

| **RYUGYONG.ORG** |

Other Levels to the Ryugyong Hotel: An idea on architecture and geopolitics.

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1. Introduction

The prestigious international monthly architecture periodical *Domus* opens its June 2005 issue with the lines: "A ruin of the future? The 330-metre-tall skeleton of an unfinished hotel towers like a concrete pyramid over North Korea's capital, Pyongyang." The magazine's call "to transform the Ryugyong Hotel into a worldwide antenna for ideas" (Boeri et al. 2005, cover) was a pronouncement we could not resist.



Figure 1. The non-completed Ryugyong Hotel on the right. Photograph by Armin Linke.

2. O[The]r Levels

Over a long period of time we appreciate only those artefacts which successfully escape the restraints of presence and functioning. Leaving behind outdated conceptions and substations they may gain continuance far beyond predictability. This strategy of the untouchable has many faces: The lethal forces of nuclear reactions survive within an archaic sarcophagus. The Chernobyl accident left behind more than a shut down nuclear plant sealed with tons of concrete. Airy towers, the prosperous symbols of cultural stagnation, give over to terrorism and vanish in debris. As the WTC skyscrapers lost structural integrity and collapsed they finally gained perpetual

and inviolable dignity. But they outlive their very own destiny of decay. "The base hypothesis is that architecture is not filling space, it is creating space." (Baudrillard 1999, p. 11) In a queer way these Big Buildings tend to withdraw from reality.

MIRRORING : The selftranscendence of the Ryugyong Hotel is less subtle, but more striking. Performing as an abandoned construction site, it denies access and insight, but compels our imagination. Now the intention is to usurp the structure by digitally mirroring the building site into a virtual site on web servers, namely the www-domain |ryugyong.org|. The mirror - one prototype of real virtuality (Eco 1988) - is the tool to get complete control over the virtual aspects of Ryugyong Hotel. We augment these reflections with digital virtualities to stimulate - or at least simulate - feedback and communication between the hyperreal referent and its source. Aware of the differing connotations of the term 'virtual' comprising all meanings - from computing's 'virtual reality' to Deleuze's 'potential', both manifestations remain closely linked to each other.

VIRTUAL ESTATE | CLAIMING : A real estate developer makes improvements of some kind to real property, in order to increasing its value. 'Virtual Estate Developers' operate on immaterial potentialities. We develop virtual construction plots and offer them to individuals and organisations on a leasing basis for certain periods. The purpose of these claims is to give our clients an opportunity to present any kind of project they find adequate for this exotic playground. In the broadest sense 'Claiming' stands for demanding your own piece of the pyramid in order to transmute its mould. Thereby the recurring collaboration between the projectants sparks this online experiment.

|RYUGYONG.ORG| is to promote another level of architectural discourse and conception: Being concurrently platform and issue of discussion - the diverse aspects and approaches of the ongoing work may clash into each other, provoking a hybrid environment and visions of permanent mutation and unpredictability. According to these ambiguous parameters |ryugyong.org| toggles its role from acting as custodian of the pyramid's diverse manifestations as well as providing substantial support in technical and architectural terms to a manifold of clients.

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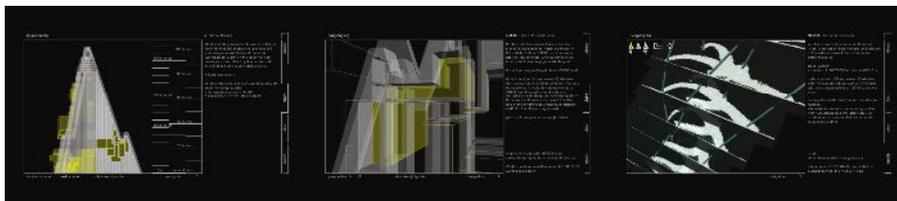


Figure 2. Screenshots from the website: the virtual pyramid, a single claim and a project.

3. Conclusions

For the quest *Domus* proclaimed, we believe that it is vital to sustain the bonding between the real and the virtual Ryugyong Hotel. But depending on the submitted ideas and desires, ultimately the community determines the course. The feedback loop will point the scheme's bearing. Our adventurous approach to explore the building's presence or existence in contradiction to the site's rather traditional representation of material architecture seems to be a conceptual imperfection as well as the chance for |ryugyong.org| to be successful. By now we set the scene for the first chapters. We built the scope. Henceforth we need others to contribute to the picture. We hope they even scatter the frame. Or to close with Baudrillard (1999, pp. 10/11): "We have induced an experimental environment of not-knowing, of risk, and this scene can eventually turn into a mystic scene of unrestrained things, that are fatally or deliberately uncontrolled."

References

- Baudrillard, J.: 1999, *Architektur: Wahrheit oder Radikalität?*, Graz: Droschl.
Boeri, S. & Petrecca, A.: 2005, A Concrete Pyramid, in *Domus*, vol. 882, magazine sleeve.
Eco, U.: 1988, *Über Spiegel und andere Phänomene*, München: Carl Hanser.