

| ryugyong.org |  
Other levels to the Ryugyong Hotel

a diag and richdank project

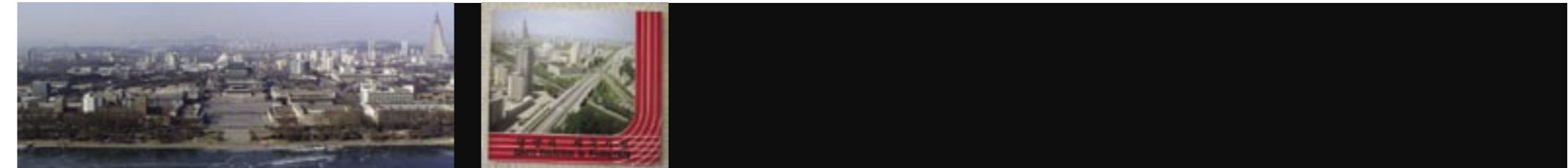
| introduction

The name of the 105 stories 330 meter building comes from one of the historic names for Pyongyang: Ryugyong, or 'Capital of Willows'. Its construction began in 1987 for the 1989 World Festival of Youth and Students (Official Slogan: For Anti-Imperialist Solidarity, Peace and Friendship), but problems first delayed the completion until the efforts finally came to a halt in 1992 with only the basic concrete structure erected. (Wikipedia, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ryugyong\\_Hotel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ryugyong_Hotel)> [accessed 09th December 2005]) These few facts are about the only safe data about the pyramid - the rest is literally an 'Urban Legend'. Some even claim that it has been designed personally by Kim Jong Il to resemble a rocket. (Cumings 2005, p. 64)

Apart from the lack of information and the improbability of any realization soon the question arose whether one should or may not participate in the Domus competition - particularly due to the country's uphold of Juche ideology - meaning 'self-reliance'. It originally grew out of Stalinism, and though minor political parties exist, it is commonly accepted that the nation's regime is a totalitarian dictatorship.

In June 2005 the prestigious international monthly architecture magazine Domus launched the Call for Ideas on architecture and geopolitics for the Ryugyong Hotel in Pyongyang (Boeri et al. 2005). This was the aftermath of Stefano Boeri, Armin Linke and Andrea Petrecca's local investigation in North Korea's capital - photographs of "emphatic sequences, portions of a standard city enriched with designed exceptions, subtitled with propaganda" (Petrecca 2005, p. 19) underlining several articles, one of which is significantly called "The Phantom Pyramid". At the end of this essay the invited delegation put it like that: "In requesting ideas conjuring up the future of this 'ruin of the future', we wanted to raise the game of replicas, analogies and visions of architecture [...]" (Boeri 2005a).

We have been challenged...

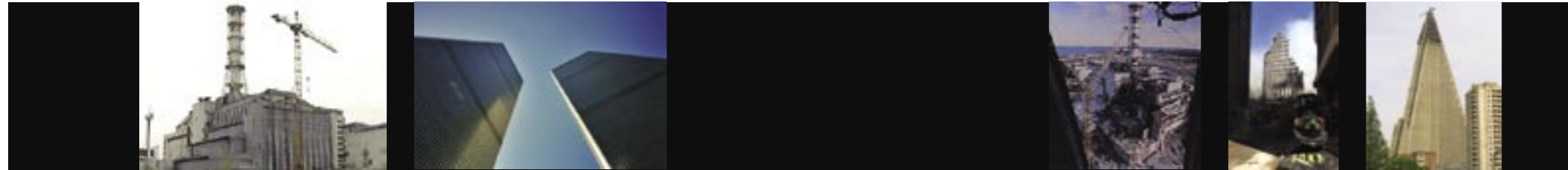


In his letter to the editor on Domus 882 the Czech architect Jan Kaplicky (2005) criticises the initiative for being "an intellectual exercise which supports cruel regimes". He argues that "the Ryugyong Hotel is certainly not architecture. It is empty. Without people. It cannot be designed and used by brainwashed robots. Modern architecture cannot exist without free human beings." But Stefano Boeri (2005b) answers: "We think that the act of observing, describing, interpreting space and the built environment is one of architecture's resources and helps us understand the community we inhabit. [...] We used this ruin as a symbolic bridge, a tool to denounce this dictatorship while at the same time opening a crack in the regime's isolation, without resorting to the use of 'smart bombs'."



| o[the]r levels

A central feature common for many of the Big Buildings is a surprisingly high level of absenteeism. In a queer way they tend to withdraw from reality.

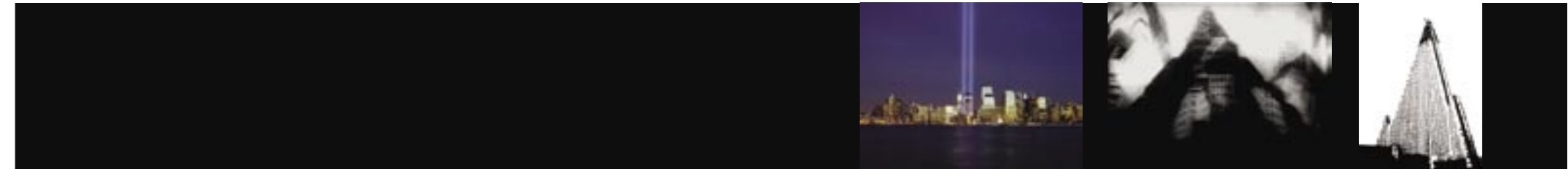


Over a long period of time we appreciate only those artefacts which successfully escape the restraints of presence and functioning. Leaving behind outdated conceptions and substations they may gain continuance far beyond predictability. (Baudrillard 1999) This strategy of the untouchable has many faces: The lethal forces of nuclear reactions survive within an archaic sarcophagus. (The Chernobyl accident which occurred on the 26th of April 1986 left more behind 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. (The two towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City were the most famous victims of the series of coordinated terror attacks upon the US on September 9th, 2001. As they lost structural integrity and collapsed due to American Airlines Flight 11 and Flight 175 turned into terrorist incendiary bombs, they finally gained perpetual and inviolable dignity.) Thus they all 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)

| intention

The selftranscendence of the Ryugyong Hotel in Pyongyang is less subtle, but more striking: Although the Ryugyong Hotel is by far the highest structure in the country, the 7th largest building in the world and its shadow can be clearly identified from orbit (see: <http://maps.google.com/maps?q=pyongyang&spn=0.059422,0.163731&t=k&hl=en>), it cannot be found on the official Pyongyang city map. It simply refuses completion to negate its very existence and to prevent questioning at all.

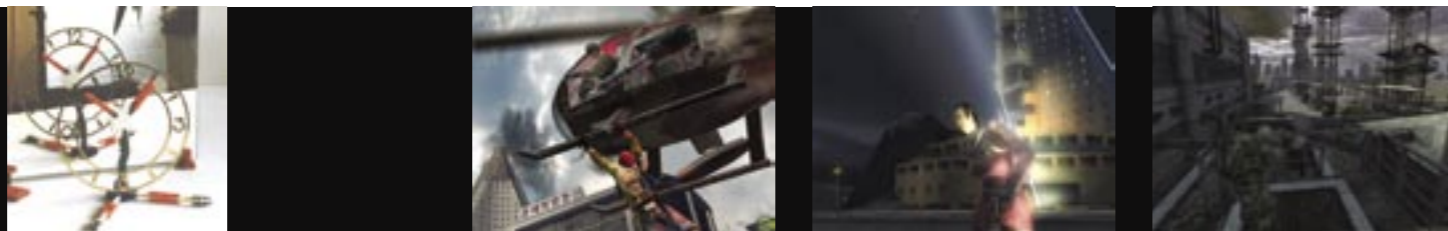
Performing as an abandoned construction site, it spreads the charme of the unfinished as well as concrete bruteness. It denies access and insight, but compels our imagination to get stuck in obscure gangways and immeasurable ravines. To stalk exactly this auratic retraction is our intention.



| mirroring

To usurp the structure, the building site is digitally mirrored into a virtual site on webservers, 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. Although this virtuality appears to be detached from what it's modelled on, both manifestations remain closely linked to each other.

We use the concept of the mirror - an absolutely uncommitted implant - to imagine and to deal with a nexus of a hyperreal referent. As the referring reality can be reflected, we can reflect on some of its constituting properties though these are out of reach to our perception and touch. We augment the virtual reflections of the pyramid with digital virtualities to stimulate - or at least simulate - feedback and communication with its source.



The term 'virtual' is applied in many fields with somewhat differing connotations, and also denotations. Aware of that we wittingly use it comprising all meanings - from computing's 'virtual reality' to Gilles Deleuze's 'potential'. This virtuality offers ultimate disposability as well as permanent reflection onto the outer reality on-site. So the ongoing virtual manipulations on | ryugyong.org | will permanently challenge the snoozing sadness of Ryugyong Hotel. As long as the incomplete giant is trapped by delirious circumstances, | ryugyong.org | operates quasi as a trustee of possible futurities. We are convinced that this can speed up things and defy ones vision.

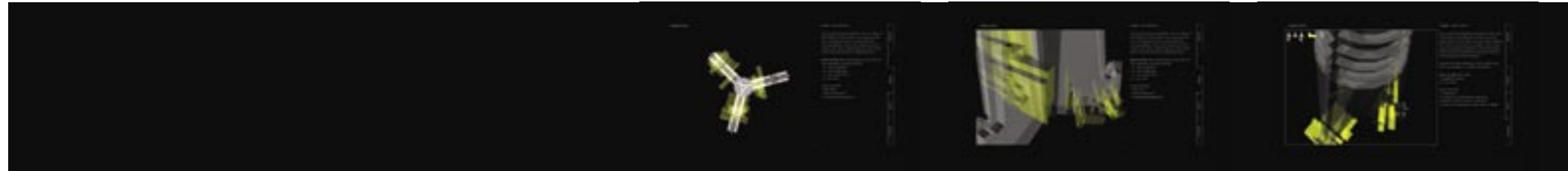
| virtual estate

"A real estate developer [...] makes improvements of some kind to real property, in order to increasing its value." (Wikipedia, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Real\\_estate\\_developer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Real_estate_developer)> [accessed 09th December 2005]) 'Virtual Estate Developers' operate on immaterial potentialities. To make things move, we - the real domain owners of | ryugyong.org | - presume to act in the manner of estate agents. We develop virtual construction plots at | ryugyong.org | and offer them to individuals and organisations on a leasing basis for certain periods. In our role as Virtual Estate Developers we guarantee for legal and technical reliability on the | ryugyong.org | site.



| collaboration

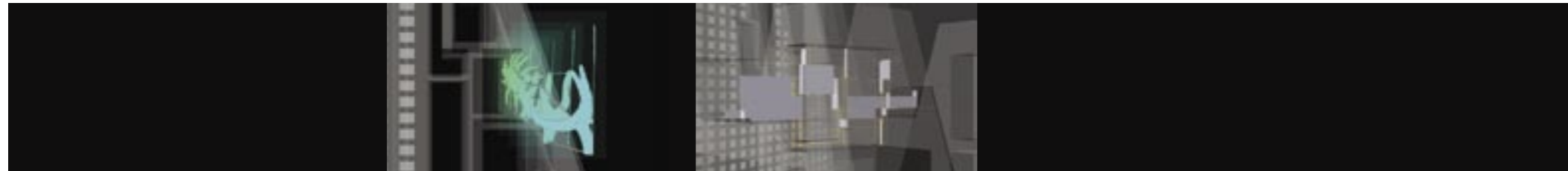
These plots we are trading are clearly defined volumes within a virtual 3d model of Ryugyong Hotel. The purpose of these plots is to give our clients an opportunity to present any kind of project they find adequate for this exotic playground. The operators of | ryugyong.org | will make any efforts in providing support for realising and visualising even the most exceptional concepts and in promoting the site as a serious and reckoned scene of digital art and architecture.



| claiming

The first step to take part in this online experiment is to pick one of the prepared regions within the virtual pyramid that seems appropriate for an envisioned project. Projectants then need to contact the operators of | ryugyong.org | and claim this selected volume as their individual online site. They also will have to give notice of the scheme and communicate the general idea of intention. | ryugyong.org | will clarify all necessary details, like site costs, the duration of the online presence, down to refined visualisation topics, the project data formats and transfer policies.

In the broadest sense 'Claiming' stands for demanding your own piece of the pyramid in order to transmute its mould. Of course this catchphrase is also to be reminiscent of the Gold Rush.



| objectives

| 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.

| ryugyong.org | is online now!

| conclusion

“To transform the Ryugyong Hotel into a worldwide antenna for ideas“ (Boeri et al. 2005, cover) we believe that it is vital to sustain the bonding between the real and the virtual pyramid, at least in the early stage of the endeavour. But depending on the submitted ideas and desires, 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 (Kaga 2005) seems to be a conceptual imperfection... as well as the chance for | ryugyong.org | to be successful.

Although there has already been international response to the project we wait to finally have it kick-started after the publication in Domus magazine and this paper’s appearance at the GameSetAndMatch II Conference.

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

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| imprint

| ryugyong.org |  
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An idea on architecture and geopolitics for the Ryugyong Hotel in Pyongyang  
Contribution to the Call for Ideas by Domus Magazine

a diag and richdank project 2005/06

contact: office@ryugyong.org