



Polyark III / Polyport – SuperMegaCrit

Polyport is a project about ports and the unique spatial, environmental, and phenomenological character they have. Modelled on Cedric Price's original Polyark of the 1970s, Polyport is a design studio project with an international twist, connecting 15 schools of architecture worldwide.

Introduction and context

The original Polyark was a development of the late Cedric Price's idea for a **National School Plan (NSP)**, published in *The Architects' Journal* in March 1966 (an edited account of the NSP is in **document 2**). The NSP was critical of the limitations of conventional architecture schools, and suggested that a sharply responsive network of students and tutors in continuous transit between schools could offer a broader, more vivid education.

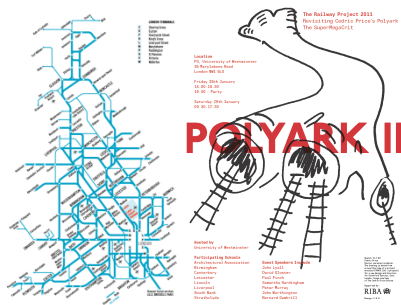
The original Polyark of the 1970s was based on a double decker bus hosting a **constantly morphing group of students and tutors** who entered the bus in different parts of the British Isles; the upper deck of the bus was converted into a studio and dormitory. **Everyone worked on the same project**, but exchanged ideas between themselves in conditions of 'calculated uncertainty' to produce unpredictable results. Did the bus break down? Was the service pod accidentally detached by a low bridge? Did the bus attempt to embark a MacBrayne's ferry travelling between the Western Isles of Scotland? Who was *really* on board, and who just *wished* they had been? The photo below refers.



In 2009, **Polyark II** refreshed and revived the idea of the original Price-derived bus project, basing the themes on the UK railway system to ask the question: now that railways run on different fuels, how can the vacated coal, water, and gas-based backland archaeology of the railways be creatively used for new purposes?

Eight UK schools (Architectural Association, Birmingham, Canterbury, De Montfort, Lincoln, Liverpool, London South Bank, Strathclyde) took part, working in pairs, exchanging sites and ideas. The map and poster on the next page refer.

In January 2011, a SuperMegaCrit was organised in the Ambika P3 space at the University of Westminster. This gathered together architecture students, tutors, interested practitioners, ex-Cedric Price office staff, critics, and journalists to discuss and debate the work produced, consider their vision for a railway-related architecture, and provoke conversations about education and practice.



Polyark 3: part 2

Cedric Price: National School Plan *The Architect's Journal*, 25 May 1966, pp. 1282-1284

This plan differs from other architectural education plans in that it proposes that only through totally restructuring the national education machine can there be any positive architectural contribution made to society. It considers that most efforts over the last few years have been in the wrong direction...it has been assumed not only that the immediate demands made by one of the most archaic industries, building (translated into gentlemanly terms by the RIBA and pipelined through to the schools by the Board of Architectural Education), are a direct concern of embryo architects, but also, and more important, that the industry as it is constituted today is the rightful heir to attentions of architects of the future – and five years ahead is the future in relation to healthy progressive artifactual endeavours...

It is considered extremely unlikely that a single standard five year course can ever be the ideal preparation for variety of specialisations...the dog and tail situation should be eliminated...the proposals for a 'national school plan' make the following assumptions;

- 1 that schools of architecture are the only institutions of sufficient concentrated scholarship capable of producing proposals for meaningful architectural education;

- 2 that such proposals can be formulated only as a result of interaction, co-operation, and comparison between individual schools;
- 3 that such proposals will imply flexibility and capacity for change within and between institutions;
- 4 that such proposals will have a limited life;
- 5 that the formulation of such proposals will require their concurrent testing within the institutions and will at any time provide the basis of the educational curriculum being undertaken

The proposals are;

- A all schools in the UK should be co-ordinated to produce a range of architectural educational investigation far more comprehensive than that now offered by any single school
- B students should be enabled to move from one school to the other during the average five year full time course
- C the value of such movement would lie in the advantage gained by the student from the particular quality of any one school at any one time. The particular quality must be clear in the content of the school's curriculum
- D the particular quality of a school would be enabled to develop far beyond present possibilities through an established and agreed exchange and joint usage of primary information and instruction. A Joint Schools Commission (JSC) would be established to prepare and administer such programming. It would offer full and part time paid employment as at present offered by individual schools
- E the uniqueness of any school should be accompanied in every case by the shared courses, and such shared courses would primarily be determined by the advantages to be gained from mass participation
- F there would be realistic acceptance of the shortage of ideal staff and money would be spent, not in hiring second rate replicas, but in enabling as many students as possible to come into contact with the good ones
- G the possibilities of the development of the unique qualities of individual schools would require an increase in mobility (see B) at the same time permit concentration and reinforcement of particular staff at any one school

...it is likely that these proposals would cause groupings of schools through mutual architectural interest, and that such groupings would make possible, owing to the increase in size and resources, not only the establishment of viable research groups within the schools, but also contact, at a comparable level of expertise, with other research and development bodies both national and international

...schools are becoming increasingly nervous of experiment and , in some cases, are using 'technology', not as a springboard but more as unchanging cornerstone on which to base some form of bastard classic education pattern. On the other hand, the profession, groggy with the attention being paid to it, is totally directionless and prey to the short term overtures of a derelict building industry

...an information cell in each school will inevitably be founded and such a cell or agency will incorporate any existing libraries, increasing their function to include information reinforcement as well as retrieval. In addition, such a cell will be sufficiently acute to be able to utilise fully 'visiting firemen', unscheduled events, and so on...

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Brothels and colonies are two extreme types of heterotopia, and if we think, after all, that *the boat is a floating piece of space*, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development...but has been simultaneously *the greatest reserve of the imagination*. The ship is *the heterotopia par excellence*. In civilizations *without boats, dreams dry up*, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates
[Michel Foucault: Des Espace Autres Architecture/Mouvement/ Continuité 1984]

The port is a powerful *catalyst for urbanisation* irrespective of geography, topography, or culture. Ports are developed from the accident of deep water found near to land - water that allows the draught of mighty ships to come close to the land, and load or unload valuable cargo. Found both on the sea and at the river's edge, and operating at all scales from the containerised megaports of Ningbo, Shanghai, and Singapore to the intimately charming havens of Hoi-An, Kotor, and Port Grimaud, the port is a special functional and architectural type.

But the port also provides *the services and sensual support for lives lived on the water*, or those immediately connected to it; sailors, soldiers, dockers, fishermen. The port becomes the place that they both want to leave, and return to; remember the opening of Apocalypse Now, and Martin Sheen's reflections on Saigon?

When I was here, I wanted to be there; when I was there, all I could think of was getting back into the jungle. I'm here a week now...waiting for a mission...getting softer; every minute I stay in this room, I get weaker...each time I looked around, the walls moved in a little tighter
[Francis Ford Coppola: director, Apocalypse Now 1979]

In 1964, Jacques Brel wrote one of his best songs (Amsterdam) about a port. Here are the first few lines of the lyrics, translated from the French:

<i>In the port of Amsterdam, the sailors sing Of the dreams that haunt them in the great barging coasts. In the port of Amsterdam, The sailors sleep</i>	<i>like ancient willows that weep Along mournful riverbanks. In the port of Amsterdam, sailors are dying, <i>bulging with beer and catastrophe at the first light of dawn</i></i>
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The success of this song, now translated into many languages, is based in its powerful sense of *romance and desperation* that may only be experienced in a port. Another thought:

*A few years ago, there was an extraordinary project for the redevelopment of the docks in Hamburg. Through his friend, the ornithologist Peter Scott, whom he met while working on the London Zoo aviary, Price knew that this was a stopping route for migrating birds. He proposed to make a significant portion of the docks a wetland so *the birds would stop in the port area to feed*, much to the delight of the people of Hamburg.*
[Will Alsop: Flight of Fancy (article on Cedric Price) The Guardian 18 June 2005]

Brief/methodology

The brief for the project is to propose a visionary, adaptive future architecture particular to, and responsive to, the activities of ports and the edge conditions found between land and water.

Each school will (where possible):

- work as part of a national and international team
- consider proposals for the Polyark 3/Polyport theme defined in this document
- each team is comprised of three schools (two UK, one international)
- the teams will be randomly selected
- each school writes their own interpretation of the project brief issued by the RIBA
- each school proposes a site at the intersection of land and water (preferably a 'port', or site for a port)
- schools exchange their interpretative documents with another school in the team
- schools exchange sites with another school in the team
- no school works on their own brief
- no school works on a site they have proposed
- all schools within a team work collaboratively
- all teams work collaboratively
- staff and students from different schools and countries meet and work together
- any year or level of students in a school may participate
- teams may work on PolyPort for any period of time
- all teams meet for an open to the public SuperMegaCrit in Rome (with special guests)



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participants

- University of Brighton
- University of Greenwich, London
- University of Huddersfield
- Loughborough University
- Queen's University, Belfast
- Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen
- Sheffield Hallam University
- University of Westminster, London

International participants

school	country
STMT, Alexandria	Egypt
UNILIMA, Lima	Peru
UNIBUC, Bucharest	Romania
RASHP, Moscow	Russia
University of Belgrade	Serbia
UNIVMU	Vietnam

La Sapienza University Rome