctions; and icons of avant-gardeness*. For the BIM side, we have *objects as functional systems; pictograms of the aggregated construction trades; and indexes of a production logic*.

(6) For the **audience** of parametricism – those whom the object is meant to persuade – there are *students (those that are being recruited to the avant-garde); lab/research culture; and media culture*. For the BIM audience, *we have practitioners (architects); the AEC industry including owners (the “expanded field” of collaborators); and business culture*.

(7) Here we can see the chart again. It would not be difficult to see that the “whole object” of P-Parametricism might combine easily with the attributes on either side of this divide. They are a yin to a yang, not opposites. And this is the point that I will get to.

(8) But Kleinian analysis demands something else, which is not merely the move from a part-object, schizophrenic position to a depressive, whole-object one, but the interpretation of these attributes as symptoms of larger, unacknowledged Desires. So here is a quick analysis within these symptom categories.

For the parametric **authors**, we could identify the desired self-image as *zeitgeist signifiers, charged with the imaging of contemporaneity*. For the BIM authors, we could identify the desired *self-image as powerbrokers, as practitioners of what business calls, “valuation”, the business of business*.

For the parametric **object**, desired identity is *uber form, a form that has evolved teleologically from both history and science, one that, while formally flexible, is identity-wise fixed in its inevitability*. For the BIM object, *the overt eschewing aesthetics*

*demands, still, a look, one as specific as it is ignored: a form of non-form; an informe not of detritus but of information.*

For the parametric **audience**, the ultimate hoped for audience is the realm of *cultural cache* - that realm of ritual, institutionalization, and intellectual dissemination that functions globally; we might call this capitalism's superstructure. For the idealized BIM audience, we can say that they envision their entre into the realm of *power, money, business, and development*. We might call this audience, capitalism's base.

(9) At this point, we can speculate on the more mature, whole object, depressive option where the two supposedly oppositional attributes in the 3 categories are combined into one enterprise. That singular enterprise is potentially enormously powerful for architecture.

For the P-Parametric **authors**, combining the aspirations of a signifying/branding practice with that of a valuation practice yields the essence of *entrepreneurial success*.

For the P-Parametric **object**, the combination of a projected uber-form combined with an informational in-forme yields the essence of intelligent design: not style driven, not ego driven, and, most importantly, *not assigned to object-making*.

For the P-Parametric **audience**, the simultaneous application of intelligence to both the superstructure/culture and the base/production, indeed in a manner that upsets this dichotomy all together, makes P-Parametricism, and architecture within it, *players in the knowledge economy*. P-Parametricism, as a whole-object, positions architecture to be a powerful player in the contemporary context. This is a source of real optimism for me. There seems to be nothing depressing about this.

(10).....Until we recognize the neo-liberalism within which this conflation seems initially to be deployed; which in fact, P-Parametricism seems blissfully happy to indulge.

(Schumacher) The same part-object pairings, when examined in the context of an *ideological* analysis, gives the depressing picture.

Here we can use the ideogram, the snapshot or hieroglyphic portrayal of ideology, to show not good intentions but on the ground reality. And what we see, currently, is not synthesized empowerment but shared obsessions (... blockage and repetition). In this, the images of P-Parametricism are analysed not for what they mean, but for what they show. Here, we can see both parametrics and BIM sharing obsessions - we might now call them fetishisms – in all three categories.

(11) For the **authors**, the obsession with software and technology that leaves behind the actual worker at almost every level: architect, fabricator, engineer, constructor. The battle

between Revit and Maia might look like a significant conflict, but the argument merely *seels proprietary software*.

(12) For the **object**, the shared obsession with an object's virtuality that t leaves behind the on-the-ground sensuality so essential to architecture's meaning. It is the *marketing of "the future" and "innovation"*. The body so central to the Bataillian notion of the informe is absent in both sides of parametricism.

(13) And for P-Parametricism's **audience**, the shared obsession with *neo-liberalism's values of promoting consumption and production for their own sake* leaves behind the question of who needs and profits from our parametric work.

This isn't meant to be a downer. It is a reminder that the conflation of BIM and parametric software is not enough and not what we are talking about. What we are talking about is a synthesis that doesn't happen naturally, historically, or teleologically. Rather, it happens with intention, resistance, and agency. The hoped for whole-object of P-Parametricism can and should be the powerful engine that drives architecture into the market place with its guns loaded, but we architects have to make this happen. If we want to have P-Parametricism serve a rebalancing of production and consumption, to align market needs with social and environmental needs, architects need to deploy their parametric power wisely.

Let me just say in conclusion that I have become increasingly convinced that there can be no ideological, conceptual, or social distinction between the things that we produce and the way we produce them. That is to say, as long as architecture has and supports horrific labor practices, does not share its meagre rewards fairly, and is led largely by old white males it will never produce the society that doesn't also have these inequalities. This conference and this paper has largely examined what parametricism implies for the past, the present, and the future. I want to also say that it is a question of inside and outside. We as architects will never clean up the outside world if we don't clean up inside our own house. For me, the inspiration of parametricism is its distribution of information in a manner that supports collaboration, empowers a younger generation of players, and makes design an organizational, not merely design project. This is good. It is a start. We need to build from here.

# P-PARAMETRICS

PARAMETRICS

BIM

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# P-PARAMETRICS

	PARAMETRICS	BIM
AUTHOR	Boutique, Innovation-Driven Labs Hipster Mavericks Designers	Large, Profit-Driven Firms AEC Collaborators Managers
OBJECT	Algorithmic Systems Seamless Continuity Product Icons	Functional Systems Labor Discontinuity Process Indexes
AUDIENCE	Students Digital Culture Media Culture	Practitioners AEC Industry & Owners Business Culture

# P-PARAMETRICS

## PARAMETRICS

### AUTHOR

Boutique, Innovation-Driven Labs  
Hipster Mavericks  
Designers



## BIM

Large, Profit-Driven Firms  
AEC Collaborators  
Managers





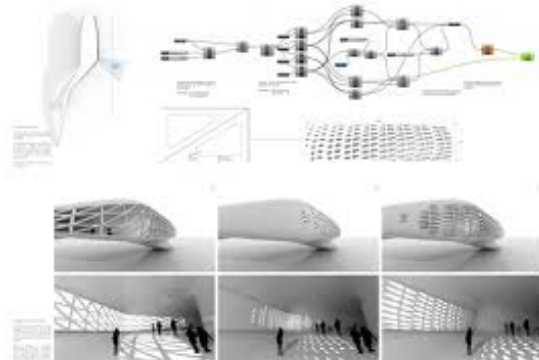
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## PARAMETRICS

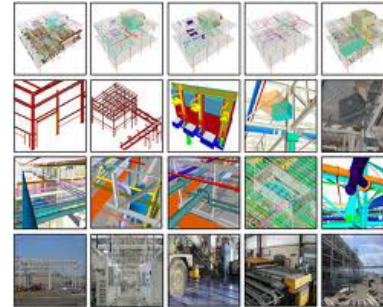


OBJECT

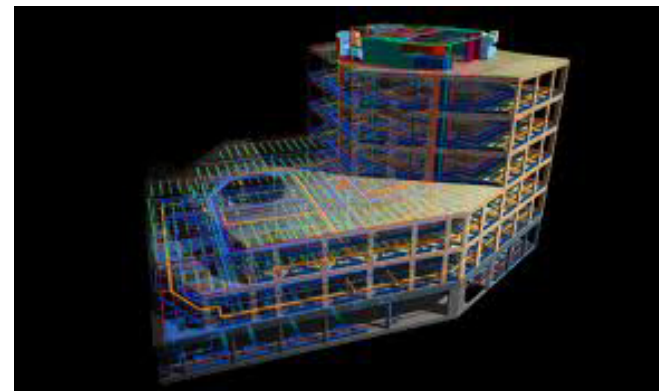
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Seamless Continuity  
Product Icons



## BIM



Functional Systems  
Labor Discontinuity  
Process Indexes



# P-PARAMETRICS

## PARAMETRICS



Students  
Lab Culture  
Media Culture

## BIM



Practitioners  
AEC Industry & Owners  
Business Culture

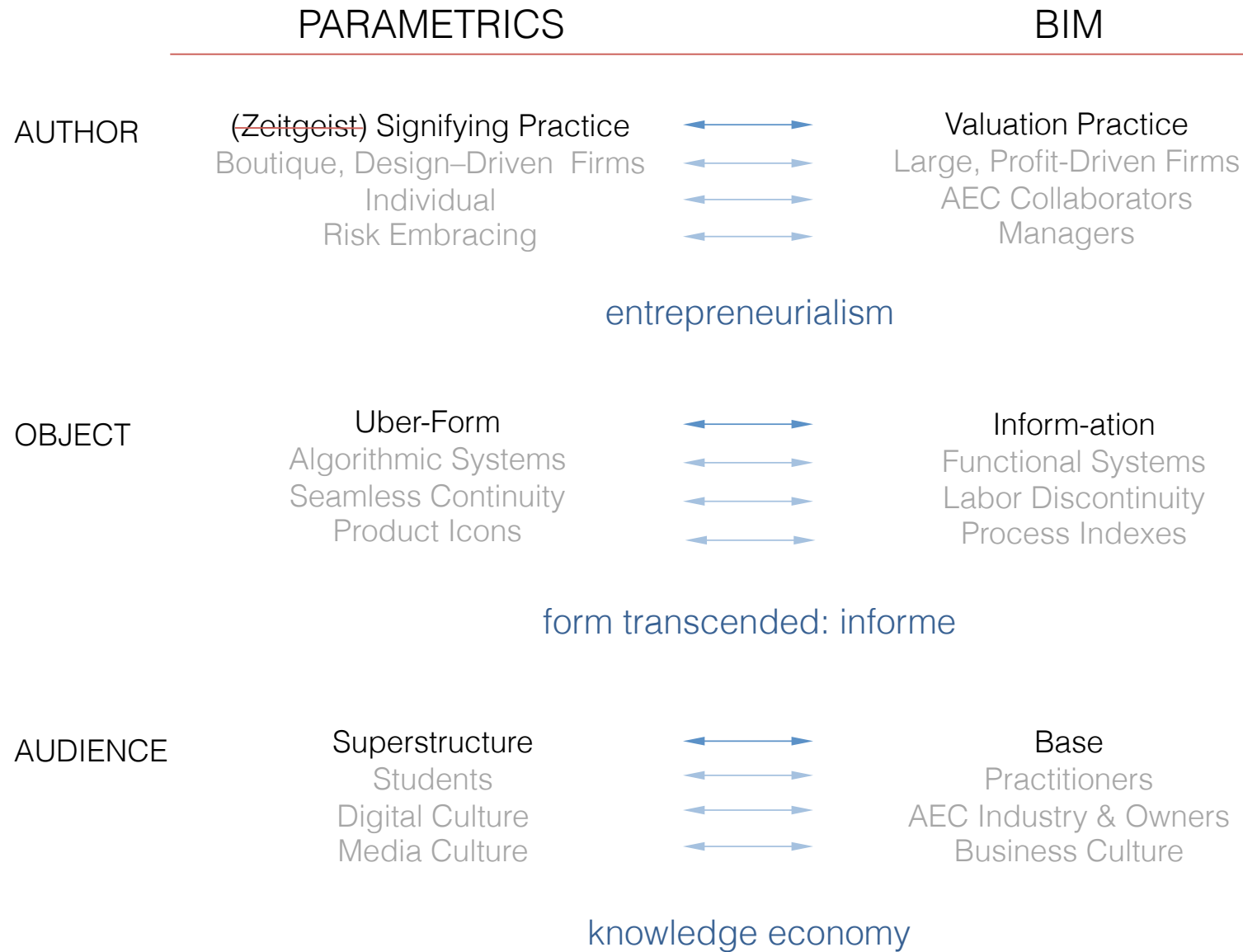
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AUTHOR	Boutique, Innovation-Driven Offices Hipster Mavericks Designers	Large, Profit-Driven Firms AEC Collaborators Managers
OBJECT	Algorithmic Systems Seamless Continuity Product Icons	Functional Systems Labor Discontinuity Process Indexes
AUDIENCE	Students Digital Culture Media Culture	Practitioners AEC Industry & Owners Business Culture

# P-PARAMETRICS

	PARAMETRICS	BIM
AUTHOR	(Zeitgeist) Signifying Practice Boutique, Innovation-Driven Offices Hipster Mavericks Designers	Valuation Practice Large, Profit-Driven Firms AEC Collaborators Managers
OBJECT	Uber-Form Algorithmic Systems Seamless Continuity Product Icons	Inform-ation Functional Systems Labor Discontinuity Process Indexes
AUDIENCE	Superstructure Students Digital Culture Media Culture	Base Practitioners AEC Industry & Owners Business Culture

# P-PARAMETRICS



# P-PARAMETRICS

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AUTHOR

Signifying Practice

Valuation Practice

Ideogram: the same marketing of design technology  
the same white males  
the ignorance of labor

OBJECT

Form

Inform-ation

Ideogram: the branding of the future and innovation

AUDIENCE

Superstructure

Base

Ideogram: neo-liberalism

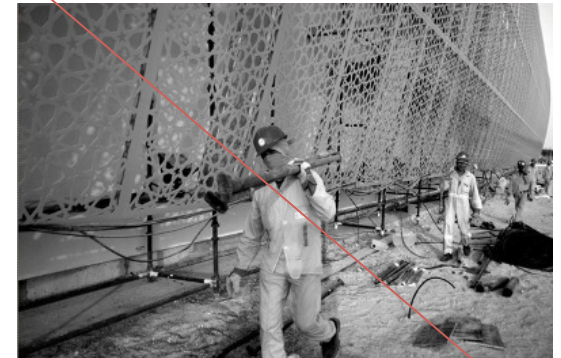
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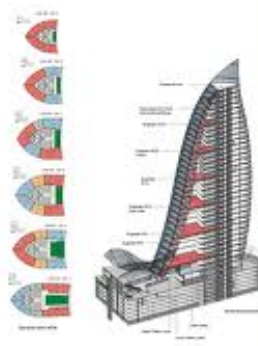
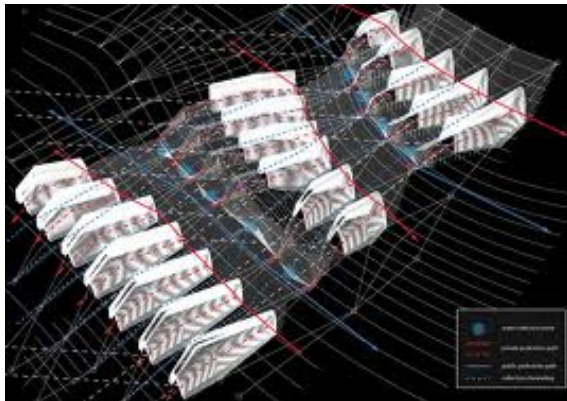
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OBJECT

Form

Inform-ation

Ideogram: the branding of the future and innovation





# P-PARAMETRICS

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AUDIENCE

Superstructure

Base



Ideogram: neo-liberalism

P-Parametrics ↔ Architecture

AUTHOR: Entrepreneurialism

OBJECT: Form Transcended: Informe

AUDIENCE: Knowledge Economy



Ideogram: Architecture as model for  
Post-Capitalism