

Investigating Theories of O.M.A. as an Intermediary between Critical and Post-Critical Practice

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Abstract—In the 1990s, architects Robert Somol, Sarah Whiting, Michael Hays, and Rem Koolhaas presented the idea of a creative practice free from the dogmatic preconceptions of the preceding anti-humanist theories of the 60s, 70s, and 80s. It paved a way to a fresh thought process, free from the shackles of critical thinking and towards a more market-driven ideology.

In the past fifteen years, there has been a paradigm shift in the architectural practice with an influence from the rising forces of money driven neo-liberal society. The intellectual foundation for architecture that resists negates and attempts to create alternatives to the establishment of market corrupted design, and commercial culture has been rattled. We have evolved from a critical mindset to a post critical one.

In this shift, the practice of OMA, which begun as a post-structuralist practice in the early 80s, became the initiators of the post-critical thought, without having lost the inherent criticality in their work. Rem Koolhaas's research on Manhattan, over time, has shaped most of his architecture philosophies that led him to operate in a transitional space which with its active claim of opposition to the avant-garde critical practices, takes a political stance and reveals the consumptive culture of today's capitalist society.

This research attempts to understand these diverse theories and ideologies and their implications on design thinking among the latest breed of established international practices. The paper further correlates the different theories behind the emergence of this post critical architecture and in the process defines a new understanding of criticality. Further, by analyzing the writings of Rem Koolhaas and their effects on his design process, this paper establishes a framework for placing OMA as an intermediary between a critical and a post critical practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

"The nature of what comes after only finds its explanation by reference to what came before."

(Costelloe, 1912)

In The Language of Post-Modern Architecture, Charles Jencks pinpoints the juncture of the death of 'Modern Architecture' at

3.32 P.M. 16 March 1972. (Jencks, 1991) This was the instant that a dynamite destroyed the first of St. Louis's Pruitt-Igoe public housing towers designed by Minoru Yamasaki. This notion of freezing the clock of modern architecture which is so globally dispersed and stating its death at once is an absurd idea and thus should be only considered as a literary device to entice the reader.

In the past fifteen years, there has been a surge of critical work suggesting a similar turning point has occurred concerning postmodern architecture. For the sake of banal succession of 'isms' in history, several authors have declared the death of theory, the end of 'critical architecture' and the demise of postmodernism. Architecture historian, author and critic, Mark Jarzombek, talks about a shift from 'critical' to a 'post-critical' mindset which is characterised by a reduction of importance given to the "traditional avant-gardist aesthetic methodologies"³. The pragmatic nature of the statement 'the death of...' has not been established as objectively as the Jenckian device of recording time but it does provide a reference point to initiate a debate around the changing role of theory in architecture.

Critical Architecture

The 'critical practice' in the 80s and 90s were confined largely to the history theory wing of the discipline. In those days having a critical practice meant that one formulated questions about architecture's theoreticity often with Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida in the background or that one related architecture to the issues of historicism, gender, culture, and fashion (Jarzombek, 2009).

The history of 'critical architecture', put forward by the 'post-critics', traces back to the Italian architect, historian, theorist Manfredo Tafuri's introduction to his 1968 Theories and History of Architecture and the subsequent readings of this work. In the context of a failing 'modern project', Tafuri pointed out that the architect/critic could no longer judge the value of a work based on a set of merits and faults from the

perspective of everyday life. Instead, the architect/critic was to evaluate a work based on that work's relation to its larger ambitions, the framing of theoretical aspirations, accessible to the critic only 'through a temporary suspension of judgement'. (Tafuri, Ockman, 1993)

The theoretical autonomy of the design work by Peter Eisenman served as the key reference point for the critical architecture to set its foundation. He transmitted his ideas through the journal *Oppositions* (1973-1984), which he founded, and the Architecture New York (ANY) conferences and publications. Confirming to Tafuri's ideology, Eisenman's design strategies for architectural production were safely removed from the conditions of technocratic governments and the commodifying forces of the free market. Confirming with the Tafuri's Marxian ideology of the corrupting influences of capitalism, Eisenman constructed a theoretical framework for his projects, set apart from the commercial interests that make up the bulk of architectural commissions. Instead, he developed his forms in a series of petri dishes untouched by the impurities that might force compromise in the quest for a theoretically rigorous architecture. Derrida's textual autonomy was brought together with the linguistic autonomy of critical architecture in a series of collaborations between Derrida and Eisenman.

Paradigm shift to a Post-critical mindset

The story presented by the authors of the 'post-criticality' argument traces its critique back to Rem Koolhaas's 1979 'Delirious New York' where he writes a retroactive manifesto for the modern circumstantial city, highlighting the culture of congestion that exists in a purely consumerist modern society. One of the significant deviations was from the economic orthodoxy of critical architecture in the 1990s.

Somol and Whiting point out that the strategies of commitment with the mass culture, capitalist society and globalized economy can serve as power sources to generate alternative liberating lifestyles and they confirm their argument with constant reference to the works of OMA.

Michael Speaks, dean of the School of Architecture at Syracuse University speaks sharply towards a rejection of not just critical theory, but the theory itself. Speaks writes, "I would argue that theory is not just irrelevant, but was and continues to be an impediment to the development of a culture of innovation in architecture." In the place of theory, Speaks offers 'intelligence' (as in information), and speculations of emerging practices employing Computer Numeric Control (CNC), rapid-prototyping technology. Speaks's market-driven 'innovations' are in confirmation with Koolhaas's portrayal of architecture as a 'product'.

As by Mark Jarzombek "quasi-spiritualizing agenda" of the phenomenologists and the usually more "liberal-leaning agendas" of the deconstructivists and pop-culturalists, have lost their once-dominant positions in this shift from critical to post-critical.

Many of the fronts of criticality like new urbanism, green architecture and advanced computation are already well established. Now post-criticality is shaped not by concepts like "resistance and novelty" but by the need to solve pressing and large-scale communal, ethical, corporate, computational and global problems.

Criticality in post-critical

After a period when theory served to disrupt rather than propel the action, a healthy dose of pragmatism is a good start towards more effective architecture (Provoost, Vanstiphout, 2007). Rather than suffering the consequences of detaching from theory altogether, can we instead re-examine the ideals that were forged in the period of postmodern criticism and test them against the challenges of the twenty-first century?

According to Michael Hays, architecture should be conscious of its expressive and disciplinary position in the world, not indifferent to it. Hays, and other post-critical architects claimed that the discipline's emancipation from the dominating tendencies of the architectural theory of the late twentieth-century could only be achieved through a return to architectural practice as the focus. However, this return to a creative practice, freed from the dictatorial constraints of theory, does not pardon architecture of its responsibilities to reflect and critique the cultures it expresses. Architecture cannot exempt itself from its privileged position as a mirror-stage to society. It fosters a critical self-reflection that generates new knowledge about who we are as a society and plays an essential role in situating the ongoing formation of historical and social narratives. (Hays, 1984)

This intellectual positioning of the discipline can only be achieved if the 'critical' and the 'post-critical' are put in some relationship to each other. Mark Jarzombek suggests a "tertiary form of 'critical practice'" to achieve this relationship. This intermediary ideology should be similar to "investigatory journalism" and should aim to point out the "hypocrisies, ambivalences, complexities and ambiguities" of the 21st century.

OMA (Rem Koolhaas) as an Intermediary

In *Architecture 2000 and Beyond*, Charles Jencks positions Rem Koolhaas under the category of deconstruction. Also, his works were displayed in the "1988 Deconstructivist Exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)" curated by Philip Johnson.

Archdaily, a popular online architectural resource explains deconstructivism as a reaction to, and rejection of, modernist architecture, its radically irregular geometry and dynamic forms serve to protest the scientific rationalism that defined and dictated much of architectural practice from the end of the First World War to the 1970s. Despite a similar reactionary basis, deconstructivism distinguishes itself from the more significant body of postmodernist architecture by rooting itself deep into the theoretical repertoire of linguistics and thus

gaining an autonomous character free from the impurities inflicted by the outside world.

Rem Koolhaas is also considered as one of the initiators of the post-critical mindset as confirmed by the critiques, Somol and Whiting. Mark Jarzombek argues that the practice of Rem Koolhaas is a prime example of post-critical.

Thus it is safe to project that the practice of OMA proliferates the idea of a “projective practice” beyond the resistance of critical inquiry. But the theories of Rem Koolhaas at the same time establishes a critical outlook towards large-scale communal, ethical, corporate, computational and global conditions. Thus acting as a ‘mirror-stage to society’ and confirming its transitional status between the critical and the post-critical.

The research investigates the theories of OMA as an intermediary between critical and post critical mindset and devises a methodology to do so purely on theoretical grounds.

2. READING REM KOOLHAAS

Considering the theories of Rem Koolhaas is unlike reading a structured volume. His theoretical works as demonstrated by his description of S, M, L, XL (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995), are presented as narratives, manifestos, and anecdotes that describe everything he has uncovered and understood before publishing. They read as an anthology of ‘theories of everything’, with each work as an autonomous ‘episode’ addressing a few issues and interests. It is significant to note that unlike Tschumi, he makes no overt association between these theoretical episodes and his implemented architectural practice. Neither are they explicitly presented as a condition precedent to any project in particular.

It is difficult to define Koolhaas as being exclusively a theorist, novelist, scriptwriter, or an architect. Koolhaas himself had once claimed that he is “an architect with theoretical and literary interests” (Koolhaas in Levene, 1998). For many critics this self-description is reductive. Aron Betsky (in Patteeuw, 2003) for example describes him and a few of his colleagues as a group of architects that continually strive to redefine their position. This suggests that his identity is always in a state of transition; doing his best to question the status quo and redefine his role within an ever-changing world. Clarifying his contemporary theory and practice thus requires identifying the origins of his interests to determine whether a common structure survives the many developmental transitions. The city in this regard seems to be a significant foundation and continual thread of interest.

3. OMA – ON THE SOCIETY

For Enwezor (2003), Koolhaas the architect assumes here the role of an anthropologist and ethnographer, employing sociological methods to decipher the evidence within cities in the hope of understanding the complexities of human habitat

and culture. Even in *Delirious New York* (Koolhaas, 1994), it is evident that his intention was not to focus on the rigid identity of the Manhattan Island, but on the density of human habitation and the activities that had created cities within a city.

Data

Koolhaas’s journalistic interests always draw him toward the study of the dynamics of society. He is ever more interested in documenting the facts and analyzing them to reveal a latent structure of contemporary society. An example of Koolhaas’ fascination with data is demonstrated by the prologue to *S, M, L, XL* (1995), where the history of the OMA is represented as an analysis of data. This fixation with data is presented as the methodological base for understanding and conveying contemporary culture, and the factual preconditions for the theorizing that follows. He sees the architect as an obsessive gatherer of statistical data hoping to ground architecture and urbanism not in abstract ideas, but by the analysis of data and projection of trends (Patteeuw, 2003).

Mass Culture

OMA explores the impact of mass culture on the city and architecture. Mass culture, which is guided by profit, economics and politics with no interest in the ideals of form and aesthetics. Mass culture, giving rise to the consumptive environment with generic spaces everywhere. Koolhaas revels in the populist ideals but at the same time, with the use of known iconographies critiques the modern society. He can be seen as a “realist painter”, and Moneo compares him to the artist Andy Warhol who used the images of pop culture that can be easily recognised to create a new type of art that glorified but at the same time criticised the consumption habits of his contemporaries and the consumers today. “Koolhaas aggressively addresses society, insists on reflecting it in his work.” (Moneo, 2004)

This mass culture according to Koolhaas also gives rise to a generic consumerist society which in turn gives rise to “Junkspace”, a new kind of throwaway space, not inhabited by people but by brands, a “generic space” without a history that can be found in airport halls, malls, hotel lobbies, bank offices etc. and then he destroys the foundation or the essence of the junkspace by one line “a single citizen of another culture- a refugee, a mother- can destabilize an entire junkspace. The space which is cool, clean, superficial, chemically fresh smelling, totally monitored with the infinite interiors of the world of consumption contradicts the two pre-modern modes of existence embodied by the mother and the refugee.

Koolhaas’ experimental / theoretical project – *Exodus*, or *The Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture*, is an idea proposition, not a built project. As Rem Koolhaas says, it requires a ‘fundamental belief in cities as the incubators of social desires, the synthetic materialisations of all dreams’ (Koolhaas, 2005, p. 253). To Koolhaas, our world is a virtual world that bears

little resemblance to reality. A social commentary about the state of global London, Exodus is an ideological project in narrative, collage, and drawing form. Exodus offers an alternative urban space to the global and universal sameness beyond its walls.

The tale begins with a direct allusion to the Berlin Wall: "Once, a city was divided in two parts. One part became the Good Half, the other part the Bad Half. The inhabitants of the Bad Half began to flock to the good part of the divided city, rapidly swelling into an urban exodus." The story describes an "artificial paradise," a strip of land that runs through the center of London, "protected" from the existing city by two walls along its perimeter. Inside, the zone is subdivided into a series of identical squares, each with its own program, ranging from private allotments to communal facilities. Together these squares are to restore the debased ideals of the metropolis "to a sparkling intensity that would tempt the inhabitants of subconscious London to escape into the strip in an impulsive exodus – and to become its Voluntary Prisoners." (Koolhaas, 1995)

City disconnected from a newly-forming global network of cities; Exodus operates in two opposed directions. Its function is a prison, which is designed to keep people in Exodus inverts this role, on the other hand, insofar as its ideological purpose is to exclude. Its two walls keep the traffic of goods, capital, and politics out. Through its representations, Exodus articulates a globalised society consumed by capitalism; on the other hand, Koolhaas creates programmed architectural space that resists this self-same capitalism.

On a closer look, by portrayal of the grotesque nature of these programs, Exodus produces a satirical commentary on the effects of globalisation on the society. It reveals the horrors presented by a capitalist consumer-driven market where the citizens are its voluntary prisoners. The world where the prisoners pay voluntarily to enjoy the constructed artificial environments of high society and bind themselves in the shackles of the rules established to exist in that very system.

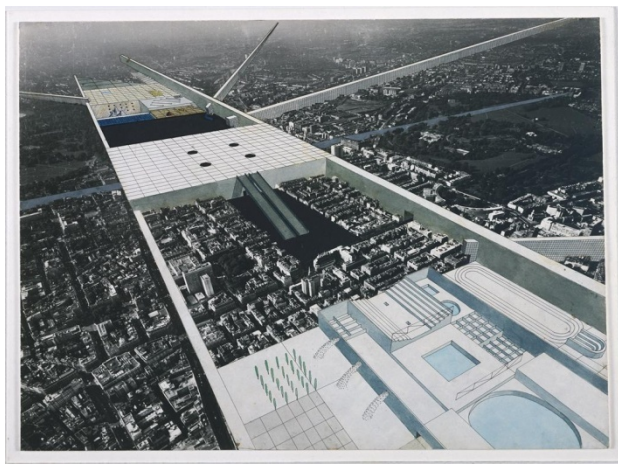


Fig. 1: Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture

4. OMA – ON ARCHITECTONICS

Bigness

Building on to an underlying concept of 'Manhattanism', Koolhaas developed his argument for the 'big' in architecture (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995, pp. 494- 515). The essay begins with the voicing of the antithesis, the reasons for its dismissal by the conventional world as something that is non-contextual and disruptive to urban fabrics. The engineering, servicing, and economic impracticalities that the big generates have always questioned the viability of attempting to build big. Bigness is consequently considered as an unsustainable approach to urban development that leads to inevitable organizational failure (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995).

He defines Bigness as a state that is reached when a structure exceeds a certain critical mass. He argues that such a volume or architecture would not be able to be controlled by a single architectural gesture, or for that matter a few gestures. Due to the volume that such architecture acquires it lacks unity, thus leading to the autonomy of its separate parts. This he believes does not indicate fragmentation as the autonomous parts remain attached and committed to the whole (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995). Architecture that has the desire and means to grow will inevitably become independent of the architect's control. It will organically transform into something that is so big that in a final radical break, depart from the urban tissue to become a micro city in its own right (Jencks and Kropf, 1997). Koolhaas claims that this evolution of "Bigness destroys, but it is also a new beginning" (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995). Its growth consequently gives birth to new typologies and relations between buildings and their contextual city. Bigness is a prime example of Koolhaas' interest in the interactions between architecture and urbanism.

Program Indeterminacy

"I would never again believe in form as the primary vessel of meaning."

(Koolhaas and Mau, 1995, pp.227)

The programmatic bent in Koolhaas's thought process laid its foundation, very early on during his tenure as an architecture student in AA, London when as a third-year summer study program, he was supposed to document an existing architectural element. Because of a journalist's interest and a discontent towards the idea of a pure architecture, he decided to document "The Berlin Wall as Architecture". His interest in journalism encouraged him to think like a realist, observing and documenting the factual content and arriving on conclusions objectively based on the substantive data.

"The wall, in my eyes, made a total mockery of any of the emerging attempts to link form to meaning in a regressive chain and ball relationship."

(Koolhaas and Mau, 1995, pp.227)

As described in S, M, L, XL (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995), the original purpose of the wall was only of the division, but due to its obvious malleable form, it continued to evolve through the years and thus manifested an array of activities with the original purpose staying in hindsight. The uncertain conflict between the context and the wall manipulated the character of the wall in varied ways with sometimes the wall slashing through the weaker sections and sometimes the apparent superior forces deforming it. The disparate character gave rise to multiple programmatic values, and the wall swelled wherever it was possible to assume a maximum identity and to accommodate the existing “urban incidents or dimensional conflicts”.

Further, in his retroactive manifesto of Manhattan (Delirious New York), Koolhaas writes about the technological advancements and population growth leading to the development of a number of avant-garde programs in architecture and the cross-breeding of these programmatic arrangements. One of the primary examples that he stated is of the Downtown Athletic Club where a vast urban grid and elevator couple horizontally and vertically to produce previously unimaginable experimental effects (Koolhaas, 1977). Among these experimental effects is the precedent of “Eating oysters with boxing gloves, naked, on the 9th floor” (Koolhaas, 1977) which instigates a debate on the development of similar fantastical programmatic possibilities into realities.

Koolhaas considers the vertical building as a container of no single specific function. It is seen as a number of plates stacked one on top of each other, free from any fixed function. The plates can accommodate any program as and when required. Thus, creating an “unstable unforeseeable combination of superimposed and simultaneous activities whose configuration is fundamentally beyond the control of architect or planner.” (Koolhaas, 1977). The built is in a constant state of flux between the different programs which create an array of uncertain conflicted encounters absorbing the “change that is life”.

Program indeterminacy plays a crucial role in Koolhaas’s architecture where he exploits the “culture of congestion” in order to initiate certain types of social encounters. This is very much similar to the Russian Constructivist’s idea of “social condensers” which in reality was truly manifested in the incidental skyscrapers of New York.

Through this indeterminacy, Koolhaas concluded that “no single specific function can be matched with a single place” (Koolhaas, 1977) and that “there need not be an interdependence between form and use” (Moneo, 2004, pp.322). He detaches the interior and exterior and considers the building as a container with the interior being in constant negotiation with the themes, iconographies and programs whereas the surface just acting as a sculptural shell.

As per Moneo, the origins of architecture for Koolhaas lies in the program. Through his statement “a maximum of program and a minimum of architecture” (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995) Koolhaas affirms his belief of program being diffuse and less related to the architecture that is to be built and more towards the unbuilt, i.e. the void, which in turn gives rise to the “imprecise open buildings” and his concept of “free section”. Koolhaas, learning from the vertical skyscrapers of New York, stresses on the assembly of different programs in a vertical configuration, thus starting his design process by the creation of absence in a section which can be seen in the Tres Grande Bibliotheque building in Paris.

This creation of interior spaces with a conflicted varied programmatic value base and a sculptural exterior is termed as “cocktail architecture” by Moneo.

Koolhaas explored quite a few of his architectonic theses in the Seattle Central Library project, designed as a response to Amy Murphy’s critique of the traditional library. She said “It is not only the traditional book and library that has become threatened by new digital and electronic media, but traditional forums of public life itself.” stresses on the breaking point of the commitment of the library only to books. The pure idea of a library as the “fortress” for books, thus counting electronic media as an intruder, must transform into a more liberal understanding towards the influence of media and other technologies, in order to co-exist with the powerful new forms of media.

“The Library, maybe with the prison, the last of the uncontested moral universes: communal accommodations for ‘good’ (or necessary) activities...”

OMA/LMN Architects “Concept Book”

Public space is somehow stated with accessibility for every citizen. But, for OMA, as stated in the Concept Book the real indication of public is being “free” that is not only in terms of money but also in a social sense. In the capitalistic motives of the consumer-driven market of the 21st century, “public domain” has undergone “erosion” and substituted with similar structures of the “private”. This “privatization” brings about “quasi-public” spaces, which in fact “makes the user pay while suggesting welcome”. Thus, the library is stated to be “the last breathing space”, both free and public. Therefore, the public space for OMA is a “free social space” to interact and which is not pre-defined and restricted yet spontaneous.

The idea was to create a new unspecified cultural concoction of human interactions to develop the design for the Seattle Public Library. This interpretation on and commentary of the contemporary society resonates in the works of Koolhaas early from his study of the Berlin Wall and his retroactive manifesto “Delirious New York”. Having analyzed the necessities and possible requirements of the library and collecting miscellaneous data, OMA attempts to re-define the library program and re-structure the relations between its parts to fulfil this objective.

Anthony Vidler states a parallel approach to program that architectural concerns in the conventional sense should not be privileged, but instead the development and creation of environments, which will adapt "technologies of the every day" should be stimulated. Vidler refines his argument by declaring that architecture should be "flexible and adaptive, inventive and mobile in its response to environmental conditions and technological possibilities." OMA creates a diverse programmatic arrangement by developing five stable platforms tailored for specific functions punctuated by four unstable voids, thus blurring the boundaries between different platforms and generating conditions for the occurrence of non-specific events.

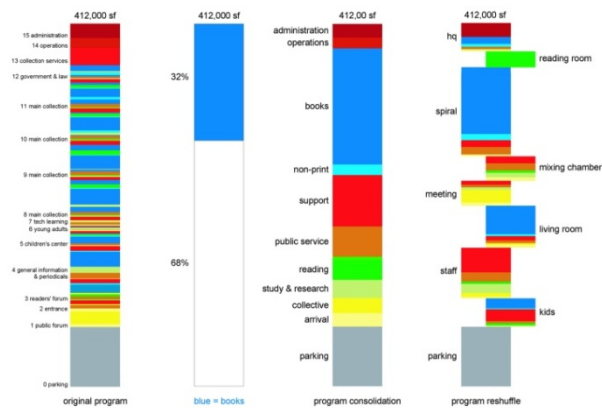


Fig. 2: Programmatic Arrangement in the Seattle Library



Fig. 3: Diagrammatic Section of Seattle Library

Koolhaas's notion of stable and unstable zones resonates with Richard Sennett's "The Uses of Disorder" in which he juxtaposes a pure community with the archaic system of urban disorder. Sennett claims that a disorganized, chaotic urban

fabric would promote a social change through real interaction. Instead of providing a pure constructed stable environment defined by rules of high society, a more organic uncontrolled environment would instigate disruptive experiences forcing individuals to respond in spontaneous and unpredictable ways, which he considers as a precondition to sociability.

5. OMA – ON THE CITY

IJ-plein (1980-89) is one of Koolhaas' early projects for a low-income housing scheme in the north of Amsterdam, which appears at first glance as a simple arrangement of buildings. As Ian Buruma elaborates (Patteeuw, 2003), this seemingly ordinary arrangement is a subtle attempt to create an autonomous neighbourhood with shops, housing, and a playground all connected to form a distinct socioeconomic sphere. This early project is an example of Koolhaas' keen interest in urban communities rather than isolated buildings (Patteeuw, 2003). As the years advanced, critics have suggested that the entire history of his office (the OMA) has been a relentless quest for an urban vision (Menu, 1996). Thus his continual engagement with tasks and research into all things urban, unsurprisingly serves to qualify him as an urban-theorist.

Delirious New York

Manhattan for him was an urban playground with an intriguing story that until his arrival had not been duly considered. It was to him the product of an unformulated theory where cities exist within cities (Jencks and Kropf, 1997). He confidently declared that "Manhattan's the 20th century's Rosetta stone, the programme for decoding", a statement that highlighted the triumphant discovery of its urban structures and their significance to deciphering other urbanisms. Delirious New York is consequently the foundation for all his work on the city; a theory of everything that he desired to use to decode and decipher all urbanisms and their modern form (Enwezor, 2003). Architecture in this paradigm is a means to conveying an understanding of the city; a building block belonging to a much larger and complex landscape.

The Generic City

In S, M, L, XL (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995, pp. 1238-67) 'The Generic City' is categorized as being an "extra-large project", simply for the reason that it considers macro built environments. The scene for the narrative is established with a series of ten obscure images of an anonymous metropolis. The identity of this city is purposely withheld to facilitate an attack on traditional urbanism, in particular, 'identity'. "Identity is a mousetrap..." he claims, "...the stronger the identity the more it imprisons" (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995). He describes this city as being detached from its context and driven by efficiency, with history reduced to token gestures. It is urbanism that in the end could exist anywhere in the world, with the same functions, activities, appearances, and lifestyles.

This Generic City is the projected outcome of the uncontrollable wave that is described as 'globalization'. Cities in such a future he claims, would "strive to reach a mythical point where the world is completely fabricated by man to coincide with his desires" (Koolhaas, 1994, p. 293). Identity would thus have little purpose as the desire for efficiency gains primacy.

Among the many urban fabrics that Koolhaas researched for this work, Singapore was selected as the model for what he believed to be an embryonic representation of the Generic City. In his study of the city, he identifies an association between the urban fabric created and the authoritarian regime that governs that territory. He supposes here the need for some authoritarian control to bring about the changes necessary to generate a generic urbanism. "I think myself being global" (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995) Although, for an avant-garde theoretician such as Koolhaas an urban future that resembles the Generic City might seem a welcoming utopia, it is likely to be a peculiar existence for the typical urban dweller (Buruma in Patteeuw, 2003).

The root tendency that he amplifies to describe the Generic City, therefore, exists in the urbanisms of the present. This root tendency that the narrative acknowledges is globalization. His aim is not so much to preach in favour but to accept and address the urban transformations that it is likely to generate.

"The force and the direction of the wave are uncontrollable, it breaks, and the surfer can only, in exploiting it, 'master' it by choosing his route"

Koolhaas in Patteeuw (2003)

Urban Renewal and Conservation

The old cities will gradually give way to the new. As Buruma argues, this urban renewal does not suggest that Koolhaas is advocating an urbanism that should discard historical interest to make way for the new. He believes that the old urbanism if left without the revitalizing 'shock' of the new will inevitably become uninhabitable museum relics that fail to address the needs of a changing world. A history that is layered onto cities must, therefore, be shattered and rewritten time and again to redefine the state and requirements of its living inhabitants.

The balance of preserving the old while introducing the new is one that is challenging to achieve in any city, particularly within a European context where historical assets are deeply cherished. This inherent friction is something that intrigues Koolhaas. He believes that there is no need to raze the old for the sake of creating the new. Instead, the forces of change should seek to build the new out of the wounds of the old. Urban fabrics with wastelands, neglected areas, and bombed voids are of particular interest to him as opportunities for the new to be created. Dereliction, therefore, can be transformed to be beautiful, and despair the stimulation for this radical creativity (Buruma in Patteeuw, 2003).

This fascination with dereliction and the dysfunctional as sources for opportunity seems to be the motivation behind Koolhaas' exploration of Lagos. His study embraces the idea of the city suffering endless mutations that he addresses by acknowledging the beauty of decay and disorganization as constructive generators of self-organization (Enwezor, 2003).

Similarly, in his design for Euralille, Koolhaas counted a revitalization project as an opportunity for the old Lille. A progressive critic would describe Euralille as an 'instant city', set down like an alien spacecraft with masses of greyness that suggests the arrival of a new urbanism (Meade, 1994). For the traditionalist, however, it is a shocking contrast to Lille's historic center and represents the very imagery of "cheap modern junk" (Menu, 1996). Such contrasting descriptions illustrate Euralille's audacity in relation to its birthplace and the morphology it has generated. The project as a result has managed to induce strong and distinct reactions to create both interest and debate. This in return has directed much-needed attention to Lille, and thereby demonstrated Euralille as having successfully addressed the project's hypothesis.

Euralille today is a transitional city where people work, eat, and buy, while the old town of Lille, shaken by it, is revitalized, renovated, and once again thriving (Balmond, 2003). Buruma sees Euralille's success as a bold urban experiment that has managed to "shock the old" to revitalize a fading city. The theory of "shocking the old to revitalize" is something that Koolhaas had expressed in the Generic City. He describes the need for cities to be rejuvenated by shocking its urban fabric to address contemporary desires, without being constrained by nostalgic attachments. Lille therefore is an example of such a city that has regained a sense of vitality by addressing its modern needs, without being restricted by its historical associations to form, scale, style, or organization.

The hypothesis for Euralille was supported by the significance of location, an hour from Paris and two from London. The project needed to capitalize on this global significance of the site as a European hub of movement. The TGV and its hub thus were essential ingredients of Koolhaas' vision for Euralille as a situation for transient habitation.

Movement and its global significance is another concept that Koolhaas addressed in the Generic City. He claims that "they are like quarters of the Generic City. Taking into consideration the above, Euralille as a programme could be said to: shock the old urban fabric to generate new reactions and interests, distances itself from nostalgic attachments to 'identity', and capitalizes on location and its significance. As far as these themes are concerned, it is evident that Euralille has significant association to the ideas expressed in the Generic City.



Fig. 4: Footprint of Euralille vs city of Lille

6. CONCLUSION

Can architecture claim a critical and autonomous position if the planners consent to the current business practice of a neo-liberal globalised economy?

For Tafuri, influenced by the political climate of the 1960s and 1970s, architecture since the Enlightenment was an ideological instrument of social, political and economic realities contradicting the utopian aims of the architect:

“It is hardly worth mentioning here that, in a capitalist system, there is no break between production, distribution and consumption. All the intellectual anti-consumer utopias that seek to redress the ethical ‘distortions’ of the technological world by modifying the system of production or the channels of distribution only reveal the complete inadequacy of their theories in the face of the actual structure of the capital economic cycle.”

(Tafuri, 1972)

That is, architecture can only exist within “natural” order of capitalist development. Architects contribution to making space could only occur within political and economic systems.

The shift of emphasis away from the work onto the act of its making and ultimately onto its maker had political ramifications for Tafuri. Koolhaas embraces this political stance to reflect the consumptive economic demands of the global brands, in the case of the Prada building. There, he incorporates the consumptive practices of luxury products such as Prada into the functional and conceptual context of architecture, thus giving the work to a market system that transforms the authorless post-critical architecture into an aesthetic structure that is specifically associated with Koolhaas as a brand. This again affirms to the anxieties of the global customer who craves for a brand value to affirm his cultural status in this neo-liberal society. Consumptive practice thus becomes the primary content of architecture and capitalism, its ultimate author.

In the essay “‘Criticality’ and Its Discontents” (2002), George Baird, like Koolhaas, criticises the notion of criticality as an outdated and irrelevant concept that only inhibits design creativity. But without the supporting body of a post-critical theory, “this new architecture will devolve to the merely pragmatic, and to the merely decorative, with astonishing speed.” While Koolhaas himself aims to be overtly uncritical, Kim Dovey believes that Koolhaas’ embracing of market forces results in a critical resonance in his architecture, “Instead of encoding critical comment or opposing the effects of power, his work at times accentuates such effects, rendering architecture more socially transparent.” Architects must learn to better acknowledge both the work’s authorship and its potential subversive power if they are to reverse the current trend of critical indifference. Koolhaas’s work thus presents a post-critical structure that is simultaneously a dominant form of criticality.

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