ABSTRACT

“Our old ideas about space have exploded. In their place comes a surprising range of domains that will define our future.”

Rem Koolhaas
When talking about Rem Koolhaas, the mirror does not only reflect one but numerous images: it is nothing but a polyhedral prism. His mirror gives us the image of Rem the media celebrity, the intellectual, the conceptualizer, the builder, the analyst, the journalist, the actor... This research sets the spotlight on Rem the COMMUNICATOR.

"Rem on both sides of the mirror" belongs to a research on architectural media, its influence on the architectural production and vice versa. It is aimed at getting to discern whether communication and architectural production collide and converge in the case of great communicators such as Rem Koolhaas, and whether the message and transmission media acquire the same features.

Focusing on the figure of Rem Koolhaas, this thesis addresses the evolution of his communicative facet and the successive transformations in the field of architectural communication, parallel to the conceptual evolution he underwent throughout his career. Therefore, this research is not so much focused on his theoretical component or on the OMA's architectural practice, but on the exhibition of his production to the world, especially through his essays and books. "Delirious New York" and "SMLXL" hold up a mirror to the conceptual moment they are part of, and contain a great deal of information about the graphic references that have inevitably influenced his work.

Specially, the launch of "SMLXL" was a salutary shock for the architectural communication world, since it set the spotlight on the importance of leaving a linear and unifocal narrative behind in order to face communication considering multiple variables and approaches, based on a process similar to the development of an architectural project.

It offers a very innovative design and an extremely careful editing, which deals with parameters much more ambitious than those merely narrative. It explores the need for a global subject and suggests the most appropriate approach for each of the projects described, giving the reader a closer insight to the sensory that goes beyond what's strictly visual.
In addition, its huge international impact and the great interest shown, not only by architects but also by graphic designers, publishers, people from all kinds of artistic trends and the general public, led to the globalisation of the architectural publications phenomenon and brought the importance of communication as a discipline in itself, within the architectural production in the age at hand, to light.

Despite the importance of "SMLXL" at all levels, this thesis suggests that the communication experience really culminates in "Content", for it includes new conceptual parameters associated with the container-content conceptual fusion. It is in this book where the purpose of communication and the expression of such become a single element, ruled by similar laws. In this particular case, the fundamental law is to implement the "culture of congestion" to its extreme consequences in both the message and the media, leading to what we have agreed to refer to as "congestive communication". This concept leads to its inevitable materialisation into an ephemeral, disposable, almost virtual product, because it meets the conditions of a very concrete and specific time, and outside that context it loses its significance.

The "culture of congestion" emerged in Koolhaas' approaches under the guidance of Elia Zenghelis, in the Architectural Association School of Architecture of London. Subsequently, his retroactive manifesto on Manhattan, "Delirious New York" developed it, waging an all-out war against the modern movement urbanism and maintaining that the really contemporary cities are those hyperdense ones that rise as a result of an unplanned development and thanks to the typical technological advances of their time. Finally it began to materialise in the Diploma Unit 9 of the AA, in which he started lecturing in 1975, leaving an indelible mark on subsequent generations of architects who passed that unit.

First and foremost, Rem Koolhaas is an intellectual and, therefore, all the theoretical construct in the metropolis began to be reflected in his work through OMA since the beginnings of his production. Broadly speaking, we can say that his career is influenced by two essential historic events, which determine three different stages in his production. In the early years of his career, Koolhaas was still fascinated by the urban metropolis and the implementation of the paranoid-critical method to his architectural production. He was then a deeply surreal architect. He understood this method as a knowledge strategy and an approach to the world around him: "let the subconscious out but hold it with the crutches of reasonableness".

However, he was actually interested in its implementation on a broad scale, the "Bigness", and therefore, he took part in ambitious projects that led to the accrual of concepts that, beyond being rewarded, left an ideological impression on the evolution of architecture. These projects included his proposal for the Parc de la Villette or the Très Grande Bibliothèque in Paris.

The projects he carried out during this period showed a great conceptual background, which evolved into surprising interiors but a sober, or even "povera", exterior appearance, thanks to the use of ephemeral materials that were atypical in the macro-architecture field until that moment.

Suddenly, in 1997, the so-called "Bilbao effect" boomed thanks to Frank Gehry (1). The Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao amazed the world with its spectacular nature and its pregnant and impossible shapes. It was the beginning of the era of "The architecture of spectacle": the transformation of the city through ICONS that would act as nodes of attraction and gathering, around which the economic, cultural and socio-political activity of the city was supposed to be revitalized, as if through a single gesture all internal tissues of the city could be rebuilt.

Rem Koolhaas quickly realized that the approach to the city, and especially to the global market, had changed. In the world of globalisation, the only way to get to materialise such "Bigness" was by keeping his intellectual exercises in pregnant, beautiful, iconic and spectacular shapes. Koolhaas found his personal brand in the "Stealth" aesthetic, resulting from the eighties American combat aircrafts whose shape was faceted in order to avoid radars.

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1. Biographical structure described by Professor Luis Fernandez Galiano in his Lecture "Architecture's Protagonists of the XXI Century: Rem Koolhaas, Juan March Foundation, 2011"
Projects such as the Casa da Música in Porto or the Seattle Library date from this period; both buildings are faceted icons of pregnant beauty that left an indelible mark on the city and caused, like the Guggenheim, some degree of recovery and revitalization on the environment in which they were based, at least temporarily. In any case, Koolhaas never gave the merely theoretical exercises up, but he segregated his work in two: OMA produced what was destined to be built and ruled by the parameters of the global market and AMO, Rem’s other side of the mirror, applied the architectural thought in unexplored fields, notwithstanding external agents and being able to work as a purely experimental laboratory.

In light of this backdrop, September 11th 2001 came and the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York had devastating effects at all levels, leading to a change in the world order, in a surprisingly short period of time. Rem Koolhaas made a 180° turn directing his vision towards China, where he believed his contributions would have a more direct social benefit than in the Western world. (2) In order to introduce his new course of direction and the creation of the AMO “Think Tank”, he planned a major exhibition in the Neue Nationalgalerie of Berlin under the title “Content”, in parallel with edition of the book with the same title, which was at first the “exhibition catalog” but, deep down, was always conceived as the most important document of the Office since “SMLXL”.

However, in many ways it was just the opposite: a publication characterized by its magazine format, soft cover, very fine paging, “supermarket brochure” form and hyperdense content. It was an ephemeral, brief, light, cheap and “disposable” experiment. In fact, it is currently out of stock and out of print.

Rem Koolhaas would probably disapprove of a research that sets the spotlight on him, for he would probably say that his validity has expired given that it has been ten years since its publication. However, it shows OMA’s conceptual and vital status at the time of its publication with crystalline clarity and it is also a true milestone in architectural communication. A point of no return. The epitome of the so-called “congestive communication”.

This thesis suggests that “Content” contains the essence of Rem Koolhaas’ greatest contribution to the world of architecture: the deep and definitive transformation of architectural communication through the convergence of the conceptual state and the transmission thereof.

His architectural and conceptual legacy has left an indelible mark on all subsequent generations. There is no doubt his essays, theories, projects and buildings already belong to the history of architecture. But it is his review on the concept of communication in architecture that has had and shall have an immediate influence on future generations, not only in their communication but also in their architecture, through a bijective exchange.

Future approaches should try to determine what happens after “Content”, after the maximum hyperdensity after the visual culture of congestion; what shall Koolhaas suggest as well as what shall happen in the world of architectural communication. To this end, we shall study his latest communication-related projects, such as the design of the Venetian Architecture Biennale in 2014, his intensive research on the “Metabolism” in “Project Japan: Metabolism Talks ...”, or the course of his latest territorial approaches in depth.

Most recently, Rem Koolhaas has talked about “Preservation”, “Sobriety” of “Essentialism”, “Performance”, etc. The mastermind of the culture of congestion now speaks of the “low density” as it could not be otherwise, on the other side of the mirror. Summarizing, the white color as the sum of all colors; all wavelengths of the visible spectrum received at the same time.
CONCLUSIONS

“If the culture of the 20th century is the culture of congestion, the culture of the 21st is the culture of dissemination, dispersal.”

Rem Koolhaas,
interview in Wired, 1996
About communication in Rem (state)

Walk towards the light...
At the beginning of this thesis I wondered if I could get away from Koolhaas’ spotlight enough to understand his figure without being blinded by the light. I must confess that it was not always easy, for once immersed in the “Koolhaesian” galaxy, is much more appealing to be carried away by the absence of gravity and be dazzled by the landscape before your eyes. After an exhausting journey around his orbit, there is nothing else than to analyse the samples recorded and establish intelligent conclusions (nothing less...) from a critical and distant position, where possible, trying to reconcile the statement that “Rem Koolhaas is the most influential living architect in today’s world from a theoretical point of view” with an aseptic vision that would allow me to verify or refute such assertion.

Toxic talent
Luis Fernandez Galindo defines Rem Koolhaas as a “toxic talent” and I sincerely believe that there is no better definition. His talent for innovation and anticipation is undeniable and his intellectual influence is indisputable, just like his sense of timing, for he is able to anticipate themes that will be the centre of the architectural-media discussion in years to come with inconceivable easiness, being always a step ahead of everyone else. This allows him to set the rules of the game to some extent, putting him in a permanent position of apparent relevance. Other times, he gobbles up someone else’s speech that, despite being intellectually brilliant, has not had the deserved repercussion, and after its absorption, its content acquires such an exponential relevance that its initial authorship disappears from the collective imagination.

On the other hand, its “toxicity” is polyhedral: it is toxic because “excessive consumption” can cause “adverse reactions”; toxic because it has that aura of genius who is struggling to empathize with others at times, with the ability to focus all his capabilities on one reality, temporarily ignoring the rest; toxic because it is extremely contagious and pregnant, being really complicated to “untangle” from
his influence; and finally, toxic because he has the ability to turn errors into virtues and the most voracious criticism in intellectual propaganda.

**The magic potion**

Because the effect of his venom is inexorable. The content itself is the result of a magistral formula that has no antidote. It is the mixture of a prodigious intellect, a dash of cynicism, a great deal of observation and interpretation, a spark of humour, all seasoned with good timing and anticipation.

Rem Koolhaas combines the deepest abstract theoretical reasoning with architectural practice, allowing himself the “frivolity” of making them not to coincide by means of an intellectual trick: creating an alter ego indifferent to global market fluctuations and external factors whatsoever. In turn, this strategy allows him to submit entirely radical proposals and approaches.

The essence of such approaches lies in a continuous reconsideration of reality and globally assumed standards, opening the window to new realities and even others that already existed but appeared to be unpublished from the new point of view. Work by analogy and contextualisation are characteristic of OMA’s way of working.

There is no doubt, another of his potion’s ingredients is cooperating with other disciplines. The way he addresses the foregoing also has its peculiarities: he starts from a blind faith in each other and a desire for total permeability, for mutual pregnancy, so that the intervention transforms both parties forever and provides a truly original input to the project.

However, the most dangerous part of this poison is certainly that jar... that appealing, striking... irresistible ... jar. The aforementioned mix of specific ingredients is wrapped in a both pregnant and repellent continent. Its visual strength lies in unprejudiced, direct and unambiguous graphics approaches, sometimes voluntarily and manifestly unpleasant, with a sarcastic humour and irony that makes it difficult to digest in certain areas. However, both advocates and detractors surrender to the evidence of the message and, of course, the media significance.

**The jar of essences**

That small, transparent jar with a drawing of a skull... warning you to “stay away”, “do not open”, “do not drink”... But you cannot help it — you approach it and sniff it again and again... Moreover, it seems not to be always the same, it changes, becoming even more appealing. The poison is powerful, but its true power lies in how it sells its “communication strategy”; therefore, it lies in the media approach.

Koolhaas himself says so in “The Poisonous Mixture” ("Content"): “Architecture is a poisonous mixture of power and impotence”. Which in the specific case of my research translates as: “Koolhaas is a poisonous mixture of toxicity and pregnancy.”

Therefore, the approach concludes that the most powerful active ingredient of the potion is its communicative strength, which determines its originality and uniqueness.

Throughout this thesis, each and every communication strategy explored through the years has disengaged, allowing for corroborating the way they adjust to the displayed message.

In "SMLXL" he draws the attention of critics and the media surrounding the design and architecture by designing a truly collector’s item, the content of which is completely new and striking and is wrapped in an unequivocal, beautiful, timeless “suit”, proving that is intended for a very specific audience.

Quite the contrary is the case of "Content", which is intended to open to the public, to the critical mass. It is the best example of the translation of the pop art and postmodernism spirit, ultimately aimed at being a reliable manifestation of mass culture. Somehow he suggests wrecking the archaic concept of architecture as an elitist discipline and aims to popularize its consumption, to open it up to the masses, so that they, end users, determine its final destination.
In conversations with Charlie Koolhaas, she sets the birth of "Content" in a very specific context that was taking place in the UK, with the popularity boom of men's magazines like "FHM" and "Jacks", which led to a radical transformation of the targeted market, for it increased exponentially by addressing research topics mixed other subjects which were closer to sensationalism, from a sarcastic point of view and with a direct and striking aesthetic.

Rem Koolhaas was interested in the phenomenon that led to the emergence of such magazines for it involved the popularisation of a consumption, "intellectual" and both intelligent and "stupid" reading. Therefore, he clearly aims at drawing the masses attention on everything that is being developed in OMA and transform architecture into an object of global immediate consumption.

This reasoning also sets the basis of "Fundamentals": from a radically different aesthetic and communication strategy, it suggests the reduction of architecture to its most basic, understandable and "consumable" items to any person, whether related or not to such discipline, resulting in the popularisation of architecture. Likewise, the main interest of recent interventions in the Prada Foundation lies in the visibility of art for its popularisation, for its extrapolation to a world beyond the artistic intellectual stronghold in which it usually cloisters.

Somehow, he is inviting us to "open the jar" and let the essence impregnate everything giving value not only to the content but to the container too. Therefore, his contribution to the understanding of the communication strategy as a fundamental part of the discipline is undeniable. From his point of view, the concept design is as important as the as the "visibility of information", as well as the popularisation and openness of the media spectrum.

**Thinking in motion**

Rem Koolhaas' thinking is based on movement: to think in continuous ideological movement. Meaning that any statement to be heard on any matter should not be understood as part of a speech, but as a snapshot of the mood and obsessive state (conceptually) of that particular moment. His working tools are, therefore: destabilisation, change, transformation, imbalance and immediacy.

However, every one of his expressions (projects, intellectual propositions, manifestos, publications, etc.) leave an indelible mark on the architectural "state of the matter" for the following years. The graphic and visual language contemplated today in many schools of architecture, has much to do with the one used by OMA ten years ago; giving rise to the paradox that, because of its ongoing evolution, Koolhaas had long since "abandoned" it, due to its learning cadence (despite having been accelerated by communication technologies).

From the very moment the concept takes root on society, Koolhaas loses interest in it and he changes direction. It is acknowledge that OMA needs to be the source of information in order to subsist, and that can only be achieved by anticipation. But it is not only the need for visibility, but for the deep belief that his contributions are useful to the extent that they generate discussion and controversy, and once lit the flame, he looks for new fields of exploration.

**About communication in Architecture**

**The iconic dimension of Architecture**

In "Learning from Las Vegas" Venturi reflects on the iconic and communicative dimension of architecture as an intrinsic component thereof. He argues that modern movement has stripped the architecture off its communicative essential character, which, on the other hand, is present in all periods of history (from the Egyptians to the Paleochristian basilicas or the Mayan temples). As seen previously, Venturi detected two categories: architecture as a symbol and as a sign.

However, he suggests that no in-depth reflection has yet been made on the processes, media and content for which the environment built can give information to the user nor on the mental processes providing information to the image that develops a building or the involvement of such perception in building such image. He concludes that the architecture
mechanisms of representation have not been explicitly analysed. Therefore, such perspective should be reviewed, from the understanding of the architectural communication double scope: the built element and its narration. The aforementioned assertions made by Venturi cannot be more appropriate from this research's point of view, since its origin is the importance of the content's visibility, the review of the way it presents and the understanding that this strategy results in the very essence of the architectural object, in its character and understanding.

Architecture and representation as a communication whole
On the other hand, Gregory Bateson suggests in "Steps to an Ecology of Mind" that the essence of communication is the creation of redundancy or an apprehended pattern that adds a degree of predictability to the message. Therefore, the goal is to decode a message through a language, but he suggests that the representation consists in the creation of a context that is capable of generating partial and fragmented interpretations that expand the object's perspective; that is, representation leads to preliminary learning.

Prior knowledge of the code enables the message's communication. This implies that reality depends on the representation; we perceive things through communication, so the object and its representation are the same thing.

Therefore, if we perceive reality through its representation, information and visibility are a whole. The need for convergence between what is told and how it is told, between the concept and the communication strategy established, is suggested. It is at the confluence of these two concepts from which one can move forward to innovative approaches providing an enhanced view of the discipline and allowing for revisiting its past from an additive view, generating multiple visions of what is already known and implementing architecture creative possibilities.

In the particular history of architectural communication in OMA-AMO, this confluence starts with "SMXL", with the work of Bruce Mau. As he explains, the intention of the book was BEING the culture of architecture, not a simple comment or reflection on culture of architecture. Literally, he explains: "I wanted to design the book as an EXPERIENCE of the complexity and difficulties, the failures, the uncertainties, heartbreaks, conflicts, and also the accomplishments, triumphs and rewards of the REALITY of architectural practice. (...) the form is the content, the design is the reality of the subject".

In this specific case study, "Content", such convergence not only occurs but it combines an innovative, radical and relevant theoretical construct, with a refreshing and deeply stimulating means of transmission enhancing such construct.

Concept materialisation
Before getting to this point, the investigation has gone through three conceptual stages: first, understanding the importance of communication in architecture; then, analysing its application in architecture and, finally, understanding that communication and architecture are part of a whole. From this conclusion, the next natural step is to put communication and architecture into practice. This does not mean assuming Venturi's iconic architecture precepts as such, but understanding that each of the communication phases of the architectural creative process are architecture itself without necessarily referring to the built object.

Koolhaas and Mies, differ in many respects, however, they converge in an important reasoning: "the architect must find a way to suggest a consistent architecture with the time in which it lives". Likewise, this axiom applies to communication. If architecture and communication are a whole, architectural communication should then be inseparable from the time in which it is suggested. Sometimes, like in the case of Rem Koolhaas, the communication strategy is ahead of the productive approach until he gobbles it up and transforms it. Rem Koolhaas is one of the most brilliant architects of our time, but he is, without trace of a doubt, the best current communicator in the world of architecture.

Le Corbusier is, without a doubt, his predecessor in this invented category. Many authors compare Rem Koolhaas's media talent and ability to make visionary suggestions to Le
Corbusier’s. Beatriz Colomina (238) describes how, when the Swiss architect realized his own actual significance, he began to record absolutely everything he did, said and produced. If he ever picked up a seashell, that shell would in the Le Corbusier Foundation in Paris.

However, OMA follows a diametrically opposite pattern. There is an almost compulsive obsession with the production of publications, recording (239) and documentation of processes and ideas, OMA is said to issue a publication per day.

In many cases, it is rather an internal record that helps to assimilate the ideas (while inventorying them, for “self-recycling” is one of OMA’s favourite projective formulas). But this record’s communicative effort is not the same as in publications in which the potential “target” is massive, or at least intended to be so, like in “Content”.

In addition, there is a deliberate ignorance of the dimension of everything that has been produced. As already described above, a few years ago, Aaron Betsky suggested OMA to publish and classify files by the NAI, but for Koolhaas that was like burying his thoughts.

In the exhibition “OMA Book Machine” (240) curated by Brett Steele and Zak Kyes in 2010 at the Architectural Association of Architecture in London, a unique experience resulting in the importance of communication in architecture was carried out: the creation a mega-book of more than 40,000 pages that gathered most of the books, pamphlets and publications of all kinds that OMA had developed since 1978. The “colossai” result contained all OMA’s conceptual construct, its history and yet it was completely measureless and useless.

Communication strategy is as important as the message that is intended to be conveyed, for it can enhance and even transform it. If the approach is not clear, the message becomes diluted, deteriorated and diffused. On the contrary, the highlight of the communicative experience is reached when strategy and concept converge.

Is “Content” the highlight of the communicative experience?

Yes and no... Does everyone have to like “Content”? Probably not; in fact, collective imagination does not classify it as one the essential books of architecture.

“Content” knows exactly what it wants and does not want to be, it knows exactly the message it spreads and how to develop it and, most importantly, it knows exactly that message and communication are consistent and redundant. It tries to replicate that consumer explosion that took place in the 90s with male pseudo-intellectual magazines, which became a mass consumer product exclusively thanks a change in the rules.

“SMLXL”, published in 1995, speaks of a very different phenomenon. It represents the biggest publishing success in the history of architectural publications. This “almost 3-Kg weight silver cobblestone”, as defined by Luis Fernández Galán, led to Koolhaas’s mass recognition and has become a fetish object and a reference for anyone involved in design. In theory, the book is a compilation of OMA’s work since its foundation until 1995, but, predictably, it is much more than that. In it, Koolhaas’ career unfolds ranked by scale (or rather by size), from domestic to large scale projects, which is what really fascinated Rem Koolhaas at the time of its publication. If “Delirious New York” is Manhattanism, “SMLXL” is certainly Bigness.

It is a beautiful object in itself, precious, strong, methodically compound, with an original and striking structure while remaining ordered and consistent. It is a book that can be touched, smelled and felt. It is perfect. In short, it is The book.

In this context, whatever publication that followed OMA was going to be very closely examined and it was almost impossible to suggest such a convincing “object” with that level of quality. So they decided to set the spotlight on a very different matter and suggesting the exact visually opposite. Koolhaas did not sought to distance himself so much from “SMLXL” but from the books that had already emerged in its shadow.
In the words of Rem himself: “In order to make a book after SMLXL, we needed to break from our own achievements. Doing something as good was totally impossible, so I had to do something equal but bad”.

Disengaging from the strength of his message, he alludes to the significant conceptual change that took place on both the continent and the content. In this regard, if “SMLXL” sought an original approach to each project, conveying the specific and unique features thereof, “Content” approaches were always diverse, polyhedral and polyphonic; assuming that narrative strategies specifically determine the project’s perception. Of course, like in his time as a writer,

Koolhaas chooses the directionality of the spotlight and usually positions himself in radically different views to those found in conventional architectural narratives.

Just like “SMLXL”, the book has become an object of worship but in a very different sense. It is more of “rarity”, a fetish object. Readers are left so overwhelmed by its graphic exuberance that they rarely delve into the “content”.

However, the success of this publication lies in the container-contained marriage: “SMLXL” created a new architecture communication genre, but “Content” transgressed the genre to such extent that its impact is yet to be seen. What we can determine is that it has changed the idea of architectural communication and the target audience to which it is addressed.

Therefore, in this context, it is not possible to determine whether “SMLXL” shapes the highlight of communicative experience. The wrapping accompanies the message, but it “is” not the message. “Content” is, on the other hand, metaphor permitted, like a book on chocolate made of chocolate, and, like in the case of black gold, its consumption in excess can be harmful.

Comparison diagram of the three publications analyzed in the research

What is the ultimate goal of “Content”? So far we have determined what “Content” is: a 544 pages publication, halfway between a book and a magazine; with an unprecedented informative and visual congestion and an aesthetic that is extremely remote from any other architectural publication to date.

This definition is absolutely consistent with Koolhaas’ desire to generalise the use of the “architectural product”, surrendering to an elegy to postmodernism and pop art as the perfect communicative way to fulfill the culture of masses. Therefore, its ultimate and priority goal is to popularise architecture, to bring it down from its pedestal allegedly reserved to the extremely qualified and acculturated minds, and to turn it into a product of daily consumption.

I once heard José Luis Esteban Penelas mention that Rem Koolhaas’s intention was definitively to “convey emotion rather than information”. In a sense, my conclusion on Rem’s ultimate goal in “Content” follows that direction: turning information into something exciting, by means of a clear choice of the media and the message, it makes architecture much more permeable and accessible to all public.

In the aforementioned statements, Rem describes “Content” as a “pamphlet”. In essence, that is its voluntarily adopted format. It has even been possible to verify, throughout the interviews carried out for the documentation of this thesis,
that many authoritative voices consider it almost a mere propaganda pamphlet of Beijing’s CCTV Tower project.

However, in my opinion, the format used is merely a strategy copied from the publishing success of men’s magazines in the 90s in the United States and later in Britain, which managed to transmit highly intellectual investigations and studies through a frivolous and sarcastic package and made them available to the general public. It is nothing but the means to an end and its appearance might have been different if he had set his sight on a similar phenomenon that also worked when providing the masses with content that, to date, was only accessible for a few.

Likewise, if the strategy is to replicate the phenomenon of such publications adopting the configuration of a semi-pamphlet magazine, there is no doubt that post art and postmodern graphic references are the tool. As we have seen throughout the investigation, many other studies have been using such tools since the 70s as a proven effective and direct graphic strategy. “Content” takes such concept to the extreme densification and message radicalization, but, in essence, the principles and criteria are the same than those found in the graphic substratum.

Finally, following the research carried out we can determine that he even goes a step further: not only he generates a product the goal of which is to get to the critical mass, but he suggests that such mass shall be responsible for defining its final configuration, concluding the need for returning to “generic” formats and getting away from the architectural “star system”.

Somehow, he tries to get away from the professional approach of the genius that governs the destiny of humanity to become the executing arm of the mass’ designs. Naturally, the way he handles the means at his disposal to be part of the “star system” cannot be forgotten, nor the manipulation implicit when focusing the general interest on his own through his aforementioned ability to anticipate and to gobble the general interest up.

What is next?
Each and every one of OMA’s publications leaves behind a burnt land scenery that is difficult to overcome. That is the dilemma they found themselves in after “SMLXL” and even more after “Content”.

Furthermore, “SMLXL” was published at a time the conditions of which will probably never be repeated again: the confluence of the emergence of new means of production, the rise of the architect cultural status, the first impacts of globalisation on architecture and publications and the growing influence of the theoretical part. Therefore, its success is impossible to replicate, because the circumstances have changed significantly.

“Content” was published at a time of maximum globalisation impact, during the world crisis following the September 11 attacks and the beginning of the current economic crisis that led to the beginning of an assessment on the society as a whole. The whole system falls into the crisis, as does the figure of the architect.

Thanks to its closeness, “Content” records the message and mimics it, becoming a turning point, a product of its time, a transitional book. Whatever comes next shall be determined by thousands of external and internal factors, it is essential to determine whether to continue the intellectual process where “Content” left it or if that is even possible.

Accordingly, and following the conversations held with people close to him like her daughter, Charlie Koolhaas, I have concluded that his recent actions do have translational connections with “Content” even though they look opposite. For example, when referring to his performance in the Venice Biennale, “Fundamentals” is only a dismemberment of architecture to its most elemental parts: doors, windows, stairs, etc.

Once again, like in the case of “Content”, he aims at visualising architecture as a mundane, close and understandable product for the user product when it is disassembled.

241. Analysis extracted from the Article “Publishing Practice” from Michael Kubo, OMA’s collaborator in communication strategies.
Therefore, although “Content” and “Fundamentals” formal configuration and communication strategy are very different, almost opposite, they share the same intrinsic conceptual construct.

Koolhaas’ strategic intelligence when ignoring one of the architecture’s fundamental and more complex principles, like the merger of unique elements such as the “joint”, the “intersection” or “sewn”, which is ultimately what distinguishes a “mundane” piece from the sublime, the “generic” from an architectural work of art, is noteworthy.

Three, and nothing less than three hypotheses

At the beginning of this research, I suggested three baseline hypothesis that, in my opinion, have been refuted by the research itself even exceeding expectations in some cases. The first hypothesis is based on the convergence of project and visual language in Rem Koolhaas / OMA-AMO’s publications.

Through the conceptual, graphic and visual analysis of the three most significant publications to date, we have confirmed the way his graphic speech adapts to his intellectual speech and vice versa, getting to the point that it is extremely difficult to determine which of the two comes first.

This results in a Bijective Exchange: communicate-project; an exchange of variables, an intellectual trade to the benefit of both parameters. While in “SMLXLVII” the message is magnified by the communication strategy, it is in “Content” where they definitely meet. The book perfectly conveys OMA’s conceptual and almost spiritual state at that very moment and is a reflection of such mental state itself.

“Content” represents a turning point in this dynamic, and that’s the reason it has been subject of study. There are many publications that have adapted its aesthetic, with different degrees of visual success. However, if not converged with the content, the message is trivialized and becomes banal.

The second hypothesis suggests that the origin of the so called “congestive communication” (which impregnates the book in an exponential way as it develops and approaches the “EAST”) can be found in the use of the same dynamics that govern OMA’s intellectual and cognitive developments at that very moment, applying the same method to its architectural and graphic production. In this case, the study reflected a state of intellectual growth and congestion, resulting in a significant visual congestion, an unprecedented display of graphic procedures that overlap and are juxtaposed, creating a visual and sensory voluntary cacophony.

At the beginning of this research, we suggested three basic pillars for the “culture of congestion”: hyper-density, unplanned development and the use of the technological advances of its time. This research has proven that these are the same parameters that govern the communication strategy of “Content”.

Graphic hyper-density is a permanent feature in the book; however, I have found patterns that draw a partially planned scenario, for there is a gradual increase in the graphic language densification as the publication moves forward, with turning points in the purely speculative projects, therefore belonging to AMO.

At the same time, I found out that there is also a progressive intensification and fragmentation in the speeches, which become fully polyhedral, equally affecting its communication process. The approach to the works built in the West is somehow flatter or, at least, more comprehensible, becoming more encrypted as they move eastwards.
According to my analysis, “SMLXL” has a very different approach to the one usually seen in architectural monographs, leading to a total breach of rules and opening up each project’s field of interpretation, shown from perspectives encompassing the sensory, cognitive, emotional, etc. In “Content” the perspective is introduced in each case generating a polyhedral communication, made up of multiple approaches. The overall picture is reassembled by means of a multifaceted vision, leading to a high degree of uncertainty and an interpretative message that depends on the experience apprehended by the receiver.

At this point, the only thing left would be determining whether his essential contribution to the world of architecture lies in transforming the architectural codes of communication as we suggested. In “SMLXL” the means by which the message reaches the recipient is transformed. This represents an immeasurable important contribution itself, for it has taken architectural communication to a whole new level transforming it irrevocably. But it is in “Content” where takes the leap in transforming not only the means (again) but the message, adopting strategies hitherto unknown that represent, without a doubt, a turning point that not even Koolhaas himself has gone through afterwards.

In subsequent publications, such as “Project Japan: Metabolism Talks ...” we can distinguish an extreme care in the means and a message treatment closer to that of “SMLXL”. Notably, this latest’s content is not Koolhaas’s but somebody else’s, which greatly reduces the chances of experimentation. We’ll probably have to wait for his next monographic book in order to determine whether the conceptual transformation announced in “Content” was punctual and brief, like its edition, or if it will offer a new intellectual twist, as usual.

On the other hand, regarding writing and theorising, and regardless of the message transformation, the fact that Koolhaas retrieves the tradition of pragmatic theorising, previously developed by great masters such as Le Corbusier, with whom he is often compared because of the aforementioned characteristics they share, is remarkable. Currently, Schools tend to cloister theorising and Studies tend to stack practice, for their frenetic activity does not allow for recording everything produced. Koolhaas “needs” to record everything he conceives. And more importantly, he conceives through theorising and translating in order to design, it is a complex conceptualization method that takes 3 parameters at a time into account.

Accordingly, this communication system could be called “Trijective Exchange”: design-communicate-record. A three-way permutation that enriches the message and leads to a high degree of responsibility of the recipient thereof.

Bruce Mau comments in his interview that “every new social condition demands and creates new visual forms for expressing the new ideas. The new forms of expression then generate new ideas and social organizations. This process where new ideas invent new visual languages and new visual languages invent new ideas is always happening in architectural and urban thinking”. Communication and registration of ideas are both poles that cover their generation, taking part of it before, during and after the process, exponentially multiplying the influence on ways of living what was created.

The implementation of this system requires an intensity degree such that is extremely difficult to keep over time. However, the benefits arising from the three vertices of the system are much greater than those of a dual system, for feedback becomes a 3-element combinational in all possible ways. The creative field opens up exponentially as do the possibilities for future growth.
Decalogue of the good communicator

As an epilogue or “conclusion” of the conclusions, I dare to suggest a Decalogue of good communication practices from the “Koolhaasian” point of view, bringing together the insights drawn from this research.

What should I be: theoretical or practical? Probably theoretical-practical

Human intelligence is based on two types of operations: abstraction of the knowledge acquired in the world (learning) and projection of learnt knowledge in the world (242). Theorise and practice (243) are therefore synonymous with built knowledge and its application. However, as aforementioned, too often, theories remain in the drawers of academic institutions as practice develops with no time to theorise. Koolhaas has an obsessive need to publish each new process that carries out, either for subsequent distribution or for internal use. It is one of the few theoretical-practical architects of the current scene.

Chaos has its rules

Man tends to simplify reality around him, to generate abstractions in order to reach an understanding. Embracing the chaos is to accept the unpredictable, irregular and discontinuous world we live in. Contrary to common opinion, chaos and uncertainty don’t necessarily mean confusion. Chaotic systems are characterized by their adaptation to change and therefore their stability. They are governed by strict rules. Not “everything” is acceptable. Actually, chaos is very systematic.

In order for the chaotic thinking to develop it is necessary to receive multiple “inputs” at the same time to diversify the process. Its development shall not be flat, but it shall lead to sequential ruptures forcing to reconsider discontinuities. Several people, from different fields and with previous lack of awareness on the matter, if possible, should be involved in the process in order to obtain different approaches. Of course, each proposal shall be emphatically justified and previously verified, if possible. When facing the provisional result, you shall analyse irregularities and upheavals and delve into them, for at that specific point in the process, you might have probably made a discovery. Never forget about the global image. Bruce Mau explains it perfectly: “the process is like producing a symphony. You need to understand the whole before you can decide on the part. But you can only get to the whole by creating the parts. It’s a bi-directional process.

Controvert yourself

You have to find a way to be rational and utopian, hypercritical and self-complacent, literal and metaphorical, abrasive and generous, egotistical and humble, exhibitionist and reserved, excessive and synthetic, theoretical and pragmatic, tireless and tiring, mythological and scientific, ironic and explicit, faithful and agnostic... and so on ad infinitum, without being contradictory, but “controversial”.

This concept sums up the title of the thesis for Rem Koolhaas has the ability to present two reflections at once without being contradictory. He adapts to change and transformation so fast that by the time the rest have assumed their final budgets, they are obsolete to him. Therefore he considers that “Content” has an ephemeral, provisional, banal, etc. element vocation, and when we’ve finished assimilating it, Rem has already moved on.

“Change tends to fill people with this incredible fear. We are surrounded by crisismongers who see the city in terms of decline. I kind of automatically embrace the change. Then I try to find ways in which change can be mobilised to strengthen the original identity. It’s a weird combination of having faith and having no faith.” (244)

Work the analogy: Search pregnant definitions

Koolhaas has an exquisite and precise command of the language, which combined with a high intellectual clairvoyance, guarantees the permanent creation of slogans that are inserted into the collective imagination such as Manhattanism, Bigness, Junk space, generic city, hyper-density, fundamentals, perform-action. Even when they don’t belong to him, he makes them his own and, more importantly, he makes the critical mass to think so.
Conceptualising something means reversing its configuration significantly. In western language is not as usual, but the oriental one works by analogies and symbolism. Koolhaas has understood and exploited this concept like no other.

**Always question the proper approach**

Rem Koolhaas has not had a conventional career, the "normal" label is not applicable to him. Neither is it in his role as journalist. He undertook an innovative project using alternative original narrative methodologies and journalistic techniques. All his creative experiences, despite belonging to very different fields, have something in common: the approaches to each one of them are unconventional. He is the "de-contextualiser" par excellence, or rather the "re-contextualiser". He specialises in taking an item out of its natural context, putting it in totally different environment and, in a few seconds, it is as if such element had always belonged to that particular place.

Always reconsider the best possible approach to what you are developing regardless of the field of action. The communication strategy can eventually change the essential content of the message, so don't forget to reinforce your message by means of its narrative.

**Clone yourself: create an "alter ego"**

If you cannot find a way out of a situation that is limiting your creativity, get yourself an alter ego who is able to get out of such chain and who is also able to show your reflection in the mirror in order to favour both sides AMO can do and say what OMA cannot and OMA can build what AMO only gets to imagine.

**Always copy, but do it well**

Like in the case of the approaches, references have to be diverse, attractive, motivating, etc. They are normally needed when walking into unknown territory... They are like little fireflies lighting your way. Use them! Extract their essence but don't let them dazzle you. When in the middle of the creative process copying oneself is another key resource. It is impossible to be original forever and, sometimes, ideas suggested for a project, suddenly "fit" much better in another one (like when your friend tries on the dress you were going to buy and it shall no longer be yours...).

Take also the chance and the accidental into account. Nature is random, so any human process must necessarily be so as well. Take advantage of mistakes, reinventing them and, what's more important, have fun. Games, humour, irony... are all inherent to the creative process. Suffering destroys creativity.

**Take part in other disciplines (or gobble them up)**

Koolhaas immediately understood the need to interact with other disciplines, in a different field to the one architects are used to. I have often heard the comparison of the architect with an "orchestra conductor", for he/she coordinates the different agents involved in the construction. While that could be an accurate comparison a few years ago, media and methodologies revolutions led to the need for the architect to work at the same conceptual level as the rest of professionals from completely different fields with whom he/she collaborates.

His complicity with Cecil Balmond, Petra Blaisse (whose evolution has been parallel since the 80s) or Ima Boom allows him to "cede" control and move on to a true partnership, where everyone takes the other to their limits, enabling growth and mutual learning.

In an interesting interview with Arup's engineer, Rory McGowan, who has worked with OMA for 17 years (so many that, according to his own words, the only person left from the beginnings of OMA is Rem), explains the CTV conception process from his point of view. He describes how he was scared at first, when he was submitted that object of impossible geometry, but in the end, everyone contributed with the best of themselves to develop it.

While Rem focused on the confluence of the building's functional cycle with its formal configuration to Rory it was basically a question of material quantity. They were able to show the client that the amount of material to be used would be the same if applied to a building type with a totally
different geometry, but with the advantage of achieving the required “iconic building”. And because those were the words of an engineer, the client was convinced.

**Surround yourself with a team that fosters the project**

You shall always know the goals you want to achieve and rely on professionals that will help you achieve them. "SMLXL" and "Content" are an example of how teams determine the final outcome.

Bruce Mau, artistic director of "SMLXL" (such is his importance that he appears as co-author) is an iconic, experienced and specialized in publishing high-quality volumes designer, thanks to which he provided solidity and a knowledge of graphic and architectural environment to the project but, specially, he introduces a unique fact, a completely new approach to the concept of management of information in architectural publications: "architecture is a practice of synthesis and, as a consequence, it is one of the most voluptuous integrators of cultural practice, from material science and manufacturing technologies to creative image making and storytelling. Architecture is culture and therefore is relevant across a much broader spectrum than it typically communicates with". Rem Koolhaas understands in "SMLXL" that the design of information is as important as information itself and that’s the reason why Bruce Mau became co-author.

As for Jennifer Sigler, she is the book's editor. At the time of the publication she was 24 years old and had almost no experience in the field of architecture. From that position she was able to bring freshness to the project’s approaches, an external vision to the discipline that introduced an essential qualitative variable for its success.

In "Content", both the editor (Brendan McGetrick) and the artistic director (Simon Brown) were very young people, with no experience in the field of architectural communication and even little previous professional experience, but extremely brilliant and radical in their corresponding disciplines. Moreover, as mentioned before, this is a voluntary circumstance, since the project's a priori was to question any previous approach, acting as if they had landed on Mars. The team is definitely decisive in the final outcome. Victor van der Chijs, one of his partners in 2010, said on the interview "Design the design process": "We want to refresh and renew our organization on a permanent basis.

We really want every year at least 25 percent of our people to be new. And we want them to be young, bright people. The idea is that we really need those people to feed in new ideas, make sure that OMA stays relevant and really understands what is going on."

**Get out of the comfort zone**

The comfort zone is that vital space in which we feel comfortable because everything is known, but it is the creative process’ enemy. The main rule is to change the rules as soon as you feel that the floor beneath you is stable, to get out of the comfort zone.

Koolhaas lives kilometres away from his comfort zone. His life is constant change and risk taking (personally and professionally) which is deeply motivating, rewarding, exciting ... and absolutely destabilising and exhausting. We “mortals” aspire to leave the comfort zone from time to time, but not to live in it. That is the reason why his office is permanently defined as an area with a vibrant, bright, extremely intense... atmosphere, able to extract the best of everyone and enhance the qualities of those who embark on the adventure.

That is why it has been the starting point of many of the brightest and most interesting minds of today’s architecture. But the fact remains that almost only Rem can live permanently under those lights, that is not easy to maintain that level of vulnerability, self-demand, stress and destabilisation, as confirmed by the continuous change in OMA's composition.

The statements of Nicolai Ouroussoff on "Delirious New York" in an interview in 2012 serves as a true example of his life philosophy: “The more implausible it seemed to be defending it, the more exciting it was to write about".
A LOS DOS LADOS DEL ESPEJO

(REM AT BOTH SIDES OF THE MIRROR)

(anexos)
“Suddenly OMA was global, not in the form of multiple offices turning out a single “product” but increasingly involved more and more deeply in other cultures.

We became experts on difference: different possibilities, contexts, sensibilities, currencies, sensualities, rigors, integrities, powers.

From then on we navigated between the potentials for credit and discredit that globalization implied.”

Rem Koolhaas
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En este apartado se incluyen todos aquellos documentos que tienen relevancia para la investigación y cuyo acceso documental es complicado, bien por tratarse de entrevistas propias inéditas, documentos descatalogados o artículos de páginas web que han desaparecido o no están disponibles en la actualidad.

Solamente se incluyen las entrevistas cuya divulgación ha sido autorizada por los autores.
My work is focused in Rem Koolhaas and OMA-AMO and his work as communicator in architecture, especially in “Content”. My point is that Koolhaas books go on progressing to become not just architecture’s books but architecture themselves and they show his obsessions of the moment. For example, “Content” is, somehow the culture of congestion made book. Do you agree?

Yes.

“SMLXL”, which is your creation, is much more sober although very radical too in a very different way. It turned out to be an icon, a cult object for architects, students, designers, and all kind of creatives. I would like to ask you about it. First of all, how did it happen? How did you get in touch? How much of “Zone 1|2: The Contemporary City” is on it? (Jennifer Sigler declared that Rem was obsessed with your book).

Rem was a contributor to ZONE 1|2, and that was my first introduction to Rem’s work. Other than that, the two projects are related only by theme and subject matter. I think what resonated for Rem about ZONE 1|2, was that it was a MODEL not an illustration. We did not set out to design an illustration of the new urban conditions. We wanted to create a model that “behaved” and “performed” the way that the urban world behaved and performed. It had to have all the abrasion, jump cuts, juxtapositions, and complexity of a city. ZONE 1|2 IS A CITY. It is not an illustration of a city. That is what gives it the resonance, even today, so that we feel like we are holding a city in our hands. We are experiencing a city.

In a similar way, I wanted S,M,L,XL to BE the culture of architecture, not a commentary on or a reflection of the culture of architecture. I wanted to design the book as an EXPERIENCE of the complexity and difficulties, the failures, the uncertainties, heartbreaks, conflicts, and also the accomplishments, triumphs and rewards of the REALITY of architectural practice. On the one hand, both books claim a documentary methodology, ostensibly recording their subjects, but the ambition is truly first-person authenticity of the reality of cultural practice. In both, the form is the content, the design is the reality of the subject, and that is why Rem insisted on naming me as a co-author.

“SMLXL” was a point of no return in architectural communication, do you agree? What do you think this book has meant for the communication in the architecture?

S,M,L,XL did things that are still being absorbed into the practice of architectural communication — some easily, some regrettably, some with fierce resistance. First, we revealed the culture through an architectural lens, rather than looking at architecture through a cultural lens. Architecture is a practice of synthesis — perhaps the most important cultural function in our historical era — and as a consequence it is one of the most voluptuous integrators of cultural practice, from material science and manufacturing technologies to creative making and story telling. Architecture IS culture and therefore is relevant across a much broader spectrum than it typically communicates with.
As we increase the immersive dominance of our urban experience, where more than half of all global citizens live in urban areas, the design of our culture is the design of our cities. Our reality is a designed reality. Our life is lived inside of the envelopes that we design.

I am reminded of a story Rem once told me of a house he was building in Bordeaux for a man who had been in a terrible car accident and was paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair. When he visited the man to discuss the design of the house, the man asked Rem to approach very closely because he could not raise his voice above a whisper. The man said, “Please make my house as complex as possible. It will be my entire universe.” Well, we are now all confined to the wheelchair of our own devise. The complexity and beauty we design will define the quality and richness of our life experience.

In that spirit, we rejected the false perfection of architectural culture. If you were to look at architectural monographs of that time — and mostly still today — you would not be faulted for believing that sex never happens in buildings, that people and things don’t grow old and die, that accidents and natural disasters never occur, and the purpose and intent in the architect is never forgotten or cast aside and the designed space used for a purpose sometimes entirely at odds with the original intent. But that is the reality of architecture.

The vast majority of architecture is not produced by architects. Still the profession holds to an island mentality that sterilizes any bodily fluid out of the practice of architecture. That old boy club is still going strong, still campaigning for a gentleman’s practice that has nothing to do with making money or giving voice to power, when the reality of architectural practice at the urban scale is largely in service to both.

For me, the regrettable legacy of S,M,L,XL is the “big book” syndrome. It was never our intent to start a book war, but architects from MVRDV to Bernard Tschumi, BIG and Irma Boom all produced doorstoppers in the years that followed. In that sense, I think Content falls into the trap as well. Sadly, forests of trees paid the price for the copycat killers that followed in the footsteps of S,M,L,XL.

Which is its position right now? In my opinion it remains untouchable.

I think largely because of the inertial resistance of the most conservative elements in the architectural field, S,M,L,XL still resonates with a radical energy. It shouldn’t. It is twenty years old. And if you look at the book carefully, what seems radical is actually extremely tightly controlled and rigorous. The pages are designed in a very rigorous system that allows the reader to track the different forms of content through the book — essays, rants, dictionary, etc — so that the typographic voice shifts subtly from one form to another. In fact, the real energy in the design is not on the pages but between the pages, it’s the cut from one image or idea to the next that gives the book its dynamic energy. That cinematic effect is not in the two dimensional surface of the book, the page turn is the typographic equivalent of the jump cut.

I find very inspiring the idea of giving an extra dimension to the reading of a project, including sensorial world...I specially like the example of the Kunsthall and the intention to give sound to the story. Could you give me some other examples in which you tried to give an extra dimension (sensorial, physical...)? About edition, could you tell me which typographies did you use most? Why did you decide to structure the book by sizes?

What we tried to do in every case was to get to the essence of the ideas in the work. What we discovered almost immediately was that the real genius of the design had not been clearly communicated. In some cases, projects that had been extensively published were unintelligible. So we developed a process where we would gather the material for a project, what had been published, the original presentation, and sometimes working materials.

We would then have a session with Rem or the project designers to get the story straight. From there we would design the section of the book to clearly communicate the big ideas in the work. Often that took several iterations and sometimes, radical departures.

As for organizing the book by size, it just emerged in the collaboration. We can’t remember who first suggested it. It gave the book a clear organizing principle that most importantly was systematic but also allowed us to recognize that scale fundamentally changes the nature of the work. While the intellectual practice may be fractal, with ideas and aesthetic strategies applied at different scales across the range of projects, it is scale that changes the complexity of the work.

I’ve studied your trajectory and one of the most important concepts is considering each book as an object, completely different from the others, with its own approach. Could you tell me a bit more about your approach in ‘SMLXL’ and the design process?

The big move was the first move. We were originally contracted to produce a book of 256 pages. Rem and Jennifer described what they were trying to do, and it seemed to me that it would be so much more exciting to fold the book in half — to get twice as many pages. From the experience of the reader, a two-page image is a two-page image, no matter the scale of the pages. With this approach, you get twice as many “events” — the jump cuts between the pages.

That idea really drove the creative development and we simply would not allow the limitation to constrain the creative work. So as we worked, the number of pages grew and we had to return to the publisher to let them know what we were doing, without allowing them to handcuff us in the creative process.

The process is like producing a symphony. You need to understand the whole before you can decide on the part. But you can only get to the whole by creating the parts. There is a very demanding to and fro process as you design the book and shape the overall composition where you are locking in sections of the book while leaving allowance for the parts that are still in flux.
Rem Koolhaas has declared that “Content” should be something like “SMLXL” but in uggly... They share the radicalism but they are the opposite. Can I ask you your opinion about the book in the context of the architectural communication?

Content tries to do too much on the surface of the page. I believe CLARITY is one of the most profoundly radical ideas. Lack of clarity is very limited as a space of exploration and innovation. Eventually, the cone of vision is congested with noise and the signal of clarity is lost. That is a political idea that is very attractive to many powerful interests. I think the highest purpose of our work is clarity and the communication of values and ideas. So I am less interested in the classical definition of radical as somehow “wild” or “ugly.” Real ugly and wild are unpredictable — and designers and architects are not signing up for unpredictable. So what you have really is fake ugly, and fake wild. I’m not interested.

Could you tell me which are, in your opinion, the aesthetical references of OMA in the communicative level? In “Content” I find parallelisms with Richard Hamilton’s contribution as prophet of postmodernism. It seems that in Content there is a kind of effort for reordering the principles of postmodernism and some kind of elegy of pop-art, what do you think?:

That sounds plausible.

Do you think that the graphical and communicative display redounds on his architecture or is it bidirectional?

If you look at the history of graphic expression, every new social condition demanded and created new visual forms for expressing the new ideas. The new forms of expression then generated new ideas and social organizations. This process where new ideas invent new visual languages and new visual languages invent new ideas is always happening in architectural and urban thinking. Imagine what the new ways of visualizing complex systems are now doing to understanding the language of design for complex organizations. That back and forth is going to generate new work on both sides, and new ideas for living in new ways.

I believe that OMA contributions to architecture are unique but I think that the genuine contribution of OMA-AMO is in architectural communication, do you agree?

That is a very provocative idea. There is no doubt that Rem and his office have had a profound and sometimes even positive impact on architectural communication. It is not surprising to discover that Rem begins his work as a filmmaker and a journalist writer.

The cinematic story telling in his work is very powerful. That story boarding informs all the work in the way it is conceived and presented, and in fact the experience of the work is a time-based narrative. That is why we added “Waiting for Godot” to the Rotterdam Kunsthalle.

That communication informs and transforms the architectural practice of OMA is undoubtedly true. The controversial suggestion you put forward is that that is more important than the architectural work itself. I have always been so impressed with the design work of Rem and the OMA offices that I find it hard to go there. If you look at Porto, the work is such a masterpiece of design that it is hard to assert that somehow the communication is more important than the work itself.

What is almost certainly true is that the biggest influence of the office is in the communication. That reflects the fundamental limitation — and beauty — of architectural experience. Millions of people can buy SMLXL. Very few of them can visit the house in Paris. So the impact on the discourse is driven by communication — not architecture. But the architecture has to live up to the communication, or the house of cards collapses.

About Rem Koolhaas himself, as I know you have a deep knowledge of his life and career, I would like to ask you some questions. I couldn’t find many drawings of Rem, can you tell me a bit more about his draftsman facet?

Not aware of any drawings other than ballpoint pen sketches and diagrams. As I said, Rem is a filmmaker and author who works through the people on his team to get them to create things that they are not capable of on their own.

As you had the opportunity to work with him, could you tell me a bit about the process? Is it so intense as it seems? I heard he is tough but extremely generous. How is it when he collaborates with such a respectful figure as you are?

No one I know works harder than Rem. Rem is extremely generous in his approach to the people he works with. He understands and supports what it takes to get great work produced. At the same time, he is unrelenting in his drive to get to the best possible work and anyone who lets up on that is open for sometimes brutal attack.

Rem was always very respectful with me. But he could be quite brutal on the people in my studio, which over time caused problems. I don’t work that way and it became more and more difficult to get people in my studio to work on OMA projects.

Regarding the strong turns in his career, once maximal congestion is over and he seems to be returning to “fundamentals”, would you be able to predict his next turn? (maybe Malevich’s white on white?)

I can’t imagine anyone predicting Rem Koolhaas.
What do you think this book has meant for the communication in the architecture?

I think it was significant in terms of acknowledging the ways in which architecture (and architects themselves) have been subsumed by mass consumer culture. By adopting the look and tone of a commercial magazine and applying its devices to OMA's practice, we were trying to simultaneously satirize pop media and take advantage of the their greater clarity and excitement. Most architecture books are dry and almost wilfully alienating to a non-architects. We wanted to be the opposite of that.

Which were the intentions of the project at the beginning of the process?

The intention was to make a follow-up to SMLXL and a companion to the Content exhibition. Particularly as it related to SMLXL, the idea was to make something that was almost its opposite. Where SMLXL was big and heavy and expensive and refined, Content could be small and light and cheap and vulgar. The two books were also drastically different in term of time scale. SMLXL took 7 years to make, but we finished Content in about 6 months.

It terms of its overall theme, Content was also a vehicle for Rem to announce a new emphasis on China and decreasing engagement with America. OMA had just won the CCTV competition and Rem was more or less obsessed with the apparently infinite possibilities of China. I structured the book to reflect this, organizing the projects by geography in order to highlight this shift, starting in the States and culminating triumphantly in Asia.

Do you think that the main intentions were satisfied? Yes, totally.

My personal opinion is that this book is much more a research than a compilation of projects, as there used to be the architectural books, do you agree?

Yes, and I think this is partly explained by the magazine format, which allowed us to display information in a wide range of ways. Rather than showing full projects, we could simply extract the most interesting elements - a map, diagram, text, photo series, etc. - and allow them to function as their own features. Coming from the world of journalism, I felt (and still feel) somewhat allergic to ponderous explanations of architectural projects and so for Content we tried devise as many alternatives as possible. I think part of the book's lasting value resides in this repertoire of alternative strategies for communicating architectural ideas.

Which are the main differences from its preceding texts, especially with SMLXL, apart from the fact of being divided by geography and the appearance of multidisciplinary topics?

I think the it’s an extension of the textual experimentation in SMLXL, not a break from it. Perhaps the most significant difference is that I encouraged Rem to write very short texts. At some point I bought a huge number of tiny notebooks in China. They were about the size of a Moleskin
Basically the pornographic covers were made by one of the designers (Simon Brown) as a joke. The jokes came partly from the fact that some of the zines that we were originally looking at as references - Butt and Kult, for example - had pornographic elements. Rem showed them to some of his friends and they found them funny and so we decided to include a little compilation in the back.

These images were when used by critics of the CCTV building as 'evidence' for their own absurd formalistic interpretations of the design. They claimed it resembled a backside and was thus humiliating to China. This, for me, was simple opportunism from people who didn't like the building and were desperately looking for an excuse to demand the project halted. The issue went viral on Chinese message boards and did cause Rem quite a bit of stress. I remember him making a kind of awkward appearance on CCTV to help explain the issue. Eventually it went away.

There's a pretty thorough breakdown of the controversy here.

With regard to your personal experience I would like to know what was your main contribution to this project? and what did this project give to you?

It's somewhat difficult to answer. I was the editor and project leader, so I contributed to more or less every aspect. I suppose my main contribution was to give the book a sense connection to the wider world. It was very important to me that we show the economic, social, political, etc. forces that shape architecture (and OMA). Rem, of course, shared this belief, and I think that's why he hired me.

The project completely defined my life at the time. I was 24 and had never made a book before, although I had made magazines. I was overwhelmed and frankly terrified for much of the experience. But I learned a tremendous amount about book making, architecture, writing, and creative bravery. I can't imagine the shape of my work without it.

How did you get in touch with OMA and are you still collaborating with them?

I was initially hired when AMO was working on a special issue of Wired magazine. They were consulting for Conde Nast and were looking for journalists to collaborate with. I knew Rem's daughter from NYU and she suggested me.

Do you find any influence of this publication in some other architectural publications that came later such as MVRDV's Farmax, "yes is more" from BIG, and so on?

Yes, I'm sure that Content influenced these works. Winy Maas once told me this directly.
Dear Mr. Butragueno

I was the Curator for this exhibition and I’m happy to answer your questions. The show started in Berlin on my initiative, the NAI in Rotterdam was the second venue as the main sponsor came from Netherlands. There has been published a catalogue with the same title at TASCHEN, Cologne.

The choice of the places is quite relevant given the bidirectional relationship of Koolhaas with Mies, what do you think about it?

Rem Koolhaas has a long obsession with the work of Mies van der Rohe and contributed already to the exhibition catalogue “Mies in America” in 2001. For Rem it was the perfect opportunity to test some of the strategies that he was developing for the addition to the IIT Campus in Chicago he was planning at the same time (McCormick Center).

My research is a reflection on architectural books and their evolution, especially in OMA. I defend that in Content the “content” itself and the design are the same thing and they both represent a “culture of congestion” manifestation. It’s not a book on architecture but architecture in a book format... My personal opinion is that this book is much more a research than a compilation of projects, as there used to be the architectural books.

Yes, OMA is producing a book on each project, even when not realized and sometimes only in a copy for the office, it is a design experience where the book becomes a kind of condensed information on it. I’m very hesitant although to use the word “research” for it as it is a compilation of facts and images and some polemic texts (kill the skyscraper) but it has no methodology else than the geographical structure (Go East). Research in a scientific context is more based on a clear structure and thesis.

The exhibition added a plus to the whole concept and insists on the idea of the ephemeral. In your personal experience, which are the inputs that OMA offers different from other similar experiences?

They tried to make the exhibition an overall experience of the complexity of their concepts and projects. Each project had a different approach in the curatorial strategy while only a few elements (the background walls) were the same. A lot of new elements were introduced as inflatable models, art installations as background for theory (Junk Space by Tony Oursler) and so on.
What do you think Content (both book and exhibition) has meant for the communication in the architecture?

Book and exhibition have presented together the variety of designs and concepts in the office of OMA for the years from 1993-2003. Alone the number of projects and the incredible amount of variations they presented on each project were a unique experience to understand the process.

Which were the intentions of the project at the beginning of the process?

The intention from our side (Museum) was to present one of the most interesting architects in the world who had a long-time relation to Berlin to the Berlin audience. It was the time when he was finishing the Dutch Embassy and the exhibition was to explain the background of this project in the context of all the other seminal projects he was working on at the same time. And the other main intention was to challenge Rem Koolhaas and OMA/AMO to find a spatial relation of their exhibition to the building by Mies.

Do you think that the main intentions were satisfied?

Yes, the exhibition was a great success on all levels and the dialogue between Rem Koolhaas’ exhibition and the space by Mies van der Rohe created a unique experience that surpassed the catalogue.
How did you start with Content? which were the premises? Which references did you have over your table?

Rem Koolhaas had noticed Jack magazine in London, which I was creative director of working alongside art director Simon Brown. His office then contacted us about the possibility of producing a magazine/book crossover of similar nature to Jack, covering the projects they were currently working on.

Which were the intentions of the project at the beginning of the process?

Rem was excited about the fact that me and Simon knew very little about architecture and were able to approach the subject with much less respect than it usually gets. He saw this as being very important to the project. As I remember, the idea was to capture a snapshot in time of the many projects they were working on. The finished piece was to have the look and feel of a magazine, which would capture the ever increasing fast moving nature of their work, and be the exact opposite of the classic architectural coffee table books that smbi had influenced.

Do you think that the main intentions were satisfied?

I would say yes, the book is quite chaotic in places, but has an energy to it that is missing in more traditional architecture books.

Did Rem review your work often? (I saw a picture of him looking at the wall), Were there many changes?

The team would regularly meet with Rem, mostly in the evenings, he would review layouts, concepts and then feedback. The structure of the book took a while to create, it changed constantly and quite a lot of work was discarded as we went along. Once the structure was in place the workflow became a lot quicker towards the end of the project.

How many people were working on the graphic design?

Myself and Simon Brown were responsible for design of the book, but other people were feeding in graphics and illustrations from within OMA.

Did the contributors choose the thematic or was Rem who told them to write about something in particular? Did they choose their graphics?

The editor Brendan McGetrick and Rem would commission written pieces that were part of the East/west structure. Simon and I would then art direct visual content around these articles.
Which are the main references this publication has had in the aesthetical and formal aspect? I see Manga, magazines like Jack, Wired, Archis...Richard Hamilton (pop art in general), Chris Ware, Oliverio Toscani... what is your point of view about that?

Me and Simon supplied a magazine structure and aesthetic. Within that structure Content held a pit of different styles.

What do you think this book has meant for the communication in the architecture?

I've no idea! I became immersed in the project, did it and then had nothing to with architecture ever again.

With regard to your personal experience I would like to know how would you describe the experience? what did you get from it?

The experience was very intense, physically and mentally exhausting! Watching Rem work and the amount of energy and vision he had was very inspiring.
How and when did your collaboration with RK start?

Our collaboration started actually when I worked at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and I was in my twenty’s, in 1980 because we’ve made an exhibition on OMA at the Stedelijk Museum.

But the actual collaboration in the projects started in 1985 I think, because I became freelance exhibition designer. So I designed exhibitions in OMA’s work in the late eighties and beginning of the nineties.

And at the same time they asked me to get involved in the Dance Theatre. In the Dance Theatre I became advisor of all the colour use and material use and in that case also the furniture. I made the whole composition of furniture for all the ballet dance spaces. There was very little budget so I had to use tent-hand design and we covered it with a poster and it was very funny because that project was so based on the budget of the client, with no support of any government or contractor in anyway.

And so we were in it together with the client, Rem and OMA in a kind of private situation with the Dance Theatre so that made it very sympathetic because we all worked for nothing and we all worked day and night. So together with photographers and lightning specialist and so on...we installed lamps and we painted walls and applied gold leafs literally with our own hands. So that was really a nice beginning for someone who was starting up like myself.

Of course exhibition design and interior design are intimately related. It’s all about colour, and material, and lights... so that was nice. And then, somebody had to design the stage curtain, so I did it. Of course we were always working together and in teams, but that was the first stage curtain that I did.

So that was the beginning, eighty five, eighty six, eighty seven...those exhibitions and the Dance Theatre. And then quickly after, the Kunsthal in Rotterdam.

How would you define your working process? Sometimes you have to work with a concept and some others you start from the very concept like in Casa da Musica.

In Dance Theatre and Kunsthal also, I was very much involved. In that moment I didn’t have a team yet, so I worked alone, so that was much more connected from the beginning, because as a freelance you are much more flexible and affordable, I guess. So what changed with the course of time, is that I became a real office, with a group of designers working with me.

So, it depends, some architects think it’s worthwhile like OMA. They have a lot of outside collaborations, exterior advisors...they search inspiration with philosophers or writers, artists or curators or they ask me as a person to be part of the discussion team, I’m an advisory person as an individual to OMA in all the phases, and then if we really are asked to design (landscape, interior,
etc) then the team become active. Also if we are part of the master plan, most of the landscaping becomes involved in the early stages, so we must work hand in hand, very connected.

So, as you explain, your configuration changed from the very beginning and also OMA's configuration has changed a lot over the years. Is it harder or easier to work with them now?

With OMA it's harder in a way... It's hard to explain. OMA grew enormously. It started like an office in Rotterdam doing a couple of projects and they are 300 people now and they have offices in four places: New York, Beijing, Hong Kong, Rotterdam. And they have an enormous amount of projects; we are only involved in a handful of projects, which is good, we couldn't have more (we are 4 people at the landscape department and four at the interior department).

The difficulty is, I think, in the fact that the whole world became harder, and there is also an economic crisis, meaning there is a form of tension from the client towards schedules, regulations, fines... and that apply to us. So there is less flexibility. For example, with the budgets: before they could be reasonable or not and it was your choice to accept them or not. But nowadays you're forced to accept them, there are very different conditions. We are usually subcontractors, but some other times we have contracts directly with OMA's clients, and then we have our own relationships.

You already mentioned crisis. When you and OMA started there was also an economical and social crisis but this time is so big that somehow it will force us to change the perception of the projects and architectures themselves. How do you see the future?

It’s a difficult question. OMA is one of the architects we work with but in fact we work with many different. Each architect has a different solution or reaction to this situation. OMA obviously focused his work more and more in the middle east, China and eastern Europe.

I have not a clear view of how the future will develop. I think we are part of that development right now. We are conscious that in Spain and or course in Greece may offices like us just shut down, so we are fighting and doing our best to keep alive.

So one of the roles that OMA has at this moment, is a kind of brotherhood, which is very nice, because we have such a huge history together, so we are in the position to not expect at all but at least ask for support from their part. And they are always willing to think about it, I'm not saying they do it, but mentally they always do it, because we are an important part of their whole creative evolution, but they are of course part of this whole situation, so they can only offer their support. But we are very lucky that we have this kind of partnership with them.

Ana about your own work, and this technological revolution in materials, and also in the working system (from the hand making to computer dependency) how do you confront it?

Yes, that is true in landscaping but in textile work, where that doesn't apply so much because we do everything by hand. We don't usually design textiles, we use existing textiles. It's very much crafts, and of course the computer helps us in visioning situations for the client, to make it much more understandable because we have to show him what the effect of our implementations are in the space. Of course it also works with landscaping, but there I experienced that the digital influence is enormous because it's much more considered as part of architecture by the client so they expect it to be completely integrated with the presentations of the architectural project, much more than with these some other implementations.

Specially in the eastern market, where the rendering are so important they need to have this realistic feeling.

Absolutely, but also in the Gulf regions where we work together with OMA (Qatar, Dubai...) they are used to have very literal representations and the demands for technical precision in very early stages (also in Milan, where we are working on a park, nothing to do with OMA)

But the requirements of technical precision in landscape in a very early stage are getting stronger. And, for example, there is a whole subterranean world, with roads and tunnels and trains and tunnels... and exists... and you have no idea.

And that has to be already clarified almost in the schematic design phase and definitely design is already construction drawings, so you do need a lot of digital calculation programs and a lot of precision. So the innocence level of landscape and are more creative implementations in those cases are completely different.

I'm also interested in this connection between interior and exterior. You office is called "Inside Outside", so I guess this connection is pretty important for you. So, how do you develop this during the working process, for example in big projects like Seattle?

It's complex but also very clear. I mean, if you are part of the whole development it becomes so clear; specially with architects like OMA who can communicate very well. But it is essential that the people explain the conditions and the clients explain also their conditions very well to us, separately. And then it's not so complex because you understand what the expectations are, what the forms, the limitations, and security, safety, hygiene... And with the architects everything about the space and the essence of the building it's actually easier to do both because you have a story that is completely fluid, than to do one of the two. It might sound strange but you become much integral part of the entire story.

And it might be very personal but I find it very difficult to limitate to the space up to the facade and not understand what's going on inside. So what I usually do is that, whatever our commission is, we always want to understand it entirety. And that is why our work is very "inefficient" in terms of time, because we work in the entirety and also in the whole context where all the things take place.
I think that is something you have in common with all the OMA conception: understanding not only the place but the economical, cultural or social situation.

And the users and the time, the political circumstances. Of course we are not geniuses and we can't have everything but we try just to have the feeling, partly instinctive partly by education, we try to understand. But of course you must understand that OMA and Inside Outside grew up together. Of course OMA started much earlier and has a very different level in this profession. They also had a different starting point as writers. But in actual architectural development was kind of parallel.

I strongly believe that his starting as a journalist has a very important influence in the way he started conceiving architecture.

Also as script writer and he even wrote a film. So of course is putting into words but is the scenario and the understanding of space and movement and the experiences from one place to another. These are part in their work and also part in my personal work, since I started in Art School and it was very much about installation, site specific installations, etc. So although from a different angle there's of course this mentality affinity.

And finally how would you define both your both evolution through these years? I mean, conceptual evolution. I mean for example, my personal opinion is that Rem Koolhaas started very close to Utopia, somehow trying to build it up, and its conception is getting more and more complex with all these inputs (material, technology...) specially now in South Eastern Market. There is a huge evolution from the very beginning. And of course he has always this point of innovation and visionary. So, as you were very close through all the way, how would you summarize it?

I can't speak for Rem Koolhaas or OMA, but I think we tried to do both because we also believe in arts and crafts. In some sense, there are things that have nothing to do with renovation but it has always to do with invention: you reconsider all the possibilities each time and with each project and so weather that can go with new technology or with very old traditions. That has to be seen and considered with every project. So I think looking to historic inheritance as well as to what is going on is a good combination.
Charlie Koolhaas es artista, escritora y fotógrafa. colabora habitualmente con OMA desde el año 2000 reflejando la arquitectura del estudio en su contexto. Su última colaboración ha sido en "Project Japan".

My research tries to prove somehow that the most important contribution of Rem Koolhaas to architecture involves the communicative area. Do you agree?

Yes, definitely it is part of it. I definitely think he has kind of a unique position in the way he communicates somehow to a lot of audiences, the traditional architectural audience and the general public.

This is how he started his career, in any case, as a journalist. And he initially wrote books, not necessarily related to architecture.

And he was not even a conventional journalist. I mean, he didn’t start in a traditional way. Maybe that’s why he is always capable to understand a subject from many different perspectives.

Yes, I actually don’t know much about architecture. I studied psychology and culture theory. And became a photographer and an artist. I work with architects to some extend because I work creating pictures that help to illustrate or define ideas about city and meet people who do research on the kind of living condition. But I’m not really an expert about the Architecture industry and I’m probably not the best on talking about the analysis of it.

But I can talk about Rem because I know how he communicates in general and his interests in his life that feed into his work.

So, which ones do you think they are?

For example, when you talk about "Content", I don’t know exactly what it means for architecture because I’m not immersed in that conversation. Of course it’s a reflection on post-modernity and pop art. But it is not one kind of linear explanation. There are so many influences he’s dealing with. Definitely "Content" is totally influenced by his interest in journalism and the mass media, rather than it’d be in art or even about post-modernity. That’s kind of elevating it to a different level of conversation.

At that time, when he was working in "Content" there was this whole explosion on magazines, I know because I was working myself on one. The art- culture magazines, also with a kind of tabloid component. They exploded in popularity. I remember that Rem was reading a lot of these magazines and he was really interested in this explosion. There were magazines like FHM, at the beginning, that brought quite intellectual, interesting topics but they did it in a very sarcastic, humorous and individual way. So, at the end of the 90’s there was this kind of explosion on magazines in UK, based on playboy formula, that popped up in the 80’s in USA. This formula appeals to both most basic an primitive but also intellectual parts of the male mind.

Rem was quite interested in this media phenomenon in which intellectuality and stupidity were combined. So he contact one of these magazines called Jack. So he hired the graphic designers from this magazine called Jack for his new project "Content".
Yes, Simon Brown and Jon Link.

So in a way Rem saw that these kind of magazines have understood how to reach great audiences and that's what he wanted to do to communicate his own ideas too. Somehow the conversations about architecture don't have to be relegated only to the architecture field and they don't need to be only between architects. This is my interpretation but there is always this pretension and intellectualism as if architecture only belong to a high culture and is a domain of geniuses. But of course it's a field that affects everyone. The exhibition "Fundamentals" also pointed out that architecture is the most mundane thing. It's an everyday matter, something that people live with so they can understand intuitively. But it gets kind of coded in this language kind of confusing and intellectual. So his attempt was to break away from that.

It's quite interesting this comparison you make between "Content" and "Fundamentals" because for me, in a way "Content" meant maximum congestion and "Fundamental" was some kind of back to basics. At a graphical level they have very different: "Fundamentals" is much more sober. But you are talking more about the inner concept.

I think this is also because of the format: "Content" is a book and "Fundamentals" is an exhibition. But I really feel that they were very similar in concept although the graphic aspect was very different. Maybe he's moving out of this style, this kind of collage mixing all together. But somehow the style of "Content" is the style now, in architectural schools. It became the kind of architectural graphics, in a way he defined a new look for architectural like or architectural vision communication. Obviously, 10 years later he's moved past and is exactly doing the opposite, attempting to make it super clear. But somehow, the style may be different but I wouldn't say from maximal congestion to minimal.

So maybe it's just a much more minimal style but I think it's just aesthetically. But I think is exactly the same thing that he's doing. By making all those articles on every single element and all of those small stories... "Content" has also so many other small stories too. Putting the information in that kind of chat form so I think it's very similar.

You have commented that somehow, he anticipates the architectural style that it's going to be over the table for the next years in the architectural world. But it's exactly the same moment in he just passed by this style and goes to a very different thing. So somehow he's anticipating the architectural graphic language that will remain for the next years.

Yes, that's the nature of being an influence. He is definitely preoccupied about information design because somehow nowadays architecture, rather than simply making architecture is making information design.

And about "Project Japan" could you tell me how did you start?, how was the planning at the beginning?

Rem had this idea about making a book on metabolism. And Rem had asked me to photograph what they call post occupancy, so that is basically architecture after is being used or while it's being used. I guess when Rem wanted me to photograph for him that, he wanted on a specific perspective. Because I'm not really so interested in photographing architectural Projects for the kind of Architectural media, that is not my focus. I understood that he wanted to include a sociological element. Rather than represent the most perfect image he wanted to include this sociological point. This is what I do when I usually work for OMA.

Do you usually collaborate with them?

Yes I've taken pictures of a lot of his buildings. Some of them are published and some of them not. My first photographs for them where in 2000. They were the pictures taken in Porto, Casa da Música. What they wanted was really to show the strange environment that surrounds it. How a building like that seems to be opposite to the strange, old and traditional Portuguese neighbourhood. OMA made an effort to fit in, to become part of the environment. I tried to represent the blending. So basically from that moment on I have continued to do a similar thing.

Those pictures appear in "Content" and I think they show perfectly how this piece melts with this strange environment.

I have photographed so many buildings on Rem and I have always tried to show them in their own environment. But there hasn't been a particular anthology on these pictures. I guess this is something I will do in the future, maybe make a book out of these pictures. The metabolism book was a very different one because they were all of these old buildings from many different architects, we were photographing a whole movement. What they really wanted to show was the nature of this incredibly idealistic idea of an entire way of living. The metabolists didn't create just architecture. For example they created exact routine programs of how to exist in the building, so that was what was really unique about it.

So the question of the book was how they manage to do that and which way did the architecture feel and what does it have to say of architecture in general. Somehow it was destined to fail. It was destined to be the first layer of many layers.

Yes, it had a huge influence on the way people were living, even in politics and sociology. It was in fact a short period, but quite intense and quite radical too.

Exactly, and it was the last time that you could say that the world was small enough to have a movement with such a pure impact in the political system. So the question was that he wanted us to look on how they lived in, it was more again about the context. I don't know if you could read my book, it's called "Metabolism on trip". I made an entire journey through these buildings in Japan so I made a kind of trip through Japan through metabolism. So the book is basically the pictures of the trip made with a Japanese editor on the stories of how I ended up making
pictures inside these buildings. So this book describes my experience taking these photographs.

Finally could you tell me a bit about your own work and your own perspective when you work together with architects or related with architecture?

I'm kind of straddling in a lot of different industries at the moment. I work in contact with architecture industry and I work in art but I'm not really an artist. What I do is maybe outside of interests of the art world or is not really art. I also work in making books and publications. I taught visual culture at University in Delft. I'm also very interested in visual literacy and the ways in which we are able to communicate ideas and the tools we have available to communicate visually. And in a way the metabolism work got closer to what my interests are because I will say that ultimately my interests are closer to cultural theory, a visual kind of culture theory. So, a visual language in which we can talk about cultures forgetting about all the cliché and these kind of turns that we almost updated and bring us back into this culture that is circular. For example to create images about globalization so we no longer have to use this horrible world and loaded globalization and we can talk about globalization in a different way, which is in fact, the only way I think we could talk about it, in that visual way.

Therefore I'm very interested also in exploring how political theory or political ideology manifests itself. I'm very interested in how ideologies become reality, and photographing those moments and describing those moments. And therefore, metabolism was very close to my own interests. All my work with OMA is been a little bit like that. Usually architects have a very ideological position on how things should be used. But there has to meet the reality of how something is used. Reality is always part ideology and part failed ideology. So with metabolism I was really interested in study how it really worked something that was so idealistic, something that planner every people's moves. The architect was working on behalf of the state. So they almost defined how you're going to prepare a cup of tea. That was mostly my interest in ideology.

I think it's a fantastic example because no other movement had the possibility to put theory into practice. This is my opinion but I think somehow Rem created AMO to be able to put into practice all of his theoretical concepts freely, without the interception of the external conditions.

Yes, to preserve the purity of what they really want to talk about. Rem in general is very interested in visual culture and does a huge amount of research. Usually what architects do research they get a commission and then they make the research around the commission, whereas AMO works in a way that they could do research on the things he's interested on, he is somehow reversing the process. He will find something he's interested in, do the research and then from that commissions will come. And also un this way, commissions will be much more related with some things that he really knows because he is interested on them.

For example, I read a lot of articles about his brand-new interest in countryside, somehow abandoning the city, which was his most recognizable thematic through the years. Because he's much more interested in all the process that are happening now in the countryside.

Yes I know he's interested now in making a book because to some extent cities have been researched to death.

And of course, he also participated on that with "Delirious New York" and some other important manifestoes that came afterwards.

I think he created a method for studying cities And I guess now he's looking at what is being left out. The countryside around the world is being abandoned so I guess not he is interested on what's there.

Finally, as you know him quite well, could you kind of anticipate which could be his next interest in research or project?

What is happening now in OMA is very interesting, with the Prada Foundation. Right now he's working on creating spaces for art. He has interest on that because, again is about visual communication. Again this things related to art and architecture has always been taken out of the public discussion, they're both incredibly circular industries. And to certain extent he's attempting to change it. He wants to make this kind of cultural domains accessible to everyone. So I guess this is what he is continuing to work on.And in graphic terms yes he's working on a new minimal aesthetic, after maximum congestion. All the people talk about you know star-architecture and iconic buildings, I guess now he's creating a new aesthetic, not just in the way he graphically communicates but also in his architecture.

Yes I heard him talking about generics, like generic medicines, and no more star-architecture.

I think the generic thing is a train he is tapping into. It's like is happening in fashion world. There is a kind of fashion trend that it's called "Normcore". It's a reaction of the fashion industry to all this kind of over branding and over decoration and "over-the-top look at me" visual culture. It's about going back to being unbranded, wearing generic clothes. All of this things like "American Apparel" they're incredibly basic brands. That is been happening in fashion for a long time and I think it's also happening now in architecture: building the most simple building on the most beautiful building. What I think REM is doing it's like it lifetime research in cities he realizes that there is no longer a real need in cities for architecture but there is a huge need for interventions in the actual cities. And I think Prada Foundation is a perfect example of that.

So again in "Content" he wasn't a writer, he wasn't a theoretician, he became an editor. And he increasingly continues working as an editor. And also his architecture is been kind of a process of editing instead of this endlessly creating from scratch. So I will guess this is that direction he's going to go into.
Siempre que te he escuchado hablar de Rem Koolhaas marcas dos hitos en su carrera: uno en 1997 con el efecto Guggenheim que inicia su etapa icónica y otro en el 2001, con la caída de las Torres Gemelas que supone un cambio en el orden mundial y una reflexión muy profunda en su estudio que deriva de alguna manera en el rumbo al este.

En los últimos tiempos he detectado un cambio de rumbo hacia lo más básico de la disciplina: con Fundamentos en la Bienalle, con su giro hacia el campo, con el Manifiesto por la Simplicidad que presenta en el 2008 en el Maratón de la Serpentine Gallery de Londres... Me gustaría saber si estás de acuerdo con esta percepción.

Mi planteamiento es que cada una de sus fases conceptuales se traslada a sus publicaciones, de manera que "SMLXL" tiene un carácter y "Content" tiene uno muy diferente, mucho más congestivo. Además, a partir de ese punto se produce un quiebro, siendo "Proyecto Japan" muchísimo más sobrio (a pesar de ser igualmente radical).

Bueno, él ya dijo en el año 2000 que había pasado por cuatro fases conceptuales. No sé por cuántas más habrá pasado hasta ahora pero, efectivamente yo creo que el efecto Guggenheim tuvo una gran influencia en arquitectura. Posteriormente en el año 2002 hace un esfuerzo por abandonar lo que él llamaba el régimen del YEE, dando paso a otro tipo de intereses. Al menos así me lo ha expresado en alguna carta; salir de América, enfrentarse a Rusia y China. Y en esta última etapa como tu muy bien detectas ha puesto mucho énfasis en la arquitectura como disciplina más arcaica.

Una de las cosas que yo planteo en la investigación es, si siendo una persona que se maneja en la contradicción, sería posible predecir cuál va ser su siguiente giro. Me pregunto si pudiera ser el blanco sobre blanco de Malevich, es decir, qué hay después de la máxima congestión y la vuelta a los fundamentos; cuál puede ser el siguiente paso.

Bueno, en realidad la exposición de Venecia era casi un manifiesto. Yo creo que es un retorno a las bases de la disciplina. Hay entrevistas en las que ha hablado que se siente defensor de una disciplina milenaria. Frente, por ejemplo, a lo digital el hablado mucho en contra de la arquitectura y las edades inteligentes, entre comillas, defendiendo la materialidad de la disciplina.

Y si has visto la última exposición que ha montado la fundación Prada, que acaba de inaugurar, es una exposición sobre lo genérico clásico. Contiene estatuas romanas que replican originales griegos series no una aplicación de lo genérico retoma temas viejos pero con un sabor renovado.

¿Alguna vez lo has visto dibujar ¿porque no encontrado muchos dibujos suyos he visto algún manuscrito pero muy poco.

Bueno no sé cuando hemos estado juntos hablando en torno a una mesa y me ha explicado cosas.
la hecho dibujando gráficamente pero son dibujos muy esquemáticos no conozco dibujos de su mano que sean complejos gráficamente. Como sabes en la etapa primera era las mujeres las que hacían todos los cuadros.

Con respecto a los libros, tenía una pregunta particular en relación a “Content” sobre el artículo que tú firmas, dedicado al proyecto del Astor Plaza, en el que no consigo detectar cuál es la persona a la que está entrevistando.

Se trata de un artículo escrito en forma de diálogo entre dos personajes ficticios. Era un recurso para poder decir cosas que es mucho más fácil comunicar si finges un diálogo.

Pues ahora me resulta mucho más interesante.

Ellos me pidieron escribir un artículo en torno a la relación entre Herzog y de Meuron y OMA tanto en el hotel de New York en el Astor plaza como en el tema de Prada.

Son dos firmas que no han trabajado juntas excepto en este proyecto auto frustrado de Nueva York pero que siempre se han estado mirando por el rabillo del ojo y vigilando la una lo que hacía la otra.

Yo ya había escrito varios artículos sobre esta relación y me lo pidieron para “Content” pese a que sabían que yo era más próximo a los suizos que los holandeses. Me lo pidieron redacte y lo publicaron.

¿Y la parte gráfica fue tema de la edición de “Content” o fue propia?

No no exclusivamente les envié un texto redactado en esa forma de diálogo entre dos personajes ficticios que te permite decir cosas de una forma más directa.

Con respecto a las publicaciones he detectado que Rem elige los equipos en base al resultado te quiero obtener. Es decir, en “SMLXL” elige a un editor consagrado como Bruce Mau y consigue un resultado contundente, casi una pieza de museo. Sin embargo en “Content”, tanto el editor, como el director artístico son dos personas muy jóvenes en ese momento, en la veintena, y además no tienen experiencia previa en el mundo de la arquitectura.

Incluso en su momento lo llamaba revista, no lo llamaba libro. Pero también lo presentaron desde el primer momento, y así me lo dijeron cuando me pidieron la colaboración, que era la publicación más importante del estudio desde “SMLXL”. Era el proyecto editorial más importante que hacían desde la anterior publicación y pusieron mucha energía y esfuerzo en el asunto, como bien sabes. Se hizo una exposición análoga en el museo de Mies van der Rohe en Berlín, para exponer la obra de OMA y que usaba “Content”como catálogo.

Además la elección del lugar fue controvertida porque la relación entre Koolhaas y Mies es peculiar.

Bueno, tuvo esa ocasión de manifestarse en Chicago en el edificio del IIT en el campus. En ese momento escribió algún artículo relacionado con el asunto.

Sí, creo que te refieres a “Miestakes”, que también aparece en “Content” pero se escribió algunos años antes. Utilizando un juego de palabras con el título.

Sí, pero él es más admirador de SOM, o de Maas Kant, de los grandes despachos productivos de los años 60, más que del estilo un poco elitista de Mies. Le interesan los profesionalistas digamos, Harrison o Kant. El gran arquitecto holandés de la postguerra, el más exitoso y con las obras más grandes y voluminosas.

También tengo una curiosidad con respecto a su repentino interés por la arquitectura cuando estaba desarrollando una exitosa carrera de periodista. Al principio pensaba que tenía relación con su contacto con... Hace junto a Gerrit Rietvel sobre Leonidov. No sé si tú que le conoces bien has podido hablar con el respeto a este tema.

Sí, él era un apasionado de Leonidov. Conoció a su familia en Moscú y tuvo acceso a los archivos.

Era un momento en que había una gran pasión por los constructivistas. Era un momento de recuperación posiblemente porque estaban buscando un estilo más cercano a los constructivistas holandeses. La clave fue por tanto Leonidov.

Desde luego Leonidov fue muy importante. De hecho toda su gramática visual se basa en Leonidov y en el Le Corbusier de las Villas. Tanto el lenguaje lecorbusieriano como el constructivista fue definitivamente crítico en su crítico.

Sin embargo, en algunas ocasiones, Rem es muy crítico con Le Corbusier, con respecto a las propuestas urbanas de Le Corbusier como la Villegas Radieuse. En el manifiesto “Delirious New York” hace una crítica bastante dura.

Sí, lo hace y de hecho está mucho más próximo a los autores del Rockefeller Center. Pese a eso, muchos piensan y yo coincido, que es el personaje más parecido a Le Corbusier en el mundo contemporáneo. Ambos son arquitectos mediáticos y tienen la capacidad de hacer propuestas de naturaleza visionaria.
Con respecto a ese tema, me llama la atención que, en uno de sus últimos proyectos para Emiratos Árabes, plantea una torre giratoria extremadamente plana, cuya configuración formal es muy similar a un proyecto de le Corbusier que aparece en "Delirious New York".

¿Te refieres a un slab building giratorio? Esa propuesta no me parece muy lecorbusieriana.

Por último, con respecto a la comunicación en arquitectura, he estado analizando el trabajo de personas como Beatriz Colomina o Luke Bulman, de Yale, pero me preguntaba si se te ocurre algún otro referente importante a quién debiera consultar.

Yo creo que Beatriz te puede ayudar; es una gran conocedora del mundo de las revistas y su tesis la hizo sobre le Corbusier y Loos y su forma tan distinta de dejar huella. También conoce a Rem Koolhaas, aunque en el fondo nadie conoce a Rem del todo. Él ha vivido en Nueva York y en esta etapa tuvo mucha relación con Peter Eisenman, porque estuvo en su Instituto de Arquitectura y Estudios Urbanos, pero si es para conocer mejor al personaje, lo mejor es que vayas a su estudio y lo entrevistes a él o a alguno de sus colaboradores de tantos años como Ellen van Loon.

No es una persona especialmente accesible. En ocasiones establece relaciones musculosas con la gente. En el mismo "Content", en uno de los últimos artículos poco menos que me acusa poco menos que de llamarle terrorista. Yo en su momento lo comparé con Houellebecq, el escritor francés.

Sí, lo menciona en el mismo artículo al que te referías con anterioridad.

Yo comentaba que eran, efectivamente, talentos tóxicos. Y sin embargo, cuando tuvo un debate con Houellebecq en Barcelona me llamó para que fuera el moderador. No es fácil la relación no él, no es como la que puedo tener con el suizo Jacques Herzog, o Renzo Piano, Foster o Eisenman, a los que considero amigos y puedo llamar en cualquier momento y hablar de cualquier cosa. Pero Rem es distinto, es un tipo peculiar. No es un arquitecto convencional. En cierto sentido, hace de esa especie de descortesía un rasgo de su carácter.

Efectivamente, hablando con algunos de sus colaboradores del pasado, algunos muy estrechos, les preguntaba por la posibilidad de que me pusieran en contacto con OMA, y todos coincidían en que, una vez que estás fuera de OMA, lo estás en todos los sentidos.

Por otro lado, de sus oficinas han salido arquitectos muy importantes y talentosos; hecho del que siente un cierto orgullo. Todos recuerdan su tiempo en OMA como una experiencia excepcionalmente intensa, con elevadísimo nivel de exigencia y tensión. Por lo tanto ha sido un estudio muy estimulante, que ha producido más arquitectos de valor que casi ningún otro.

En definitiva es una persona cuyo comportamiento es difícilmente predecible. En estos momentos estamos trabajando en una monografía sobre OMA, que en realidad llevamos 20 años intentando hacer, y a diferencia de lo que suelo hacer con las demás, que escribo un artículo del personaje, en este caso lo que he explicado son los motivos por los cuales la monografía ha tardado tanto tiempo en hacerse. Porque ha sido un auténtico "tour de force", un laberinto, con días y venidas, cortocircuitos...Realmente complicado...se podría resumir en que "ha sido un honor pero no un placer".
When did you decide to become an architect?

It’s a bit by chance, because the point was that I wanted to become an industrial designer and there was a limited amount of students and it was like a lottery. I was not selected in the lottery and second option was architecture. This was actually not bad, I liked it, so I continued and became an architect. So it was not really intentional.

When did you meet Winy and Nathalie? At Delft university?

I met Nathalie and Winy at Delft University. I was at the final season studio. Winy did landscape architecture before. After University we worked in different places and then we made a competition for Europan.

You worked at OMA for 3 years, how was that experience at an intellectual level?

Rem was a Professor in Delft and several people came straight to OMA, Winy and me and some other guys, I think maybe four people of the studio. So that was at the beginning of the ninety’s, OMA was not so big, we were already well known but still relatively fresh and still not that many buildings were done.

There were the big competitions...

Yes I worked at the ZKM. We always said it was like a post graduates experience. So, instead of doing a Postgraduate we did OMA. And that was in a way a kind of intense period. After university you don’t know much, so you were thrown in an office pretty intense but also it was very exciting because although I was not not much a lot of international people when we were an active Dutch connection it was nice to be in this international surrounding.

So you were not so conscious that you were in the middle of the hurricane?

Not really, I could not compare it with something else because I didn’t work before (I did as an intern but it is not the same). But what is interesting is that it’s like a way of life and of course after a few years and then you knew there was this moment of make a decision whether going or stay.

At that moment the office was going through tough times and we did those competitions...So it was an easy moment to jump, although it is not easy to leave OMA. When you are there everything is kind of exciting and happening and is all interesting projects and you go here and there...so, high pressure. When you step out it’s all gone and then you’re out. It’s not like we do that I see you...not at all. Also not in the office, I didn’t step into the door for about eight years, only for small meetings. I did never come back, I met some people...in the airports...You are in or out.
So that’s quite a big change. We were lucky that in that moment things in the Netherlands were going ok. There were chances for young architects, we had a lot to go for. a big shift in your head.

*What is special about OMA?*

The nicest thing is that everybody gets the chance to prove themselves, to participate. It’s a well known story that even an intern can make the best concept for a competition. He offers opportunities, you can take them, so you have to find your role. That’s a very interesting experience because you understand which are your strong points.

I think you do that too. I had the chance to get responsibility in Celosía (under Sandor supervision, of course) and I was an intern...

Yes, I think this is not a bad principle. We took some things from that experience but we also do something differently. I think we are more easygoing. The atmosphere is different in the office.

*Which references do you consider he has?*

When we were there we always though he was some kind of a player. Of course he looks into the American tradition, while we were educated in Delft where you look more into Le Corbusier and that kind of tradition. So this was relatively unknown for me and it was interesting that they had that sort of perspective. It is not the background from Delft University and it was very different from other architects from Holland, so he is not really Dutch as an architect.

When he landed here Rotterdam was so very international as most American cities. So I think that’s why he liked to be here. Also he born and grew up here. Somehow when you see it, Rotterdam is not the typical Dutch city and Rem is not the typical architect, so I think this is a good combination.

The discussion at the beginning of the 70th was on one had form VS function and on the other side the utopias, don’t you consider that what RK does is bringing utopia into reality?

Well, the reality was not always the most important thing at the beginning; of course when the project moves on it is important. But there is sort of open mindedness to celebrate inexperience.

When he works with engineers he asks about everything as if he was not knowing too much. If you have too much experience you block certain creativity and this is an interesting lesson that I also learned, that you have to be open minded and allow new things to happen. If you restrict yourself by too much knowledge it can be a problem. Maybe that’s also the reason of these ideas that everyone has a chance, even the people who know less (the interns) have a similar responsibility, you have to be open minded and create these kind of connections.

And of course he was not so much trained as a typical architect, he had some more other references. Although at that moment you don’t think about it, you just jump in and there you go. But there were certain people in the office that he was always asking around, saying “what do you think of this?”, many different inputs, reference ports: to put outsiders next in the meeting because these are people that even though they are not in the team, they make comments, that’s a nice method.

And there are always sometimes people passing by. It’s also amazing. I was working through this building in Germany and in a certain moment there was this call like “you know, put all the things on the table because we have a guests coming, I’d like to explain the project”. And I asked who’s coming?, and he said “Brian Eno”. This is one of the kind of exciting things that happened there.

*Respecting to form and function, do you consider that the big change is to consider these terms as two main ingredients together with location, geography, politics, social matters, sustainability, material, etc….?*

We also took this kind of combination of concept and realization in a slightly different way. In the beginning we were of course connected to him but in the meantime we also drifted off in our own direction.

And of course we have been formed by this experience but also have been more rooted in this Dutch tradition of humanistic formal movements, although at that moment I really didn’t care that much, but after a while you realise that something is in the mind starter. It’s kind of a pragmatic approach combined with some other influences. After a while you can trace that but we don’t celebrate that. Other people can do that: analyse it, but we don’t talk about it much. At the beginning we were much more conscious that you are just aware of that, that you just come from OMA. But now we don’t think about it, we do things differently and also if there are things that are slightly similar in the way of working, its ok. The long way you’ve gone, the more different it is.

*And what is the key in MVRDV conception? Which architects or any other specialists would you consider as your own references?*

I already mentioned, but basically this kind of tradition around Hertzberger from Delf University. He is also a very special character anyway. He is completely different as an architect. And on the other hand his difference in the humanistic approach is quite nice. I think we took something form that. and aesthetically there are certain things that I like.

And also there was this Barcelona connection with De La Peña Torres, although this was a long time ago. But at that moment it was very important for me to be there for a while (1988). There was a lot of action in Barcelona at that moment with the preparation of the Olympic games, it was quite intense.
Do you think that the situation now a days is quite similar to the latest 60th and there should be a new convulsion on the conception or architecture?

I think the role of the architect right now is very different. As an architect you have to play many roles. When we were starting architecture there was also a big crisis (economical, social, cultural...) but when we finished the situation was very different, so you never know. As architects we have to be depending on economical factors, which is a challenge. We are lucky that now the internationalization is much more easy. It doesn’t really matter where you work anymore. Some architects are more local but we are not, we can work anywhere. Of course you have to organise this in terms of people, and languages, much more travelling.

Internalization means somehow to lift of this Dutch connection. We export Dutch architecture. We had luck that we were at that moment at that time. OMA were there around much longer and had much more difficulties in the beginning. And it took a while, because they were not immediately successful.

How do you see the future in architecture?

Yes, the future is interesting! you never know, but is interesting to see the different tendencies. On one hand you can see that architecture is kind of celebrated as something special and unique and on the other hand architects are less and less needed for buildings... there are construction types that people can do without architects. So we had to organize this inner work, we have more projects where we have to leave more mom for others to design or other supplies. For example, we just started with a single town which is no more about aesthetics and is much more about principles and an ID. So these issues still play a role in what we do and on the other hand you have more “object-like” projects, specials...

There is this debate about if there should be no icons anymore but of course every now and then there will be an icon, and of course not everything should be an icon, absolutely not. There is a small row for us where we do something special, and it can be much more modest as well. We also do projects that are really simple, in the limitations you can also do something exciting, with a little money...that’s still happening. We try to be as consistent as possible with the concept, son that everything supports it. You have to know which context are you working in and how the project is reacting to it, more like and urbanistical approach, because we do combine urbanism with architecture.
ENTREVISTAS

9. Tomas Koolhaas

My work is focused in Rem Koolhaas and OMA-AMO and his work as communicator in architecture, especially in “Content”. I'm very interested in the perspective of this film made inside OMA. I saw the trailer and I found quite interesting how the approach to Casa Do Musica has added movement and sense of materials, and spaces. You could almost feel the building. I would like to know if you could tell me a bit more about some other approaches you're working on.

I've used different approaches for different buildings. I used parkour in “casa” because the way Rem uses surfaces in that building is almost ambiguous, which is similar to how a parkour uses them. In the Seattle library I interviewed two homeless men who use the building every day, because I thought that was the most powerful story/narrative in that building, so sometimes my exploration was more experiential (Freerunner) and other times more emotional (homeless) but it was often first hand rather than having some third party (like an architecture critic) explaining it to the viewer.

This fact of thinking the most appropriate approach to a project far from the usual lineal narration that is usually done in architectural films and publications is something the documentary has in common with your father publications. Have you ever collaborated with him on them?

There is a similarity, particularly with SMLXL and the way I structured the film. Other than the comic I haven’t worked on his other books.

My work is specifically about Content, but I also talk about SMLXL, where I found a very interesting comic about if I were that is yours. I see some “Sin City aesthetic, do you agree? Which other references do you have?

Yes, you could say sin city, frank mille in general was a big influence for me and my Freind Louis price who drew that comic together.

Have you done more comic work? What do you think about the relation between comic and OMA? Which are, in your opinion his most clear influences in this specific field?

That was the only professional comic I did. I'm not sure there is a specific link between comics and OMA. I think it was just one tool that he has used in his books to make certain point or tell a certain story.

Which are, in your opinion, the comics that better express the relationship between comic and architecture or comic and the city.

Sin city is an obvious one. Batman too, Gotham city is a very important character in those comics, also in judge dredd, mega city and its architecture are integral to that world.

Entrevista realizada el día 10 de Junio de 2015.

Documento relacionado con el CAPITULO 4 del cuerpo de la tesis.

Tomas Koolhaas es hijo de Rem Koolhaas y colaborador ocasional de OMA en temas de comunicación. Actualmente está desarrollando un documental bajo el título de “Rem”.
Can I ask you your personal opinion on Content? My perspective is that each of the publications of OMA is a direct reflection of the conceptual obsessions of the office in that precise moment, and Content talks about maximal congestion, do you agree?

I think maybe it also works the other way around, each publication and its concomitant research reflect the projects going on in the office at that time. I think an important element of content was to show the effects of pop culture, and the market economy was having on architecture (hence the cover.)
About your collaboration in “Content” I would like to know how did you get in touch with them. Did they give you some requirements to work with?

About CONTENT, how it started is I was contacted by the art directors Jon Link and Simon Brown. Both of them were my fans at my website http://www.111111111111111111111111111111111.com/

They approached me for pitching some graphics for the CONTENT, they also invited other illustrators/artists as well. I ended up creating an image with Jesus Christ holding guns as an entry.
A few days later they asked if they can use one of my graphics with Kim Jong Il & Saddam Hussein on 111111...111111.com as the cover, with a twist of the background with the CCTV building in China.

I would like to know something more about your arts and methods. I'm interested in the graphic language and I would like to know a bit more about your background. Could you tell me something about the importance of sarcasm and humour in your work?

I make eye candies out of the world’s ugliness. I believe everything in the world is connected, and I employ and remix images from pop culture, mass media and viral meme to create time capsules on a targeted topic. The idea is to squeeze the different spectrums of arguments and the opposite perspectives into specific visual documentary artworks that reflect that specific time frame of our history. e.g. On the Content cover, the initial idea is to remix and juxtapose opposite identities- Saddam Hussein as Rambo and Kim Jong Il as the Terminator. By subverting and flipping the meanings of Good (U.S. Fake justice of Weapons of Mass Destruction) vs Evil (Bush's Evildoers/ Axis of Evil), the idea is to question how the mass media and news at the time beating the war drums and selling the wars as entertainment.

The reason why I chose pop imageries was because most people understand them and already have a preset ideas of what it represents due to advertisements. By applying “culture jamming” process to those images, the audience is presented with a renewal idea of what that pop image can mean. And that is where I think the art is- to raise questions and generate discussions. And I found that using sarcastic and humorous approach is easier to generate dialogues.

Are you interested in comic?,

Yes I am interested in comics, and I am interested in anything that is visually stimulating. I grew up in Hong Kong, and as you might know, Hong Kong, being the “greatest experiment in laissez-faire capitalism” as described by Milton Friedman, is a super densely populated city, where private space is so little that people don’t even talked to their neighbours. And every day we were bombarded by advertisements from everywhere once you walked out the door, it almost as if Materialism is Hong Kong’s official religion and Consumerism is Hong Konger’s favourite sports. Somehow, the cramped neon signs streetscapes, the hyper-bombardment of advertisements and the Chinese New Years colorful graphics all eventually translated into the maximalistic graphics styles I have today.

Which other artists do you admire?

Marcel Duchamp and John Heartfield’s works inspired me the most. In the contemporary art world I admired the following artists’ works- JR (artist), Vik Muniz, Banksy, Maurizio Cattelan, Mel Chin, Cai Guo-Qiang, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Kara Walker... the list is long... All these artists use their medium to change the world, and I strive to do the same.
My work is focused in Rem Koolhaas and his communicator face, especially in “Content”. My point is that Koolhaas books go on progressing to become not just architecture’s books but architecture themselves and they show his obsessions of the moment. For example, “Content” is, somehow the culture of congestion made book. Do you agree with this asseveration?

With the first part of your question I agree, with the second part not completely, even if the culture of congestion is almost always a key aspect of his writing.

My personal opinion is that this book is much more a research than a compilation of projects, as there used to be the architectural books; each project has many different approaches and so, many different interpretations, do you agree?

Content contains many voices indeed, it is made like a magazine and was intended as the possible start of a magazine.

The whole book seems to be like a trip whose destiny is CCTV. Some people I read think it is just propaganda. I do think it is somehow, in a brilliant way, but it means a lot more, what do you think? It is not just propaganda, no. Maybe not propaganda at all. It may be an attempt to orchestrate the reception of his work by inviting his friends and people Rem respects, yes. But their opinions are their opinions.

His last big production, “Project Japan” is much more sober although radical. I think it’s again related with the spirit of the moment and the thematic: metabolism. OMA’s new phase is about coming back to the principles and fundamentals. I’ve noticed that Content (both the book and the exhibition) were some kind of turning point of maximum density, like a point of no return. Do you agree? Which is your analysis about it?

No, this is already an old theme, at least since “Singapore Songlines” in SMLXL. It is also an old theme of Hans Ulrich Obrist, with whom he wrote it together. It is really a coproduction.

“SMLXL” still remains the most potent model of architectural monographic (in which Bruce Mau had a fundamental role) but somehow I think that Content’s approach is closer to his architectural state in that specific moment (and then both Editors and Artistic Directors were incredibly young and with no previous experience in architecture). In Project Japan it’s Irma Boom, what do you think is her specific contribution?

I think the graphic designers are quite important. Bruce Mau and Irma Boom are much more than just graphic designers. They are true intellectuals that can help someone organize his or her thinking. They were true sparring partners. Irma also did the Biennale books.

Could you tell me which are, in your opinion, the aesthetical references of OMA in the communicative level?
There are very different ones. For Delirious New York it is almost the children’s book SMLXL is a complex experimental novel, like those of Georges Perec, with many different layers. For Content (and the exhibitions around that time) it is definitely Punk. Project Japan is serious Dutch graphic design in the best Dutch modernist tradition.

Do you think that the graphical and communicative display redounds on his architecture or is it bidirectional?

I think it is bi or even multidirectional.

In “OMA Book’s Machine” Beatriz Colomina talks about how the publication activity has grown up incredibly in the last times? Why do you think this is happening? Does he needs to register all the activity or maybe it helps to have perspective on the subjects?

In general, it has become easier and cheaper to do books for all architectural offices and most of them increasingly do and finance their books themselves. There has been an enormous boom in general as it is cheaper than putting together colour printed portfolios for each individual occasion every time.

OMA is a practice that is constantly under a media magnifying glass anyway, so it attempts to control the media attention. Apart from that, there is the presence of AMO, which largely deals with studies and publications, and the connection to Volume.

I believe that his contributions to architecture are unique but I think that the genuine contribution of OMA-AMO is in architectural communication, do you agree?

Rem would never call himself unique. The work itself is very interesting but why is not always immediately obvious as it is not necessarily in the visual aspect. It has to be communicated to be really understood. “Delirious New York” is a very classical architects publication like for example Hilberseimer and Venturi had done before: a study about a general theme and an appendix with the work of the architect.

“SMLXL” is a masterpiece, which cannot be repeated or imitated. It is a novel indeed. I think the contribution to communication is largely through lectures as well, not necessarily just through publications.

Regarding the so called “Baby Rems” (BIG, MVRDV, REX) could you tell me if you find any special contribution beyond their mentor?

For example I believe MVRDV is extremely brilliant in M size. One should never forget that OMA is an office and these people contributed to the office. Winy Maas and Jacob van Rijs in particular. Winy Maas in particular, as a former landscape architect and urban planner for the city of Amsterdam, El Salvador and for UNESCO in Africa and Bangla Desh before he started studying in Delft and working for OMA is at his best in the XL-scale. BIG has taken a lot from NL architects as well.

Most people that leave OMA get stuck in their own contribution to the office, that may be true.

I couldn’t find many drawings of Rem, can you tell me a bit more about his draftsmen facet?

That was never very present. It is mostly sketches.

I read that his decision to become an architect was related with the study he developed together with Gerrit Oorthuys and Gerrit Rietveld on Leonidow in 1966. Do you know something more about it? I read your article about Constant and his special relation with him (my first idea was that this contact was the key for becoming an architect but this theory is dismantled by reading your article.)

No, Constant did not define that. His grandfather was an important architect. And indeed Gerrit Oorthuys seduced him in a moment his career as a film maker and as a journalist seemed over.

Moscow was always as important as New York for Rem (and his generation in Europe). It is a generation that grew up indoctrinated with very clear ideas about good and bad: America versus Russia, Germany versus its victims and versus the Allies, etc.

Regarding his context, what do you think it was first: Rotterdam as a referent in contemporary architecture or REM in R’dam?

Rotterdam was first. Don’t forget the housing before WWII, the reconstruction after WWII, and don’t forget Oud’s and Bakema’s crucial role in that. (to mention just 2)

In this sense who do you think his intellectual references are?

That is a long list. You will not find many footnotes though (which became a problem for Alejandro Zaera who thought that was all right). Most references are reversed though, like the reference of Constant.

Regarding the strong turns in his career, once maximal congestion is over and he seems to be returning to “fundamentals”, would you be able to predict his next turn? (maybe Malevich’s white on white?)

I think there are no turns here, only continuities. The architecture of OMA was always reduced to fundamentals, which were played out in a post modern or deconstructivist way.
I also read he has a certain conflict of interest with being a high profile star: on one side he knows all of his actions have an incredible repercussion and he knows how to use that but somehow he is talking about creating this “Generics” like a generic brand of OMA for being able to propose without high expectations of something new in each work, can you tell me something about it?

I can have my opinion about that but only Rem himself knows.

And finally, about yourself: Could you tell me your personal opinion on the actual development of architectural communication in parallel with architecture world?

That is a very open, large and complicated question. I would have to write an essay or a book.

Which are your personal interests right now?

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architecturaltheory.eu has several research focuses. First, defined by its role in an architectural faculty revolving around teaching design, architecturaltheory.eu focuses on contemporary architectural theory and criticism by actively participating in the international debate through articles, lectures, books, exhibitions and a presence on the Internet through its three different websites: architecturaltheory.eu, txt.architecturaltheory.eu and architecturaltheory.tv.

architecturaltheory.eu does not consider architecture as an autonomous discipline. It is not just interested in design processes and their results, but also in the research architects and urbanists do to embed their work in society and to base their design strategies on. This is the ongoing research project Research for Research.

City, landscape and society are important as the traditional contexts that give architecture a place as well as fields for possible intervention. In our attempts to constantly rewrite the history of architectural theory, we constantly emphasize how architectural theories implicitly or explicitly relate to these larger contexts. The same can be said of the digital domain. The reciprocal relationships between architecture, media and the (urban) landscape are therefore themes of constant consideration, for example in the book project Reality Bytes. To better understand the social role of architecture, Cultural Studies are increasingly important.

Being embedded in an Austrian university, the Austrian architectural Avant-Gardes of the 20th Century are central themes in our research. Out of The Wild is a project that, through the main protagonists Otto Neurath, Friedrich Kiesler and Christopher Alexander, tries to understand the continuous evolution of the ideas developed for the settlement movement in nineteen twenties’ Vienna in exile and in time. Everything is Architecture investigates specific aspects of the Austrian avant-garde of the nineteen sixties and seventies as defined by among others media theory and the typical Viennese Actionism.

Of course, being located in Tyrol, the context of the Alpine Regions is important to us. There is a strong focus on Tyrolean/Austria, South Tyrolean/Italy and Grisons/Switzerland architecture in research projects like In den Bergen baut der Blick, about the impact of the mountainous landscape on architecture and the “Invention of Regionalism” in architecture. Musch & Lun, about the innovation network a building company around the turn of the century constructed, as well as the monograph on the Tyrolean architect Siegfried Mazagg and the Swiss Gion A. Caminada. Projects, like Linz: Status Quo and Maribor 2112 100 YC address issues of cultural capital and city planning in Alpine cities, while Matchpoint Innsbruck, a project in collaboration with RMIT Melbourne, investigate the Alpine landscape as a setting for leisure and sports and the specific culture this produces.

Architectural culture is not just embedded locally regionally or nationally. Global networks of transport and communication allow for a mobility of money, goods, ideas, images, people, ideas, images and culture. Several projects, like The Sleeping Beauty, on Asmara, a city largely built under Mussolini in Eritrea, and ..........., on the Vu Cumpra, the Senegalese migrant workers and sellers in Italy, explicitly deal with this phenomenon. This also means that Postcolonial Studies are important in the discourse architecturaltheory.eu creates, which also produces new and surprising perspectives on regional architecture.

The research of architecturaltheory.eu has been funded by the generous support of among others the FWF, the TWF, the Südtiroler Wissenschaftsfonds and Linz ‘09 Cultural Capital.
The manifesto I would like to present is actually quite old, but it has been reinvigorated by recent events.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall about 20 years ago, for the first time in history, the world has been united as one. Not because one country triumphed or because the dogma of a single ideology triumphed, but rather through the voluntary, collective embrace of a system: a system where economic values take priority over all other values. It is clear this has had a great impact on the way our economy is run, but increasingly it has also made its mark on the domain of politics and culture.

Throughout the 1990s we all became familiar with the long queues standing outside museums for exhibition openings testifying to the great success of the museum. Clearly this is only one half of the story. The other half of the story is that of a fierce competition in the cultural world in which an increasingly large number of institutions fight over the same pool of visitors and revenues, pushing both architecture and art into positions of increasing extravagance.

Today, we find people of the cultural world featuring in the top 100 of the same lists that ten years ago featured only business people. It is increasingly hard to tell the difference. Jeff Koons wears the tie, Charles Saatchi the bow tie. Who is the artist and who is the businessman?

Even if the status of cultural figures supposedly is on the rise, their actual standing with those who ultimately decide their fate is in terminal decline. This is Donald Trump commenting on Daniel Libeskind’s design for the WTC: “It was designed by an egghead architect ... I’d rather see nothing than see that pile of junk.”

Architects and artists attract large crowds of adoring followers and are increasingly treated like showbiz celebrities. The identities that people in the cultural world can adopt while standing in the spotlight are multiple: guru, diva, icon... Others project a simulated indifference to fame. Meanwhile all continue the same old cause, which is proudly to present one’s own work as unique, one of a kind.

We have a unique recipe to put cities on the map. That recipe is copied by others, but what is more disturbing is the fact that we are increasingly copying ourselves. Repetition of the ‘one-of-a-kind’ is increasingly turning into the standard formula. The Guggenheim in Bilbao is the same Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi, and could be the same Guggenheim anywhere else...

Abu Dhabi has embarked on the largest import of culture in the history of mankind. Here the world’s largest museums and the world’s most famous architects are only a stone’s throw away from each other. Architecture has become the prime tool to market a region and to propel that region forward in the world. This presents architects with opportunities to build larger, more uninhibited and more uncompromised than ever before.
The Dancing Towers™ by Zaha Hadid are planned for an area called ‘Business Bay’. The Dancing Towers by an unknown follower are also planned for an area called Business Bay. The turning torso of Santiago Calatrava also has an anonymous clone in Dubai. Daniel Libeskind in Denver has multiple copies in the Gulf.

Whilst this kind of copy behavior may seem erratic, it could also be read as part of a long-term trend that will ultimately push the Western avant-garde into oblivion.

A whole series of architects has emerged that no one has ever heard of, and who never appear in Domus or Casa Bella: DAR Consult and KE0 from the UAE, and Atkins, slightly better known. These anonymous firms build more in a single year than celebrated Western architects build in their entire career.

If you place the recent production of each of these three firms together, the skyline that emerges is exuberant even though it exists entirely of unoriginal gestures. And if you compare this to a skyline of masterpieces produced recently by well-known architects, a painful question emerges: Is there really such a difference?

The city has become an accumulation of individual gestures: an icon of excess made up of an excess of icons. The ultimate recipe for an icon appears to be a tautology. It’s built on well-known images and it’s always large. A gate that is large; a pyramid that is large; an eagle that is large; a snake that is large; and the head of a horse – in ultimate tribute to the Sheikh of Dubai – that is again very, very large. Equally prevalent is the race for height: where previously the World Trade Center or the Sears Tower competed to be the tallest building in the world, now the race starts by simply doubling that height – tall, taller, tallest. The race for height has come to attract the same crowds of adoring followers as the cultural elite.

"One day, all cities will be built like this" is the confident formula that is practiced outside the West at a much larger scale than the West ever practiced it. The West derides it as “Disneyland in the desert”, but Disney remains a Western invention. Their Disney is our Disney.

But for how much longer?

A month ago the impact of the financial crisis became apparent. It is also apparent that no remedy is near. If the collapse of the stock market was the result of financial greed, maybe this skyline is the exuberant result of cultural greed; the equivalent in culture of the bonus system for risk-taking managers.

Maybe the graveyard of iconic, ‘one-of-a-kind’ architecture could coincide with a laboratory for the rebirth of modern architecture: a more functional architecture, with a social purpose; one of performance and functionality.
1. Allow events to change you. You have to be willing to grow. Growth is different from something that happens to you. You produce it. You live it. The prerequisites for growth: the openness to experience events and the willingness to be changed by them.

2. Forget about good. Good is a known quantity. Good is what we all agree on. Growth is not necessarily good. Growth is an exploration of unlit recesses that may or may not yield to our research. As long as you stick to good you’ll never have real growth.

3. Process is more important than outcome. When the outcome drives the process we will only ever go to where we’ve already been. If process drives outcome we may not know where we’re going, but we will know we want to be there.

4. Love your experiments (as you would an ugly child). Joy is the engine of growth. Exploit the liberty in casting your work as beautiful experiments, iterations, attempts, trials, and errors. Take the long view and allow yourself the fun of failure every day.

5. Go deep. The deeper you go the more likely you will discover something of value.

6. Capture accidents. The wrong answer is the right answer in search of a different question. Collect wrong answers as part of the process. Ask different questions.

7. Study. A studio is a place of study. Use the necessity of production as an excuse to study.


9. Begin anywhere. John Cage tells us that not knowing where to begin is a common form of paralysis. His advice: begin anywhere.

10. Everyone is a leader. Growth happens. Whenever it does, allow it to emerge. Learn to follow when it makes sense. Let anyone lead.

11. Harvest ideas. Edit applications. Ideas need a dynamic, fluid, generous environment to sustain life. Applications, on the other hand, benefit from critical rigor. Produce a high ratio of ideas to applications.

12. Keep moving. The market and its operations have a tendency to reinforce success. Resist it. Allow failure and migration to be part of your practice.

13. Slow down. Desynchronize from standard time frames and surprising opportunities may present themselves.
14. Don’t be cool. Cool is conservative fear dressed in black. Free yourself from limits of this sort.

15. Ask stupid questions. Growth is fuelled by desire and innocence. Assess the answer, not the question. Imagine learning throughout your life at the rate of an infant.

16. Collaborate. The space between people working together is filled with conflict, friction, strife, exhilaration, delight, and vast creative potential.

17. ____________ Intentionally left blank. Allow space for the ideas you haven’t had yet, and for the ideas of others.

18. Stay up late. Strange things happen when you’ve gone too far, been up too long, worked too hard, and you’re separated from the rest of the world.

19. Work the metaphor. Every object has the capacity to stand for something other than what is apparent. Work on what it stands for.

20. Be careful to take risks. Time is genetic. Today is the child of yesterday and the parent of tomorrow. The work you produce today will create your future.

21. Repeat yourself. If you like it, do it again. If you don’t like it, do it again.

22. Make your own tools. Hybridize your tools in order to build unique things. Even simple tools that are your own can yield entirely new avenues of exploration. Remember, tools amplify our capacities, so even a small tool can make a big difference.

23. Stand on someone’s shoulders. You can travel farther carried on the accomplishments of those who came before you. And the view is so much better.

24. Avoid software. The problem with software is that everyone has it.

25. Don’t clean your desk. You might find something in the morning that you can’t see tonight.


27. Read only left-hand pages. Marshall McLuhan did this. By decreasing the amount of information we leave room for what he called our “noodle”.

28. Make new words. Expand the lexicon. The new conditions demand a new way of thinking. The thinking demands new forms of expression. The expression generates new conditions.

29. Think with your mind. Forget technology. Creativity is not device-dependent.

30. Organization = Liberty. Real innovation in design, or any other field, happens in context. That context is usually some form of cooperatively managed enterprise. Frank Gehry, for instance, is only able to realize Bilbao because his studio can deliver it on budget. The myth of a split between ‘creatives’ and ‘suits’ is what Leonard Cohen calls a “charming artifact of the past.”

31. Don’t borrow money. Once again, Frank Gehry’s advice. By maintaining financial control, we maintain creative control. It’s not exactly rocket science, but it’s surprising how hard it is to maintain this discipline, and how many have failed.

32. Listen carefully. Every collaborator who enters our orbit brings with him or her a world more strange and complex than any we could ever hope to imagine. By listening to the details and the subtlety of their needs, desires, or ambitions, we fold their world onto our own. Neither party will ever be the same.

33. Take field trips. The bandwidth of the world is greater than that of your TV set, or the Internet, or even a totally immersive, interactive, dynamically rendered, object-oriented, real-time, computer graphic-simulated environment.

34. Make mistakes faster. This isn’t my idea—I borrowed it. I think it belongs to Andy Grove.

35. Imitate. Don’t be shy about it. Try to get as close as you can. You’ll never get all the way, and the separation might be truly remarkable. We have only to look to Richard Hamilton and his version of Marcel Duchamp’s large glass to see how rich, discredited, and underused imitation is as a technique.

36. Scat. When you forget the words, do what Ella did: make up something else… but not words.

37. Break it, stretch it, bend it, crush it, crack it, fold it.

38. Explore the other edge. Great liberty exists when we avoid trying to run with the technological pack. We can’t find the leading edge because it’s trampled underfoot. Try using old-tech equipment made obsolete by an economic cycle but still rich with potential.

39. Coffee breaks, cab rides, green rooms. Real growth often happens outside of where we intend it to, in the interstitial spaces—what Dr. Seuss calls “the waiting place.” Hans Ulrich Obrist once organized a science and art conference with all of the infrastructure of a conference—the parties, chats, lunches, airport arrivals—but with no actual conference. Apparently it was hugely successful and spawned many ongoing collaborations.

40. Avoid fields. Jump fences. Disciplinary boundaries and regulatory regimes are attempts to control the wilding of creative life. They are often understandable efforts to order what are manifold, complex, evolutionary processes. Our job is to jump the fences and cross the fields.
41. Laugh. People visiting the studio often comment on how much we laugh. Since I've become aware of this, I use it as a barometer of how comfortably we are expressing ourselves.

42. Remember. Growth is only possible as a product of history. Without memory, innovation is merely novelty. History gives growth a direction. But a memory is never perfect. Every memory is a degraded or composite image of a previous moment or event. That's what makes us aware of its quality as a past and not a present. It means that every memory is new, a partial construct different from its source, and, as such, a potential for growth itself.

43. Power to the people. Play can only happen when people feel they have control over their lives. We can't be free agents if we're not free.
We challenge and advance typologies. REX feels it's time for Architecture to do things again, not just represent things.

We design collaborations rather than dictate solutions. The media sells simple, catchy ideas; it reduces teams to individuals and their collaborative work to genius sketches. The proliferation of this false notion of “starchitecture” diminishes the real teamwork that drives celebrated architecture. REX believes architects should guide collaboration rather than impose solutions. We replace the traditional notion of authorship: “I created this object,” with a new one: “We nurtured this process.”

We embrace responsibility in order to implement vision. The implementation of good ideas demands as much, if not more, creativity than their conceptualization. Increasingly reluctant to assume liability, architects have retreated from the accountability (and productivity) of Master Builders to the safety (and impotence) of stylists. To execute vision and retain the insight that facilitates architectural invention, REX re-engages responsibility. Processes, including contractual relationships, project schedules, and procurement strategies, are the things with which we design.

We don’t rush to architectural conclusions. The largest obstacle facing clients and architects is their failure to speak a common language. By taking adequate time to think with our clients before commencing the traditional design process, it is our proven experience that we can provide solutions of greater clarity and quality. With our clients, we identify the core questions they face, and establish shared positions from which we collectively evaluate the architectural proposals that follow.

We side with neither form nor function. REX believes that the struggle between form and function is superficial and unproductive. By emphasizing performance instead—a hybrid that does not discriminate between program, organization, and form—we free architecture from the tired debate over whether it is an art or a tool. Art performs; tools perform. The measure of high performance is relative to each client’s aspirations and each project’s constraints.

We reach for the unexpected by exposing root problems. We don’t innovate for innovation’s sake. Nor do we accept predigested solutions. We return to root problems and doggedly explore them with a critical naiveté. Unprejudiced by convention, we expose solutions that transcend those we could have initially or individually imagined. Sometimes we discover uncharted territory; sometimes we rediscover forgotten territory that has renewed usefulness; sometimes we reaffirm conventions with assured conviction.

We view constraints as opportunities. Engaged intelligently, project challenges such as site conditions, budgets, schedules, codes, and politics are opportunities that can catalyze the most innovative solutions. Architectural concepts
that capitalize on our clients’ constraints will surpass any vision that resists intractable realities.
We produce specific designs that are highly effective, not universals diluted in application.

*We advance new strategies for flexibility.*
Despite an increased need to accommodate change, contemporary design still relies on an antiquated version of flexibility: one size fits all. The promise of a blank slate upon which any activity can occur has produced sterile, unresponsive architecture. REX advocates delimiting activities and addressing the possible evolutions of each on its own terms. With this strategy, one activity can evolve without sacrificing another, and collisions between activities unleash surprising potentials.

*We love the banal.*
REX dares to be dumb.
The Chinese love the monumental ambition. They hate the monumental price tag – and the “foreign” design. A portfolio of the grand ideas and grim realities behind the contentious new vision for China Central Television.

BY REM KOOLHAAS

In early 2002, my office received two invitations: one to propose a design for Ground Zero, the other to propose a design for the headquarters of China Central Television in Beijing. We discussed the choice over Chinese food. The life of the architect is so fraught with uncertainty and dilemmas that any clarification of the future, including anti-design, is disagreeable ultimately welcome. My fortune cookie that night read: STRANGELY OPPRESSIVE MASTERS MAKE MILES OF HISTORY. We chose China.
THE SKYLINE RISES IN THE EAST

For more than a decade, the number of high-rise buildings in Asia has surpassed that in North America. On October 17, 2003, the final spire on the Taipei 101 building was raised into place, making it the world’s tallest building by more than 50 meters over the former number one, the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In the West, pundits continue to debate the viability of the skyscraper post-9/11, apparently unaware that in most of the world the high-rise has been an economic, social, and environmental necessity for generations.
BUILDING CONSENSUS

The China Central Television (CCTV) headquarters will be located in the northern part of Beijing’s new Central Business District, near the intersection of Chang’an Avenue and the Third Ring Road. We aim to break ground later this year and to complete the project in time for the 2008 Olympics.

The site covers about four blocks, with a total area of 180,000 square meters. There are two major buildings – CCTV, which hosts TV-production facilities, and TVCC, a hospitality center with a hotel. On the northeast block, the Media Park will be open to the public for events and entertainment, as well as available for outdoor filming.

In the free market, architecture is real estate. Any complex corporation is dismantled, each unit sequestered in place. All media companies suffer a subsequent paranoia. Each department – the research department, the finance department, administration, et cetera – talks about the others as “them”; distrust is the motive, questions are raised.

But in China, money does not yet have the last word. CCTV is envisioned as shared conceptual space in which all parts are housed permanently, aware of one another’s presence – a collective. Communication increases; paranoia decreases.

After our design was accepted, it created two kinds of apprehension, if not disappointment. First, was it merely a fabrication, one more alien proposal of meaningless boldness? Was its structural complexity simply irresponsible? On August 5, 2003, an afternoon event at Tsinghua University allowed all parties to vent criticism. It was not easy; I realized, for the assembled intelligentsia to see the difference between CCTV and any of the other foreign extravaganzas still in the pipeline. There was surprise at my description of the building as a collective, a word with complex associations. There was relief when the building, which had been considered in isolation, was presented in conjunction with our larger proposals for historical preservation in Beijing and a low-rise business district, revealing an interlocking hypothesis for Beijing’s future landscape.

Still, the younger side-opposed questions of allocating resources to “prestige,” even while western China is ravaged by poverty. The older generation of engineers was shocked to see the objective purity of their profession at the service of the unusual. A pact between the two sides – a coalition of the unwilling – could easily close a possibility that had just been opened. A renewal of the Prometheus in the name of correctness and good sense could formulate China’s architectural potential.
CCTV – OMA/AMO: Forward Compatibility

Toward a new stability

CCTV headquarters is an ambitious building. It was conceived at the same time that the design competition for Ground Zero took place – not in the backward-looking US, but in the parallel universe of China. In our time, engineering has a high status, its being resonating with Chinese whiffs of history. To prove the stability of a structure that violates some of the most sincerely held convictions about logic and beauty, the engineering firm Arup had to dissect away detail of our design. The effort to reassure only reveals the scary sinewiness of every structure – elasticity, creep, shrinkage, sagging, bending, buckling. Serving as a hypnotic window, the computer analyzes and exposes the shocking vulnerability of the mineral world with the tightness of a parvenu.

I heard one of Cecil Balmont’s engineers at Arup describe, without irony or noticeable wavering, how this stuffy steel structure in our design could be scotched only at dawn. They would be exposed to different solar heat gain due to their calculated positioning on the ground and would be most likely to share the same temperature after cooling off overnight. I was elated and horrified by the sheer extravaganzas of the problem we had set before them. Why do they never say no?!
ARTICULOS

1. Much ado about naked truth

Autor: China Daily

Documento relacionado con el CAPITULO 4 del cuerpo de la tesis.

Artículo publicado en China Daily digital en 2003, sobre la polémica suscitada por las portadas inéditas de "Content" y los "significados ocultos" de la CCTV.
NEW YORK -- Last week, American architecture took a step forward. Rem Koolhaas, the 53-year-old Dutch architect, was awarded the commission to design the Campus Center at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. If you’re wearing a hat, now is the time to toss it into the air. The $2.5 million project, which will house a mix of functions in a low-rise structure of glass and concrete, will be the most innovative building to go up in downtown Chicago in a generation.

The competition to design this building has drawn international attention, chiefly because of the historical importance of the site. The school’s campus, and 20 of its buildings, were designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the pioneering architect of the modern steel and glass skyscraper.

Mies, who was director of the Bauhaus in its last years, moved to the school in 1938. Crown Hall, the home of IIT’s architecture school, is where Mies himself taught for many years. A masterpiece of 20th-century design, the building extended Chicago’s reputation as the city whose builders went furthest toward translating the ideals of modern democracy into architectural form.

The McCormick Tribune Campus Center, as the new addition to the campus will be called, is the centerpiece of a large-scale building program that will eventually include new housing and an overhaul of the campus grounds. The Koolhaas project, which is expected to be completed in 2000, will contain offices for student organizations, meeting rooms, college shops, dining rooms, a basketball court, a bowling alley and other places for recreation.

The building is a big, one-story rectangle, the size of a city block, wrapped with glass walls and covered by a contoured concrete roof. A viaduct for the city’s elevated train crosses over the building’s central axis; this stretch of the viaduct will be encased within an oval-shaped steel tube.

Inside, the layout resembles an airfield crisscrossed with runways. The pattern of these corridors is drawn from existing desire-lines, unplanned pathways tamped into the ground by students’ feet. Here, the corridors divide the interior into a variety of irregularly shaped spaces. Like the (unbuilt) library Koolhaas designed for the University of Paris-Jussieu, the IIT building proposes to replicate bustling street life indoors. In short, the campus center will be a high-tone, low-rise jukebox version of an inner-city mall.

Some buildings create places. Others energize a culture. Koolhaas has built the Netherlands Dance Theater in The Hague (1987); the Villa d’Istria, a private residence in Paris (1991), and Congresexpo, the Lille conference center (1994). But he made an impact even before his first building went up, with the publication of his book, “Delirious New York” in 1978.

The book had an idea -- that urban congestion was a Good Thing, not the Bad Thing opposed by city planners. But, more than that, the book introduced a sensibility. His book dealt with the
eroticism of the city, a theme rooted in the youth culture of the late 1960s. The book’s most memorable image is the Madelon Vriesendorp painting of the Chrysler and Empire State Buildings snuggling in bed.

Like Roland Barthes, a writer also influenced by the student uprisings in Paris in 1968, Koolhaas sees the city as the place of exchange of social activities, and I would almost say erotic activities in the broad sense of the word. Better still, the city center is always felt as the space where subversive forces, forces of rupture, ludic forces act and meet.

Those words could easily describe Koolhaas’ blocklong labyrinth of hallways, corners, open areas and spatial fragments. But the building’s most spectacular erotic encounter will occur overhead, when the train passes through the steel tube. Technically, it is supposed to baffle the noise from the tracks. Visually, it recalls the famous Louise Bourgeois sculpture of a stream-driven piston.

Chicago, of course, was deeply shaken by forces of rupture when student activists showed up at the 1968 Democratic National Convention to protest the government’s Vietnam War policy. The era also saw the collapse of the liberal consensus culture that had supported modernism in art, literature and design. In the following decades, Chicago’s architecture lost its way.

IIT’s competition produced excellent proposals from Zaha Hadid of London and Peter Eisenman of New York. But Koolhaas is the ideal architect for this project. In the first place, he reveres Mies deeply. In the past, he has often used Mies-like photo-collages to present his work. More important, he is one of the most historically minded architects now practicing. Throughout his career, he has criticized architects for habitually rejecting the work of the generation preceding theirs.

At the same time, he grasps that the anarchic spirit of the 1960s is part of history, too. The experience of those years left him with a robustly ambivalent attitude toward authority. Since architecture is the art form of the establishment, this attitude sometimes gets him in trouble. Last year, for instance, he was eliminated from the competition to design the expansion for the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan. Some members of the museum’s selection committee evidently took Koolhaas’ provocative plan as a personal insult.

May Koolhaas never lose his flair for provocation. At IIT, he must contend with the authority of Mies and of modern architecture at its most rigidly orthodox. His design both honors and subverts that orthodoxy by wrapping a Miesian glass skin around colliding interior spaces that evoke high modernism’s demise. The building is an act of historical reconciliation, one that puts Chicago back on architecture’s cutting edge.
The interview began with Koolhaas being told a profile of him had just appeared on the front page of that week’s New York Observer. A brief discussion of the quality of the article ensued, after which Koolhaas added

*Rem Koolhaas:* It’s horrible to be on any front page. You have no concept of how horrendous all of that feels, but anyway …

*You’ve written in the Mies in America about how you love Mies. What is it in his work that inspires this love?*

*Rem Koolhaas:* … Ironically, I don’t really know. I think it’s not necessarily something of similarity or affinity. It’s definitely not something about similarity but maybe Mies is the largest possible opposite, and therefore the most attractive. Apart from that, there is simply an aesthetic and deep liking for disappearance kind of rather than minimalism.

*In the IIT Tribune McCormick Campus Center, you appear to be addressing diversity much more directly in terms of the diversity of the materials, the diversity of textures within your own building. What about the emphasis on graphics and iconography? Why has this become so important now as opposed to the more elemental architecture of the past?*

*Rem Koolhaas:* I think that is kind of in a way a response to globalization, I think when IIT opened, you could probably assume that everyone would feel very welcome in a highly abstract space such as Crown Hall, and would have situations with being well treated, I think that if the current generation enters a building like that, I think that is highly dubious. They would kind of feel a weird absence of information. I think that also that given the fact that the student body is now literally from at least four or five continents, it felt very important to try to develop a language of fundamental information that is effective in those circumstances. It’s also definitely not something we are doing to the same effect in our other buildings. I think it’s really for this explicit purpose and this explicit program, and this explicit condition.

*Is the use of color also very specific to this building? It seems like orange is the keynote color, and green is its complement.*

*Rem Koolhaas:* I think that one of my fascinations with Mies is his sense of color, even though at first he is not usually associated with color, but I think that in the 20’s and 30’s he did some really strong experiments with color, and I can also kind of remember the first time I was in the Chicago Arts Club that there is kind of really strident and outrageous sense of color. I didn't necessarily
want to make it strident or outrageous, but I think that also interestingly enough, at least that was the effect on me when I was standing on State Street, the building (Student Center) in its scale is very modest compared to the Mies building, but by being that color somehow brings out the color in the Mies building, also.

By contrast between the two?

Rem Koolhaas: Not only by contrast but also by raising the issue of color, you suddenly see much more color in Mies.

The Campus Center is a one story building, but it was a wide variety of levels. Is that the concept that people just expect more now, they don't want to see things just on one plane?

Rem Koolhaas: I think that it was very interesting to work in a limited repertoire, and I've always been incredibly interesting in buildings that had only one level, in a way because they are so easy, and in a way because they have no technical complications, and in a way can thematically be made cheaply, and for the affinities with classical architecture such as at Pompeii, or with contemporary illegal or marginal architecture such as ... the kind of cities in Africa. For me, it has that kind of beauty of potential focused on the concept and liberation from technique in a certain way, and as part of the repertoire of a single story building, I think that relatively modest sectional variations add ... a kind of simple but efficient effect. That is the kind of metaphor of modesty vis-à-vis Mies, the building is cracked by the tube and somewhere it is cracked that kind of compression can be exploited, and makes, in a way, those sectional elements inevitable because they're in areas where otherwise you couldn't pass.

Is it your feeling now that it's really not possible to do good work any longer in the United States?

Rem Koolhaas: That's complete nonsense. First of all we're working in the United States, and IIT is one example, but also we're also doing a library in Seattle, and actually if you get a chance you really should go there, because it's really astonishing.

Basically, as you know, an architect isn't going to decide where he works, but we had a phenomenally strong project for LATMA that went into the garbage dump and a phenomenally strong project for the Whitney that went into the garbage dump, and so we wanted to desperately participate in a project for the United Nations, but we were not invited. It doesn't really look as if currently there's a kind of great ... but it's also kind of a fragility of cultural institutions in a country where culture is financed by gifts rather than by subsidies ... and as you know, we also have an office in New York that is open for business.

Let me ask you about your quote about the need to "accept the world in all it's sloppiness and somehow make that into a culture." Does this still reflect your current thinking?

Rem Koolhaas: Well, yes and no. Of course, behind every project we do there is a kind of vast critical apparatus of doing better. We're not trying to emulate the current mess. We are just as interested in the sublime. Actually, that is why I'm talking about the other buildings we are doing, because they are really exceptionally ambitious in terms of not emulating confusion or something, but ambitious as architectural works in and of themselves.

on architecture and capitalism . . .

Rem Koolhaas: I think what Mies tried to do is find a way to make the sublime compatible with capitalism . . . extract from capitalism the kind of elements that are sublime. . . . I think that the first real engagement with the aesthetics of capitalism is a kind of transcending it. I think that after that, perhaps (Robert) Venturi and (Denise) Scott Brown were the second wave of looking at capitalism, perhaps with a greater sense of realism. The presence of capitalism and the results of capitalism were much more blatantly present, making it clear that you could almost not transcend it anymore, and you needed to find some accommodation with its aesthetics.

And I think that if you place Mies in the late 40's or early 50's, and if you place the beginning of the Venturi's thing in the late 60's or early 70's, then 20 years later of course globalization and the market euphoria become even more unfeathered, and that is why I had to begin to look, with the Harvard project, at shopping, because I think that at that point almost all architectural production had contracted and focused on this one program, which in itself had morphed in such a way that it now included everything, all components. So for me, it was very important to address that, and also to see whether those demands had actually fundamentally changed the kind of spaces that we produce and the spaces that we need. So you could say that the Venturi's are in the middle in terms of having a kind of positive relationship with the iconography of capitalism. Mies in a way stood above it, and Junkspace was a more internal look, when the positive attitude of the Venturi's was no longer tenable and where we had to admit and realize it was actually a much more ominous development. So, in a way, Junkspace is a theory, and what for me is very important about this building (the IIT Student Center) is that it tried to really work not so much within the same vocabulary but see what an architect could still do within that syndrome or within that regime.

You're so good at defining the reality of the world - the good things and the horrible things - that sometimes when I read your writings, it's very hard for me to see what you actually think about the things you're describing.

Rem Koolhaas: There are so many opinions in architecture. I think in the beginning it was just kind of exciting to describe and not to give so many opinions. If you read them (Koolhaas's writings), you also feel that you are in the presence of a very critical mind, or at least I hope so. Certainly in the case of Junkspace I think that should be overwhelming. But at the same time, I don't want to simplify things and say I'm against them when they have a degree of inevitability, but I would say our buildings are more and more able to really disconnect from those realities, or try to make the best out of them.
2. Descripción del proceso de construcción de la Seattle Library

CONSTRUCTION FACT SHEET AND TIMELINE, SEATTLE LIBRARY

Project description: Replace existing library

- Replace the 206,000-square-foot library, which opened in 1960, on the existing location at 1000 Fourth Ave.
- The Central Library has an expanded collection capacity of 1.45 million books and materials; 11 floors; underground parking; spacious areas for children and young adults; a four-level "books spiral" to house the bulk of the nonfiction collection in a continuous run; an auditorium; a floor called the "mixing chamber" that contains information desks where patrons can ask librarians for help; multilingual and English-as-a-Second-Language areas; a coffee cart; and an exterior "skin" of insulated glass on a steel structure.

Quick facts

- Project type: Replace existing library
- Completion date: 2004
- Budget for capital costs: $165.9 million (includes $10 million for the temporary Central Library)
- Total library program area: 362,987 square feet (formerly 206,000 square feet)
- Computers: 400 (formerly 75)
- Central Library Building Committee Library Board members: Gilbert W. Anderson and Linda Larson
- Architects: Office for Metropolitan Architecture, LMN Architects
- Contractor: Hoffman Construction Co.

Milestones

- July 2004: The Seattle Public Library board of trustees selected a third artist to create permanent artwork as part of the "Library Unbound" project.

- May 2004: The Central Library opened at 11 a.m. Sunday, May 23. Nearly 26,000 people visited the building on its first day of operation.

- January 2004: Glass exterior installation completed. Overall construction 91 percent completed. The Library Board selected two artists to create permanent artwork as part of the "Library Unbound" project.

- November 2003: The Central Library received its first award — a Steel Design Award of Excellence from the British Columbia Region of the Canadian Institute of Steel Construction for innovative use of steel.

- June 2003: The Library Board selected four artists to present proposals for permanent artworks as part of the "Library Unbound" project.
• May 2003: On May 7, workers raised the last piece of structural steel (a four-ton piece of seismic grid steel) topped by the traditional tree and American flag. Construction 50 percent completed.

• December 2002: Steel erection began. The steel structure will support the insulated glass and metal mesh exterior "skin." Subcontractor bidding substantially completed.

• October 2002: Concrete structure completed. Permitting completed.

• July 2002: Construction 13 percent completed.
• April 2002: Excavation and shoring work completed.

• March 2002: Construction documents completed.

• October 2001: Construction crews finished salvaging and recycling interior materials.

• September 2001: Contractors finished removing asbestos and other hazardous materials.

• August 2001: Contractors completed the final landscape removal plan, the first visible sign of the start of demolition.
• June 8, 2001: The existing Central Library at 1000 Fourth Ave. closed for good to make way for construction of a bold and exciting new facility. The Library began moving its books and materials to a temporary location at 800 Pike St.

• May 2001: Hundreds of people attended an open house to see images of the final design of the new library and learn more about how the innovative building will look and function.

• March 2001: The Library and its architects finished the design of the new Central Library.
• February 2001: William B. Meyer Inc. was hired to move the books, furniture and equipment from the Central Library to temporary quarters at 800 Pike St.

• Throughout 2000: Members of 37 Library staff work groups gave architects feedback on the library design.

• December 2000: The Library Board selected four artists to propose artwork to be integrated into the new library.

• September 2000: Library users tested mock-ups of two “books spiral” floor designs to house the library’s nonfiction collection in a continuous run. The Library Board selected Jessica Cusick and Rick Lowe to be art planners, following the recommendation of an advisory committee that evaluated 14 applications.

• May 2000: Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture reviewed progress on the library design for 1,500 people at a public presentation at Benaroya Hall. The Library Board selected Hoffman Construction Co. to be general contractor/construction manager. Four firms applied for the job.

• January 2000: Members of the public joined 10 work groups - including services for children, older adults, young adults and people with disabilities - to share their hopes and dreams for the new library.

• December 1999: More than 1,000 people attended public events at which architect Rem Koolhaas described his early vision for the library.

• May 1999: The Library Board selected architect Rem Koolhaas and Seattle-based LMN Architects to jointly design the new library after 1,700 people attended presentations put on by three finalists. An advisory panel reviewed the qualifications of the 29 firms that applied for the job. The Library selected The Seneca Group to be project manager. Ten firms applied for the job.

• November 1998: Seattle voters approved the $196.4 million “Libraries for All” bond measure. The bond money, which could be used only for construction of libraries, funded a new Central Library and new and improved branches.
During this summer’s Olympics, television networks will be broadcasting images of China’s national stadium in Beijing. The exterior of this circular structure is a jumble of interwoven beams. Most Chinese have come to call it the bird’s nest. The Beijing Olympic committee calls that stadium an icon of modern China.

The bird's nest is not the only modernist building that’s gone up in China's capital in the past few years; internationally acclaimed architects and designers are swarming around the city with big plans and even bigger budgets. Not everyone is fond of the new cityscape but everyone does take notice.

Lisa Chow reports from Beijing.

LISA CHOW: I'm standing here in Tiananmen Square, beneath the famous portrait of Mao Zedong. It hangs at the entrance of the magnificent Forbidden City. Most of the buildings in the Square are large monumental structures. You've got rigid lines, large columns. They look like dynastic or post-revolutionary Communist China. But not far away there's a striking new building, radically different from what you see here. It's just a few blocks away so let's walk on over.

(Soundbite of footsteps)

CHOW: So here we've got the National Grand Theater. It's an enormous titanium and glass dome surrounded entirely by water. So to actually get into the building, you've got to go underground. It's probably the most controversial building built in Beijing these past few years, costing more than $300 million. And the architect is Frenchman Paul Andreu.

Mr. PAUL ANDREU (Architect): A modern building in an existing place is disturbing. That is a fact.

CHOW: After winning the design competition, Andreu met with then Prime Minister Zhu Rongji. He says the Chinese leader knew there was a risk the public would disapprove of the design.

Mr. ANDREU: He told me your building is difficult. This place is good for us, and take care. But we selected yours and if we have 51 or 52 percent of the people, please, that's our first success.

CHOW: The government has awarded some of its biggest projects to foreign architects. Besides Andreu’s building, the Bird’s Nest Stadium was designed by Swiss architects, and a Dutchman designed the new headquarters for China’s state television network, CCTV. The government not only spent $1.5 billion on these buildings, it broke rules to make them happen.

CCTV's architect Rem Koolhaas says China's soaring ambition helped him realize his unusual design.
Mr. REM KOOLHAAS (Architect): To reinvent institutions, reinvent laws, reinvent a society and kind of trying to find organs that can somehow both express but also make it work, that is of course unique to this moment here.

CHOW: Koolhaas's structure includes two L-shaped high-rise towers leaning inward and linked at the top and bottom. It seems to defy gravity. Its been touted as the second-largest office building in the world, after the Pentagon. Rory McGowan is chief engineer. He's with Arup, a firm based in London.

Mr. RORY MCGOWAN (Caption, Arup): There is nothing like this anywhere in the world. There is no precedent.

CHOW: He says because of its shape and size, it broke all of the building codes. And so China brought together its top engineers to help come up with new codes. But, McGowan says, what really set this project apart were the building criteria that CCTV presented to the architects at the start.

Mr. MCGOWAN: The brief was to have the entire workings of the national media company on one site. Okay. That is unparalleled brief. It's never happened before and it probably never will happen again.

CHOW: He says the site will house everything from mobile broadcasting trucks to a hotel, conference facilities, broadcasting studios and management, where 10,000 people will work. The architect, Koolhaas, points to another factor behind the lofty goal for this building: age. He says in American cultural institutions, decision makers are 70. In Europe, they're 50, 55.

Mr. KOOLHAAS: The average age of decision makers here is 30 or 35. And that in itself, you know, is simply statistically means that we are talking to people who are in the beginning of their life and therefore, you know, have the thrust and the sense of adventure.

CHOW: And yet many young people in Beijing aren't particularly drawn to the flashiness. Luo Qing is 32 and has watched the CCTV towers go up from across the street in her office.

Ms. LUO QING: (Through translator) I don't like it. I can't deal with such a modern-looking building. I still prefer more traditional Chinese architecture.

CHOW: Her colleague, Sun Peng, also 32, agrees.

Mr. SUN PENG: (Through translator) I think Beijing should construct buildings that reflect the city's history and culture, especially for important landmarks such as the CCTV tower.

CHOW: One of the strongest critics is Xiao Mo, a retired professor at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Professor XIAO MO (Tsinghua University): (Through translator) There is a bird's egg in the South, a bird's nest in the North, a bird's tree in the East, and a bird's cage in the West.

CHOW: Bird's egg refers to the National Grand Theater; tree refers to the CCTV building; and cage refers to the Olympics basketball stadium, designed by Swiss architects.

Prof. XIAO: (Through translator) They turned our beautiful Beijing into the world's bird capital.

(Soundbite of laughter)

CHOW: Back outside, Andreu stands in front of his egg-shaped theater, or what he calls a cultural island in the middle of a lake.

Mr. ANDREU: I do believe that culture is important. We have all these ancestors and all these ideas behind us, and all these centuries of culture behind us, but what is required from us is to live our lives, not to look back.

Mr. RORY MCGOWAN (Chief Engineer, Arup): There is nothing like this anywhere in the world. There is no precedent.

CHOW: And at least for now the Chinese government agrees.

For NPR News, I'm Lisa Chow.

AMOS: And to see photos of the dramatic new buildings in Beijing, visit NPR.org.

STEVE INSKEEP, host:

While Beijing's architecture looks to the future, China's sports system grows out of its past. Just as in the days of Chairman Mao, the government pays salaries to athletes, and as we will hear in the coming week on MORNING EDITION, China spends millions of dollars to train those athletes.

Unidentified Woman: Financially their life is probably a bit easier than most athletes, at least in the U.S. Most Olympic athletes in the U.S. are still supporting themselves by college scholarships or other jobs. The result in China is that athletes can concentrate fully on their training.

INSKEEP: Sounds cushy, but for Chinese athletes who begin rigorous training early in childhood, the experience can be brutal. NPR's Louisa Lim brings us that story Monday as we begin a weeklong series on China's exclusive athletic system.

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