

iheartblob -
**AUGMENTED
ARCHITECTURAL
OBJECTS:**

GERALD BAST

**A NEW
VISUAL
LANGUAGE**

“The forms
of modern
life can be differentiated
in various ways,
but what ties all of them together
is their fragility,
temporality,
vulnerability, and
tendency
toward constant
change.”

Zygmunt Bauman

We live in a world that is characterized by change, insecurity, ambiguity, and an increasingly high degree of complexity. The uncanny and the uncertain are constant companions of our times. The speed of progress in scientific and technological knowledge as well as the increasingly urgent need for solutions in the manifold areas of global challenges – such as: aging societies, climate change, backlash in democracy and human rights, migration, economic inequality and poverty, digitization of human labor, and the preservation of cultural heritage – require radical new forms of education and knowledge acquisition in inter- and cross-disciplinary, synergistic and analytical strategies. Humankind's power to make things happen will no longer express itself so much by putting thoughts into material form, but will instead

manifest itself in linking intellectual, intuitive, and social processes.

Investigating new tools, new visual languages, new methods of distribution and new theories is crucial to confront and challenge the intensity of our times – in architecture and beyond. With their interdisciplinary experiments, iheartblob create ephemeral extensions of architectural spaces into virtual dimensions and thus fantastic objects. Their investigational approach founded in theory and criticism kick-starts a much-needed discourse that embraces fragments and complexity instead of shying away from it. Their reflection about a shift in architecture through virtuality leads to a reflection about society and current cultural processes as a whole as well as an observation of 'liquid times' (Bauman), in the truest sense of the word.

PUT-
TING
THE HEART
GREG LYNN
IN
BLOB

In my Angewandte studio we loved the formation of “iheartblob” by Sasha, Ben and Shaun and now that they are graduated it is great to watch where they will go with it. Their work has changed with the times while staying rooted in the recent past, much like a good “alternative” rock band adopts a sound that works and moves it towards contemporary concerns. The idea is right there in the title and it is an idea and a title that I have to say pains me all over again in exactly

the way I was pained in the 1990s by fifty percent of their formulation; the blob part, that is. My greatest regret was investing effort in formulating an essay and design method using what was either referred to as ‘digital clay’ or ‘blob’ modeling software. I didn’t want to confuse geometric principles with clay so I argued for the BLOb (Binary Large Object). It completely backfired and

the term was my greatest success in coining a term, but its meaning was not of a new kind of rigor but of an amorphous gelatinous accident. The critical review of which I am proudest summed up the entire blob situation: William Safire's "On Language" essay in the *New York Times Magazine* in 2002 that I will cite with a very long quote as it sheds light on the situation today with Ben, Shaun and Sasha:

"The architect Greg Lynn coined the term blob architecture in 1995 with no derision in mind. He was drawing on a computer, clicking out a random cloud of points that assumed an amorphous shape, loose and formless as an amoeba, which digital designers sometimes call a 'biomorphic form.' Lynn tells me the term 'blob' comes from a sort of acronym for a technical description of a computer-formed shape — a 'binary large object.' Although blob architecture "lacks the elegance, rigor and beauty that comes from modules, proportions and symmetry,"

Lynn says, "in due time, the blob architects

will discover a new form of beauty and elegance in the voluptuous, rhythmic and undulating forms of the differential calculus." The envelope-pushing architect has seen his term shortened to blobitecture. Those planar types who prefer traditional forms like cubes and spheres — and who look askance at the seeming shapelessness of what developed into a new style — seized on the predigital meaning of blob: a bubble or a globule of liquid resembling a teardrop, with an extended meaning of a gooseberry or duck's egg, which cricket players treat as a zero — hence, an error or bonehead play." ¹

¹
William Safire,
"THE WAY WE LIVE NOW
12-01-02: ON LANGUAGE,"
The New York Times
Magazine, Dec. 1, 2002,
Section 6, page 42
of the National
Edition.

The "blob" in iheartblob is not only lacking the elegance, rigor and beauty that comes from modules, proportion and symmetry, it is also intensely reflective, often translucent, always intensely colored, sometimes

patterned and occasionally textured. This is what Safire called the “shapelessness of a new style” all over again.

But there is something very different and contemporary that distinguishes their interests from the late 90s, and this is what I find interesting. For me, the sooner the 90s’ sloppy blobs are forgotten, the better. What I am most impressed with is the “Heart” of Shaun, Sasha and Ben; that is their commitment to social media, crowdsourcing and what is fundamentally a change in the value of algorithms. In the 90s, there were debates over what algorithms were used and their formal consequences. Friendships were destroyed and civil discourse was abandoned over disagreements about algorithms. The focus was on the medium of architecture and the expert formal use of design algorithms. The algorithm was a code for executing particular shapes, forms and spaces.

With iheartblob, the algorithm is what Google uses to rank results with its search engine, or what

Facebook/Instagram uses to determine individuals that look alike others. The “heart” in iheartblob is the new algorithm of what digital marketers call “engagement.” In the funnel of the digital with “awareness” at the top of the funnel, followed by “engagement,” then “conversion” (otherwise known as a sale) and then “community” or advocacy by customers. iheartblob is one of the first and purest expressions of digital engagement culture framed as a stylistic posture and method of publication. This arc of social media focus has been watched by all of us the last four years. Beginning with algorithmic processes intended to discover happy accidents the three moved quickly to game engines, augmented reality, filters and machine learning.

All of the tools that are the foundation of Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram and Search Engine Optimization they are adopting and using for stylistic effect. I hope you enjoy the book, and if you do, please follow @iheartblob