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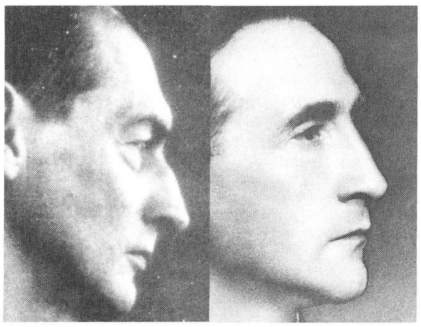
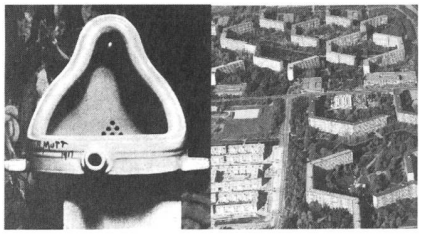
Anna Klingmann

The MEANING(less) POPularity of REM KOOLHAAS

Armstrong: "What question comes to mind, when you think of Marcel Duchamp?"
Conner: "The very idea of questioning".[1]

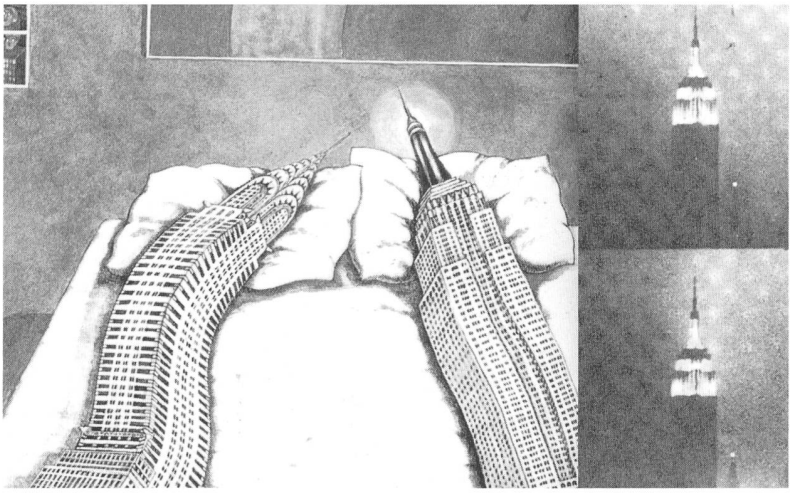


If Rem Koolhaas hadn't come along, we would have needed to invent him. This article poses a critical investigation into the position of conceptual art in the Warhol 60's and its poignant repercussions for the architectural discourse in the Koolhaas 90's. Just like the art scene in the mid-sixties, the architectural world in the mid-eighties was ready for that revolution, and fortunately for Rem, he was the one who wigged everybody else out. I may be giving him too much credit, but like Duchamp and Warhol before him, he discovered quite a bit just through his investigation into things. Had he not existed, chances are that someone sooner or later would have discovered many of the things he did. One of his most significant contribution was that he rediscovered the inherent complexity in everyday scenarios and proved that you could make architecture out of them. Like Warhol and Duchamp, he found a new sense of freedom in the opportunistic quality of things generally considered banal or mainstream. Koolhaas was actually the first critical architect who reinvented the commodity status of architecture. According to Koolhaas, "what those art movements of the 60's had in common, is that they found, in things that are generally considered banal, simple or simplistic, reasons to assume that the sublime was there." With this premise in mind, he repositioned architecture within the framework of the commodity fetish. In this regard Koolhaas' work is not only deeply influenced by the aesthetics of Warhol, Beuys and the Fluxus Movement but moreover inspired by their "heightened sense of identifying the sublime in the contemporary."[2]



Illustrations:
1 Rem Koolhaas, 1995
2 Marcel Duchamp, 1930
3 Marcel Duchamp, Readymade: porcelain urinal on its back inscribed on upper edge, in black paint: R. MUTT, 1917
4 Rem Koolhaas, "every reason to consider the Bijlmer as historic, or at least unfinished", 1995

While Duchamp challenged the status of the unique art object, Warhol denied the criteria of its validation dependent on authorship. Rather than maintaining a separate status of art and defending it against processes of commodification, Warhol developed numerous strategies by which he transformed his work from its inception into the absolute commodity.[3] In many ways Warhol's work was an extension of Duchamp's destabilization of high art, in that it dealt with the distribution of art as any other commodity object. Ultimately his work obeyed the same principles that determine the objects of the cultural industry at large.[4] Those principles (commodity status, advertisement campaign, fashion) had been traditionally believed to be profoundly heteronomous to the strategies of negation and critical resistance on which modernist artistic practice had insisted. In short the obvious contradictions between mass-cultural and high-cultural

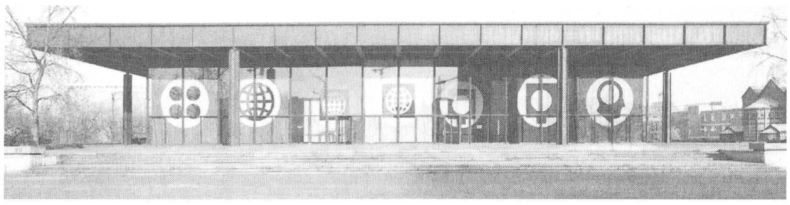


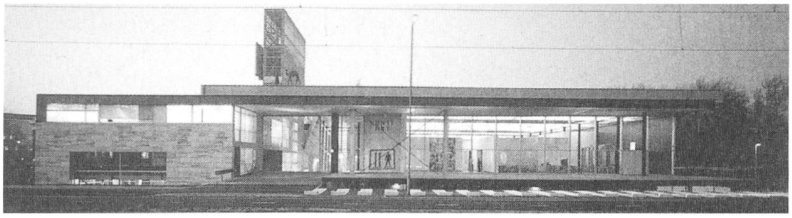
production and the need to incorporate these contradictions within the aesthetic construct itself had been a great motivation for the conceptual art movement in the 60's.

If we compare Duchamp's achievement to reconcile the mass-cultural and the high-cultural object on a conceptual level, to Warhol's incorporation of art into business ("Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art"), we could say that Rem has done a bit of both. At a time, when critical architecture was still very much in fashion, Koolhaas ventured out of this schism,—discarding the ideological baggage of a modernist utopia—to surf on the commodified side of "Manhattanism". Koolhaas' work superseded the role of architecture as a critical tool of modernist thought by taking a close look at the delights of commercially successful architecture. By reconsidering the split between "accommodating commercial" and "critical avant-garde architecture", he came up with a subversive mixture of both, which by Alejandro Zaera-Polo was termed "the accommodating critical". Koolhaas' intention here is not primarily to comply with the commodity fetishism of the consumer, but just like Pop art "to irritate and experiment with the consumer's own compliance."[5] By treating architecture in a quasi-simplistic manner, he reverted the popular preconception, which saw architects in terms of demanding and difficult contexts, artistic aura and the sine qua non of originality. Like Pop art, his architecture plays on the keynotes of a post-industrial consumer culture while at the same time subverting its structures and intentions. In this way Koolhaas' projects exude a certain directness while simultaneously raising a different kind of awareness in the people experiencing it.

I would argue that much of Rem's intensity derives from this very suspension between critical avant-garde and commercial architecture. Flirting with both sides, he destabilizes the status-quo between them. I'd say that it is this very questioning more than anything else which—as the overriding characteristic of his work—represents him and his role in architecture. It is the precision, with which he—more than any other architect of his generation—investigates the positioning of architecture within popular culture, that has fundamentally changed many of the ideological and aesthetic representations of the architectural avant-garde.

Illustrations:
5 Madelon Vriesendorp, Après l'amour, 1974
6 Andy Warhol, Film still from Empire, 1964





The following paragraphs extract some of the key inspirations of Pop art and examine its profound effects on OMA's work in more detail. While the first paragraph addresses OMA's interest in mass manufacturing in conjunction to the production of something highly original, the second paragraph depicts a rejective mode of conventional aesthetics; if you will even an interest in the debased. The last paragraph calls into question the notion of authenticity in OMA's architecture or perhaps more precisely celebrates the liberation of its absence.

(I) CHEAPNESS

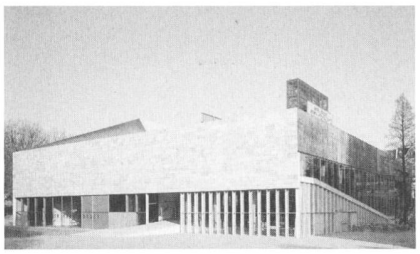
A utilitarian polemic of cheapness runs through much of OMA's work, recalling Warhol's complicity with mass production and commercial design. It also recaptures the use of cheap materials by many artists at the time, as a quotation of the ordinary. Indeed almost all of OMA's projects articulate a keen engagement of mass-manufactured materials as well as the incorporation of "cheap" detailing, corresponding to the annexation of normative consumer design into the realm of Pop art. The Kunsthal was perhaps the first radical example of cheapness: a subverted reiteration of the Neue Staatsgalerie in Berlin, the museum's playful array of innovative cladding materials in conjunction with new spatial complexities ironically recall Mies' perfectionist reductivism intimately tied to a restrained expression in material and form. Whereas Mies' Neue Staatsgalerie reads as a self contained platonic object detached from the urban context surrounding it, the Kunsthal reveals a fragmented collision of parts, highly charged by the schizophrenic qualities of its site. Pedestrian and vehicular infrastructures break the ideal nature of its square, undermining its formal geometry. While the Neue Staatsgalerie hovers on a solid podium of limestone, the building of the Kunsthal punches through a transparent plane of meshed metal plates, exposing the infrastructure right below it. The interior spaces are formed by the exaggeration of "basics" more commonly found in parking garages: bare concrete floors and columns discharge a climate of alienating neutrality, set off by the bright color patches of temporary furniture and fluorescent tubing. Overscaled signage guides you to the nearest exit, while the exit itself constitutes a sign.

At first glimpse, the Kunsthal's four sides seem equally approachable, however as opposed to Mies' building, where the facades form a consistent envelope, the Kunsthal's facades are each of a distinguished sensibility. According to Cynthia Davidson, the Kunsthal "no longer seems like a static box but rather like a series of images that play back in the mind."[6] This capturing of "experiential time" as opposed to "linear time" recoups

Illustrations:
7 Mies van der Rohe, Front facade, Neue Staatsgalerie in Berlin, 1968
8 Rem Koolhaas, Front facade, Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands, 1992

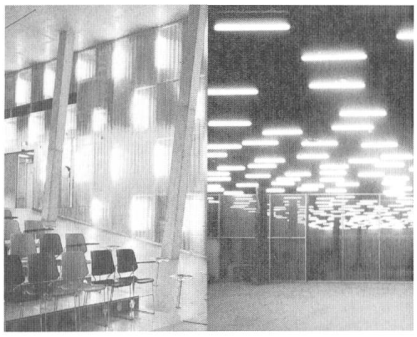
the idea of simultaneity in Pop art, whereby artists, inspired by mass media, no longer provided a narrative sequence, but like Warhol's "Brillo-boxes" momentarily dislocate the viewer with familiar information in an unfamiliar setting. In this sense each facade freezes the moment of a singular experience, resisting their reunion: While the west facade is cut in half by the use of painted concrete below and semi-opaque glass above, the east facade does the exact reverse. The back facade has the most traditional appeal with its combination of travertine and glass, while the front with its row of singular column types strikes as the most bizarre.[7] Overall, one cannot escape the sense of "cheap" detailing, which is particularly noticeable at the corners, where the thinness of the cladding is clearly exposed. This fragmented quality of "pieces having been snapped together"[8] exudes an aura of ephemerality recapturing Warhol's sense of the impermanent.[9]

As a polemical exercise of financial economy the use of cheap construction materials is perhaps most obvious in the Congrexpo: the explicit use of low-grade concrete and corrugated plastic authenticates the building's blurred position between cultural and commercial use. Programmatically the building articulates a contemporary hybrid: initially conceived as a transregional cultural institution incorporating concert hall, conference center and exhibition halls, the Congrexpo has been increasingly adopted for large-scale commercial events. Its low-budget architecture is however not to be confused with the sophisticated attitude of a "new simplicity." With its trite and at the same time grossly overscaled proportions, the building more accurately acquires the unpretentious appeal of a suburban warehouse. Analogous to many pieces of Pop art, the building constitutes a direct reflection of its suburban psychology. With infrastructure passing over, under and around the building softening its harsh glamour to the degree of formlessness, its non-descript supplication is rendered an actual simulacrum of the no-man's-land within which it is situated. This subverted reiteration of mainstream mediocrity is more over enhanced by the extensive use of "cheap" materials. Layers of corrugated plastic define exterior and interior at once. No superfluous detail ever conceals the meeting of two panels, leaving no second thought about their prefab nature. Masses of meshed metal, this time in vertical position wrap around colossal steel staircases. This ersatz mentality, exuding an alienating sense of familiarity is carried into the interior of the building with the extensive use of imitation leather and glossy surfaces to simply recoup... the average.



Illustrations:
9 Andy Warhol at the factory, 1964
10 Andy Warhol with his Brillo-boxes in the Stable Gallery, New York, 1964
11 Rem Koolhaas, Back facade, Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands, 1992
12 Rem Koolhaas, Front facade, Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands, 1992

In Villa Dall'Ava, the concept of "cheapness" succeeded to revert conser-



vative notions of the traditional/modernist villa as being necessarily exclusive and expensive. The use of plywood and plastic film, more commonly found on construction sites, alert a condition of ephemerality, tainting the whitewashed virginity of the modernist villa with a sense of mainstream vulgarity. Forever "unfinished" Villa Dall'Ava constitutes a "work in progress". If Villa Savoye fulfilled the ideal of perfection=beauty in the Kantian sense, Villa Dall'Ava constitutes a work of contamination, bordering on the marginal.

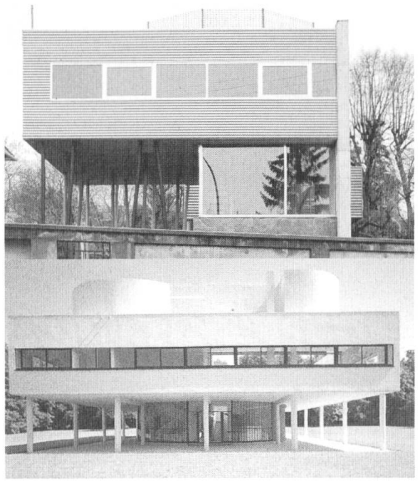
(II) UGLY

Suspension of judgment

Duchamp once said, "you have to approach something with an indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of readymades is always based on indifference, and at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste."[10] With this rather apathetic attitude Duchamp insinuated a questioning of traditional ideologies which in turn granted him a fresh exposure to a whole series of contemporary phenomena. It also implied a willful distancing from the aesthetics of "the retinal in art," which served as a source of liberation to many of his contemporaries. It was through this introduction of a quasi-arbitrary aesthetics that decisions in art shifted from a predetermined vision to the process of making. Duchamp's attitude coincides in many ways with Koolhaas' suspension of aesthetic judgment, entailing an intentional "stepping back" from ideological preconceptions and stylistic notions in architecture. While Duchamp consciously withdrew from art as a discipline, Koolhaas removed himself from the traditional role of an architect. It is precisely this act of withdrawal, that granted both the necessary freedom for a rethinking of the disciplines and their subsequent redefinition in terms of performative aims.

Deformation

Another important link to understand Koolhaas' architecture is his latent infatuation with the debased. For Aristotle, the beautiful object is one which has the ideal structure of an object; it has the form of a totality. One could say that Villa Savoye is such a work of beauty. Its form is clear and distinct. Internally it exhibits coherence, externally it establishes a sharp boundary between itself and the world. According to Mark Cousins, "this stress upon the object's being perfect and therefore finished already suggests a philosophical criterion as to what will function as ugly: It is that which prevents a work's completion, or deforms a totality – whatever resists the whole."[11] If we argue, that Villa Savoye reads as a self-contained object in material and form, the Kunsthal represents a fractional topography juxtaposing spatial difference with programmatic indetermination. The same could be said for Villa Dall'Ava. Both projects resist the subordination of their spatial and material constituents to an ideal configuration, insinuating a destructuring of space. In Alejandro Zaera-Polo's words: "OMA's projects constitute bodies rather than objects.[12] No more ideal forms (..) but instead their deformations. As such they are no longer governed by measures of proportion, which were perhaps the basic instrument of classical modernity, but rather constitute deformed entities of topological relationships, of connections, adjacencies or distances."[13] Permitting densifications in some areas, dissolution in others they constitute disorganized bodies rather than the structured compositions of parts as occurred in classical or modern architecture.[14]



Contamination

In many ways the notion of the ugly is also closely linked to the concept of contamination. To quote Mark Cousins, "Contamination, at a logical level, is the process whereby the inside of an object demonstrates that it is

Illustrations:
13 Rem Koolhaas, "Another of your nightmares", Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands, 1992
14 Rem Koolhaas, "In a single night", Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands, 1992
15 Rem Koolhaas, Villa Dall'Ava, St. Cloud, Paris, France, 1991
16 Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy-Yvelines, France, 1931

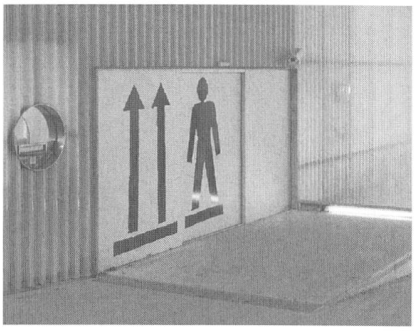
larger than its outside or representation. The ugly object is voracious and, through contamination will consume the entire zone."[15] If one argues that the modernist object strove for a cohesive state of formal integrity and self-sufficiency, furthermore enhanced by its conscious detachment from context and site, one could say that OMA's works are the contaminated works of context. Extending themselves into the context, they form unstable topographies governed by change and indetermination. The urban context is not only accommodated, but moreover interiorized and digested. The Congrexpo in this regard no longer constitutes a piece of architecture in the modern sense but simply becomes a gigantic piece of "generic equipment", accommodating the urban condition—"but inside rather than outside".[16] As such it is not only infected by the condition of its surroundings around it but literally becomes a virus in itself.

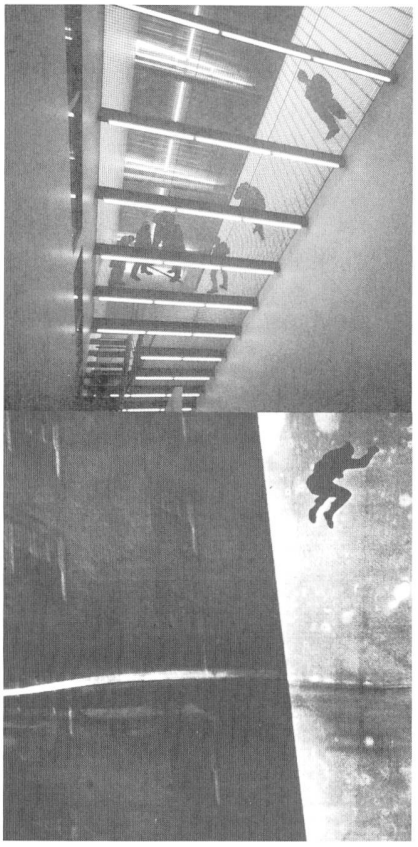
More often however Koolhaas' work also contaminates: His urban intervention in Yokohama proposes a "flooding" of adjacent sites with "programmatic lava"[17] Without architectural pretensions, layers of public activity are programmed on a 24h basis to incite a maximum of public events with a "minimum of permanent definition." According to Koolhaas, the question simply became how one could occupy the largest possible territory with the least amount of architectural substance. In this regard, his project for the IIT campus in Chicago is a synthesis of both concepts: the interiorization of urban congestion (to be contaminated), and simultaneously "the reurbanization of the largest possible area with the least amount of built substance" (to contaminate). In order to quickly establish a metropolitan condition in a derelict area of Chicago, OMA devised a large building containing the density of an urban situation; while at the same time covering substantial ground. The result is a gigantic one-story city, that – rather than stacking the architectural program—chooses to consume the entire site.

Incorporation of the grotesque and the incoherent

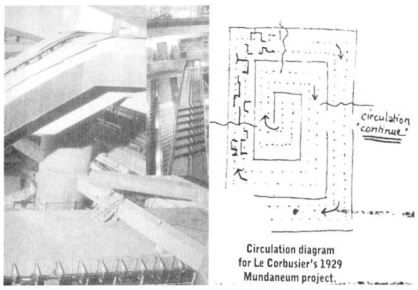
Assumption: "the genius may incorporate alien objects into a structure of a work, elements that would defeat a lesser artist, in whose hands the whole would break into a collection of incompatible fragments".[18] "This account of genius", according to Cousins, "introduces a permanent instability into subsequent discussions of beauty and ugliness. A dialectic between the two is now played out through the issue of coherence. Ugliness can deform a work, but it can also strengthen it. For the stronger the totality of a work of art, the more it has to overcome those elements within itself that oppose its unification."[19] This argument clearly poses a threat to form as a homogeneous entity. Koolhaas, as we know, incessantly experiments with the simultaneity of different movements and the juxtaposition of spaces, undermining the validity of the uniform.[20]

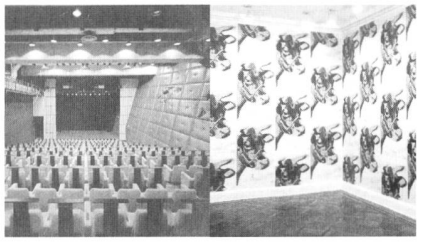
In this regard I would like to compare Le Corbusier's promenade architecturale and the role of infrastructure in Koolhaas' architecture. While the promenade architecturale presupposes a relationship of coherence to the form it engages, the opposite is true for OMA's buildings: form and circulation are almost always disjointed. I'm referring to a review of the Kunsthal by Kenneth Frampton, as interpreted by Cynthia Davidson[21], who suggested that the Kunsthal poses an interesting parallel to Le Corbusier's Congress hall for Strasbourg, most notably because in both projects infrastructure plays a vital role.[22] While at Strasbourg, a vehicular ramp passes around the building to the rooftop, the Kunsthal inhabits a series of pedestrian ramps, moving its visitors through the building to the roof. However, while in Le Corbusier's building, the ramp envelops and shapes the form of the building, the Kunsthal's ramp is conceived as a void





Illustrations:
17 Rem Koolhaas, Sign, Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands, 1992
18 Andy Warhol, Close cover before striking (Pepsi-Cola), 1962
19 Rem Koolhaas, "There's no lack of void", Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands, 1992
20 Andy Warhol, Suicide, 1962





slicing through the mass of the building without any resistance whatsoever. Hence where Corbusier's building reads as a coherent expression of circulation and form, the Kunsthal is an expression of cuts. As such, the Kunsthal poses a contested territory whereby form and movement as entirely disjunctive elements enter into a dynamic process of negotiation. I'm taking up Cynthia Davidson's argument, where she writes: "the box contains the spiral, compressing and deforming it while also being fragmented by it. (...) The spiraling ramps of the Kunsthal move away from Le Corbusier's prescriptive circulation systems as form-making to symbolize instead the movement of architecture from actual spiral to a spiraling effect."[23] While Le Corbusier, or also Mies for that matter established a linear coherence between movement and form, resulting in a spatial homogeneity, Koolhaas instigates an unstable relationship between the two, where coherence is born out of the contested space between the subjective experience of the user and the objectivity of the form. This juxtaposition of space and movement is also reiterated in the Zeebrugge terminal and the IIT Building, where Koolhaas orchestrates multiplicetous overlaps of different speeds and spaces. This "elimination of linear temporalities in favor of experiences of simultaneity and indetermination,"[24] questioning the modernist concept of the uniform, introduces another kind of equilibrium. In no longer accepting the existence of an objective logic, reality becomes the construction of desire.

(III) ORIGINALITY

Object Trouvee

Warhol banished the mysteries of artistic creation from his factory, where making a painting had roughly the same number of steps as a cake mix, and selling one involved "Small, Medium or Large. And how many?"[25] Warhol's rejection of any skill oriented mode of artistic production, as well as his disdain for notions of authenticity reveal similar ways of working at OMA. Most obviously this attitude shows in the categorization of OMA' projects in *SMLXL*, a book, in which—not unlike Warhol's paintings—architecture is categorized by size, subverting an inherently cultural venture to accede the commercial.

But also the depersonalized approach of Warhol's Factory along with its methodical mode of production impart certain analogies at OMA. Warhol in his words "Pop comes from the outside" suggests that making art is a collaborative, not an isolated process.[26] His emphasis on the collective operation eradicated any concept of specialization. Yet at the same time Warhol's complete displacement of creative control opened up the creative process to his co-workers where "collaborative craftsmanship gradually inverted the dependence on the individual designs of an artist-genius."[27] OMA, initially founded as a collaborative, likewise deflates notions of individual authorship. In addition its architecture is less animated by the creative act itself but largely energized by contemporary condition of the city. In fact the entire urban condition is rendered an object trouvee, which through a series of reinterpretations becomes the "readymade of architecture". By the same token Warhol manipulated found materials that he happened to come across. The found image served as a template for a succession of mechanized processes entailing the systematic depersonalization of manual execution, whereby "drawing as the innermost mark of artistic authenticity, as a gesture of expression is replaced by a concept of artlessness."[28] More importantly Warhol's work seemed to prove that these mechanized modes of production did not constitute a menace to the essential creativeness of an artwork, but simply elevated its cultural potential for mass consumption. For similar reasons OMA propagates modes of architectural "deskilling," which have been a vital source of inspiration for

Illustrations:
21 Rem Koolhaas, Espace piranesien, Euralille: centre international d'affaires, Lille, France, 1994
22 Le Corbusier, Circulation diagram for the Mundaneum project, 1929
23 Rem Koolhaas, Facade, Congrexpo Lille, France, 1994
24 Andy Warhol, $1.57 giant size, 1963
25 Rem Koolhaas, Interior, Congrexpo Lille, France, 1994
26 Andy Warhol, Cow-wallpaper, Castelli Gallery, 1966

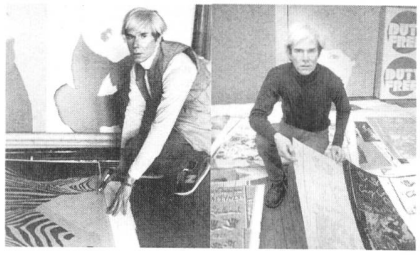
conceptual art. Just as Warhol used anonymous processing to obliterate the distinction between an original and its reproductions, OMA too conceives of architecture no longer as materialization of a prefixed vision but rather as a series of objectified readings born out of the specific context. By quantifying operative data such as traffic flow, zoning and land utilization, forms are no longer "designed" but rather "emerge." The ideological background to this mode of working, as was the case with Pop art, is intimately tied to the rejection of an aesthetic discourse.

The Generic

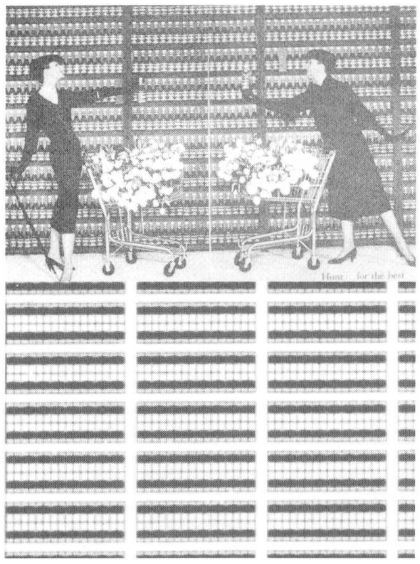
Accordingly OMA distills the parameters of each project down its most generic to free a project of prevailing ideologies. "After all what is a university library but a surface, on which to locate books and computers and a path, to bring the public to them? What is an opera house but a facility for the company to manufacture performances and a place for the public to assemble and watch them?"[29]

For Koolhaas, the banal constitutes a neutral basis to ignite his subversive strategy of difference. The most specific condition is distilled from the most generic to the point where the most common is defined anew, and the fundamentally unoriginal turns into something inherently original.[30] This interplay between the generic and the specific vividly recoups Duchamp's game of originality and reproducibility. While for Benjamin the original was marked by a sense of uniqueness which was eventually corrupted by methods of mechanical reproduction[31], Duchamp's readymades incorporate aspects of both, turning previous distinctions inside out. With the readymade, Duchamp undercuts the original by reproducing it as a kind of series. He then subverts the reproduction by reinscribing it as a kind of original. The terms are played off against each other to the point where neither one is privileged.[32] This attitude of ironic affirmation correlates with Koolhaas' critical transformation of the generic to yield something highly specific. In his design for the Bibliothèque de France, for instance, he uses the book stacks as a non-descript mass of "passive information", in which the reading rooms as carefully carved out voids articulate specific areas of "active information" by means of their diverse geometries. His project for the Universal Headquarters presents another interesting interplay of what is essentially deemed to be reproducible i. e. generic in natrure and what is irreproducible i. e. specific.Again a reciprocity is staged between the simple stacking of "generic floors" and the formal differentiation of "specific functions." While the generic office floors are left essentially undesigned, they offer a convenient backdrop for the spatially differentiated volumes retaining functions designated as specific. In this regard Rem's game is at once playful and subversive: While the generic allegedly legitimizes the specific, the commonplace is elevated as a singular event pointing to a new definition of the authentic.

The generic is however also inseperably tied to the formal language of modernism. While Warhol plundered the legacies of modernism for product styling and propaganda, Koolhaas reused its formal vocabulary as a kind of architectural prototype. This perhaps also explains Rem's long lasting affair with "Manhattanism"—a commodified version of modernism—where the distinction between an original and its reproducible sign language has been eradicated.[33] With his cunning reproductions of modernism, visible for example in the Kunsthal (where he uses Mies' Neue Staatsgalerie as a prototype), Koolhaas twists and subverts the modern to the point where the initially inauthentic reproduction acquires new definitions of authenticity. This positioning between original and reproduced modernism is not acted out in a purist fashion as perhaps in



Illustrations:
27 The Factory, 1965
28 Andy Warhol, "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface, there I am. There's nothing behind it.", 1968 30.
29 Andy Warhol, "You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke too.", 1968



New Minimalism and Post Modernism, but on the contrary remains rather blurred. By suspending any kind of ideological position, Koolhaas in fact succeeds to revert these positions. With each inflection to the point where the so called authentic is rendered inauthentic and vice versa, he produces hybrids that belong to neither side but incorporate elements of both. In closing I would say that Rem's work is not a negation of modernism, like perhaps post modernism attempted, but rather a neutralization, an almost ironic affirmation of modernism.

Authorship

Rem's strategies of subversion ultimately point to the negation of architecture as the opus of an author. This final eradication of the original, as the unique production of the artist/architect was earlier signaled by Warhol who went as far as faking his own signature, as the traditional guarantee of authorship.[34] Here Roland Barthes' argument of the "absentee author" comes into play: "The absence of the author is not only a historical fact of writing: it utterly transforms the modern text (or—which is the same thing—the text is henceforth written and read in such a way that in it, on every level, the author absents himself)."[35] Barthes notions are picked up more recently in Koolhaas' statements on "Bigness": "Bigness is impersonal: the architect is no longer condemned to stardom. Giving up control is the premise. Bigness surrenders the field to (...) after architecture."[36] Koolhaas continues this argument in his essay on "Typical plan", by acclaiming the absentee authors of commercial architecture as an "avant-garde of erasers,"[37] promising architecture a kind of post-heroic status. This opens up a new vantage point on the indeterminacy of commercial architecture - bringing back Pop art's infatuation with mass media as the origin of complete indistinction or freedom.

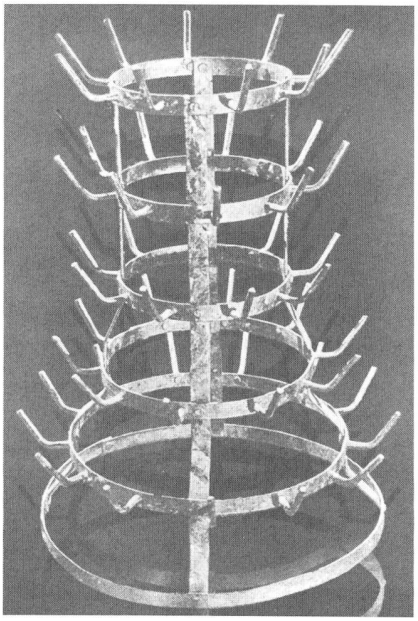
The liberation of architecture from individual authorships is naturally accelerated by new technologies: "the elevator—with its potential to establish mechanical rather than architectural connections render null and void the classical repertoire of architecture. The art of architecture is useless in Bigness."[38] The destructuring of the architectural vocabulary is expressed in many of OMA's projects. The "Piranesian space" of Lille or the "House in Bordeaux" render a spatial perception quite different from classical modernism due to their extensive implementation of different technologies. This infiltration of new technologies into architecture is paralleled by the concept of mechanical reproduction in art which, according to Benjamin, was the end of art as we knew it. While the unique status of art/architecture was always linked to its implicit permanence, the mechanical as essentially reproducible accelerates a state of the ephemeral.[39]

(IV) POPULAR

Ultimately the question arises: Why is Rem so popular? I would speculate that for our generation of architects he has had the same liberating influence as Duchamp and later Warhol had for the art scene. Interestingly enough, Koolhaas shares the same infatuation for American inventions as many of the Pop artists in the 60's, for whom the commodification of mainstream America—at once impermanent, impersonal and materialistic —was born out of a particular combination of pragmatic survivalhood and freedom. Koolhaas' architecture reflects this unique combination of pragmatism and ephemerality, without necessarily submitting wholeheartedly to its commodification. At the same time however, his architecture exudes an opportunistic, almost apolitical quality, which for many of us has been a freeing influence from the moral allegations of recent avant-garde architecture.

Illustrations:
30 Andy Warhol, Advertisement for Hunt's catsup, 1956
31 Rem Koolhaas, Los Angeles density: 2.500 persons/km2, 1995
32 Rem Koolhaas, Très grande bibliotèque, Paris, France, 1989
33 Andy Warhol, Portraits of the artists, 1967

With that in mind, Rem is as detached from the ideological constructs of an avant-garde as Duchamp and Warhol were before him and accordingly opens up a freedom for the architectural discipline to extend itself toward the performative. About his Zurich airport project Koolhaas comments: "I think our work is increasingly connecting and addressing the issue of performance rather than the issue of form; it is more interested what actually happens in the utility, than the notion that in these unstable conditions you can still create something beautiful." In this sense, Rem's architecture also negates architecture as a visual phenomenon offered to the viewer: this is the theme of the end of aesthetics, of the refusal of the judgment of taste, of the rejection of formalism, of the exclusion of architecture from every practice grounded on a morphological basis.[40] No longer bound by a prefixed aesthetic, OMA's projects evolve more likely from a target-oriented strategy. With his eventual rather than essential approach, Rem perceives form as a changing entity. The increasing mobility impeding tectonic identification puts the architectural object into question. With this approach based on the performative, OMA makes a first effort to reconcile architecture and the public, raising the critical potential of addressing a non-specialized audience. By posing a general condition of eventuality first, OMA inserts itself into the cultural division of mass culture and avant-garde architecture.



Footnotes:
1 Interview with Elisabeth Armstrong and Bruce Conner about the work of Marcel Duchamp', in
2 The Duchamp Effect, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996, p. 57 Interview with Frances Hsu, 1997
3 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'The Andy Warhol Line', in The Work of Andy Warhol, edited by Gary Garrels, Dia Foundation, New York, 1989, p. 65
4 Ibid. p. 55
5 'The Mass Media and the Arts',in: Popart, p.46
6 See also Cynthia Davidson, 'Koolhaas and the Kunsthal: History Lesions', in Any 21: How the Critic sees, New York 1997, p. 39
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p. 40
9 I'm referring here to Warhol's paintings of soup cans with torn labels, of opened cans or the rows of Coca-Cola bottles whose contents range from full to empty.
10 Pierre Cabanne, 'Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp', trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Viking, 1971), p. 48, as quoted by Thierry de Duve in 'Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism', in The Duchamp Effect, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996 pg 104
11 Mark Cousins, 'The Ugly', AA Files 28, London, 1994, p. 61
12 Alejandro Zaera-Polo, 'OMA 1986-1991: Notes for a Topographical Survey' in El Croquis 53, Madrid, 1994 p. 40
13 Ibid., p. 42
14 Ibid., p. 40
15 Mark Cousins, 'The Ugly', AA Files 28, London, 1994, p. 63
16 Rem Koolhaas, SMLXL, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam 1995, p.1204
17 Ibid., p. 1211
18 Mark Cousins, 'The Ugly', AA Files 28, London, 1994, p. 61
19 Ibid.
20 Alejandro Zaera-Polo, 'OMA 1986-1991: Notes for a Topographical Survey' in El Croquis 53, Madrid, 1994, p. 40
21 Cynthia Davidson, 'Koolhaas and the Kunsthal: History Lesions', in Any 21: How the Critic sees, New York 1997
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., p. 40
24 Alejandro Zaera-Polo,OMA 1986-1991: Notes for a Topographical Survey, p. 40, El Croquis 53, Madrid 1994
25 Trevor Fairbrother, 'Skulls', in The Work of Andy Warhol, edited by Gary Garrels, Dia Foundation, New York 1989, p. 96
26 Nan Rosenthal, 'Let us now praise famous Men', in The Work of Andy Warhol, edited by Gary Garrels, Dia Foundation, New York, 1989 p. 42
27 Rainer Crone, 'Form and Ideology', in The Work of Andy Warhol, edited by Gary Garrels, Dia Foundation, New York, 1989, p. 80
28 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, 'The Andy Wahol Line' in The Work of Andy Warhol, edited by Gary Garrels, Dia Foundation, New York, 1989 p. 54
29 Jeffrey Kipnis, 'Recent Koolhaas', El Croquis 79, Madrid 1996, p. 30
30 See also Anna Klingmann, Phillipp Oswalt, 'Formlosigkeit', Arch+ 30, 1997
31 See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Illuminations-Essays and Reflections, Random House, New York, 1988
32 Sarat Maharaj, 'A Monster of Veracity, a Cruystalline Transubstantation: Typotranslating the Green Box', in The Duchamp Effect, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1996, p. 66
33 see also Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1994
34 Rainer Crone, 'Form and Ideology', in The Work of Andy Warhol, edited by Gary Garrels, Dia Foundation, New York, 1989 p. 79
35 Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author', in Image, Music, Text , New York: Hill and Wang, 1977
36 Rem Koolhaas, SMLXL, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1995, p. 516
37 Ibid., p. 343
38 Ibid., p. 500
39 See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Illuminations-Essays and Reflections, Random House, New York, 1988
40 See also Thierry De Duve Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism, p. 119, in The Duchamp Effect, MIT press, 1996

Illustrations:
34 Binnenstad Rotterdam, 1940,
35 Marcel Duchamp, Readymade: galvanized-iron bottle dryer, 1921

The illustration material was selected in collaboration with Anne Simone Pfister.

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