

the Polyark project a brief history

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Polyark is an international collaborative design project, gathering together students from schools of architecture in *ad hoc* combinations and for short intervals of time; all consider the same (or a very similar) design brief. The project (now in its fifth decade) directly reflects the thinking of the architect, Cedric Price. The latest event bringing Polyark collaborators together is the SuperMegaCrit 2018, and takes place at **Here East** between **9-11 July 2018**.

Often referred to as the most influential architect you never heard of, Cedric Price (1934-2003) was a strategic thinker and genuine 20th century polymath. His best known extant building - the Snowdon aviary in London's Regents Park zoo - is currently being renovated by Foster+Partners. Yet his legacy is reflected in the work of many other architects, with his Fun Palace of 1960 (for theatre director Joan Littlewood) expressed in built form by Richard Rogers' and Renzo Piano's Centre Pompidou in the Place Beaubourg, Paris (1977) - and his 1984 proposal for a giant ferris wheel on the Thames realised by Barfield Marks' London Eye (1999-2000).

Price was also fiercely committed to promoting flexible ways of learning in architectural education. He ran his famous office in Alfred Place from 1965-2002, and became an unofficial part of the Architectural Association faculty; the AA was Cedric's *alma mater*, with its members' room bar conveniently close to his office. He was unconvinced by any attempts to formalise or regulate architectural education, and this led to the Polyark project. A column written in the *Architects Journal* [Cedric Price: *National School Plan* *The Architect's Journal*, 25 May 1966, pp. 1282-1284] made five principal recommendations for a National School of Architecture; the most important of which were:

*...that such proposals can be formulated only as a result of **interaction, co-operation, and comparison** between individual schools...[and that] **students should be enabled to move from one school to the other during the average five year full time course...***

Between 14 February and 2 March 1973 a unique collaboration between the AA and Architectural Design emerged as a double decker bus (**Polyark 1**) converted to a nomadic school of architecture roamed the UK's A and B roads. Any student of architecture or member of academic staff in a school could travel on the bus, but all aboard committed to working on a shared project. To ignite inter-school dialogue, the bus crew would video each stop and broadcast the material at the next destination. The result was unprecedented overlap and subversion of the parameters within which schools of architecture operated.

A mere 38 years later following encouragement from ex-Cedric Price Architects alumnus, John Lyall, the RIBA redefined the Polyark experiment (**Polyark 2**), with 8 UK schools working together in pairs.

- Architectural Association + University of Lincoln
- Birmingham City University + University of Strathclyde
- Canterbury School of Architecture + De Montfort University
- University of Liverpool + London South Bank University

At the successful conclusion of the 2011 event (in Westminster's Ambika P3 workspace; very indeterminate, very Price-ian), it was proposed Polyark become a globally-orientated event; i.e. an *International School of Architecture*.

Two years later, 17 schools from 11 different countries were invited to participate in Polyark 3: Polyport. After some indecision and a security alert in Singapore triggered by students taking too close an interest in the port's architecture, 13 schools and 8 nationalities surrealistically gathered in the postgraduate department of Roma Tre University, 5 minutes' from the Colosseum. Roma Tre had had no previous contact with the RIBA, but graciously donated their space to Polyark 3 for 3 days. Participants were:

- Scott Sutherland School of Architecture, Aberdeen, **Scotland**
- Queen's University Belfast, northern **Ireland**
- University of Belgrade, **Serbia**
- University of Brighton, **England**
- University of Architecture and Urbanism Ion Mincu, Bucharest, **Romania**
- Arab Academy of Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport, Cairo, **Egypt**
- University of Greenwich
- University of Huddersfield
- Universidad Nacional Ingenieria, Lima, **Peru**

- Moscow Architectural Institute, **Russian Federation**
- Northumbria University
- Sheffield Hallam University
- University of Westminster

Polyport considered proposals for architecture interfacing water and land, but a further iteration of the project (**Polyark 4**: 2016-17) set down a half-century marker for Price's most celebrated project; the Fun Palace. Fun Palace Futures acknowledges the influence of the Palace, but invites new themes addressing 21st century takes on fun. This project continues the internationalist tendency of Polyport, amped up to include more new participants...

- Beirut Arab University, **Lebanon**
- University of Belgrade, **Serbia**
- University of Brighton, **England**
- University of Architecture and Urbanism Ion Mincu, Bucharest, **Romania**
- the American University in Cairo, **Egypt**
- Heriot-Watt, Dubai, **UAE**
- Universidad Nacional Ingenieria, Lima, **Peru**
- the Bartlett, **England**
- Ravensbourne College, London
- London South Bank University
- University of Westminster
- Mongji University, Seoul, **South Korea**
- Pratt Institute, New York, **USA**

And **Polyark 5**: Polyair is already rolling, with Belgrade, Bucharest, and London South Bank University providing cameo appearances at the July event on projects considering the new usage of airspace. The conditions of 'predictable chaos' that Cedric Price actively promoted seems remarkably successful, more than 60 years after his first projects were published.

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