Six Canonical Projects by Rem Koolhaas

Essays on the History of Ideas

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6.

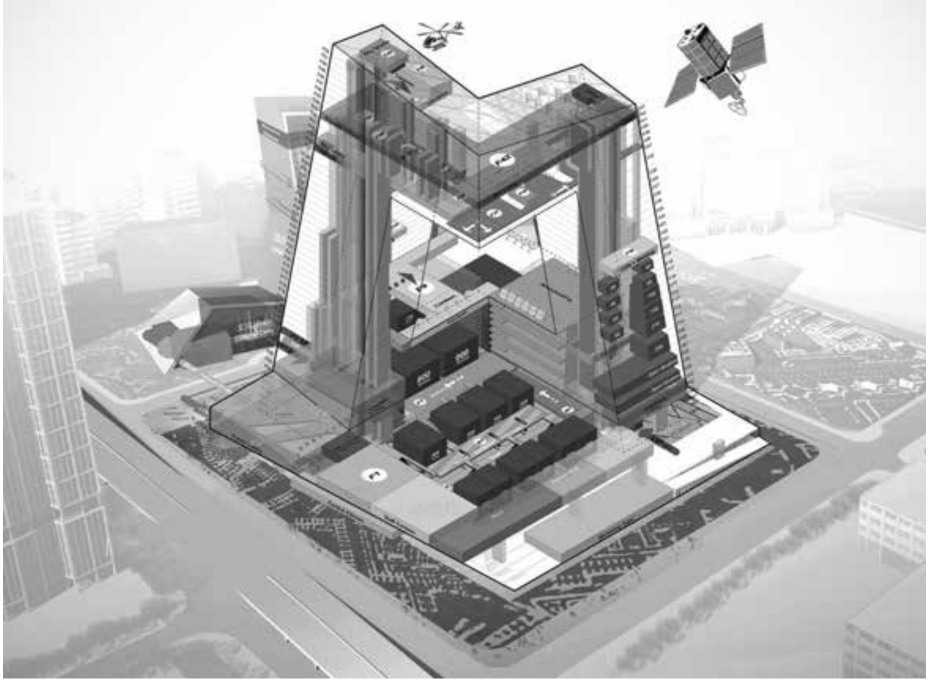
SHAPE: CCTV, BEIJING 2002–2008

THE OUTDATED TYPOLOGY OF THE SKYSCRAPER

An Adaptive Species: The CCTV Building in Beijing

In *Content* (2004), Koolhaas characterizes the current transformation in China both in political and economic terms as "perhaps the greatest gamble in the history of mankind, it is a gamble that no one can afford (China) to lose."[1] However, this modernization of the Asian urban space must take place "without the intellectual infrastructure to rethink the project of modernity … changing the world without a blueprint."[2] The site of his designs for the new China Central Television Station (CCTV) and the Television Cultural Center (TVCC) (2002–08) is located in Beijing's new Central Business District (CBD). This area, which was scheduled to be completed for the Olympic Games in 2008, represents a new quarter that will eventually have around 300 skyscrapers. According to Koolhaas, "a new icon is formed … not the predictable 2-dimensional tower 'soaring' skyward, but a truly 3-dimensional experience, a canopy that symbolically embraces the entire population … an instant icon that proclaims a new phase in Chinese confidence."[3]

Instead of being one more high-rise among many others, the shape of the CCTV building is a cornered loop created by six approximately rectangular elements that deviate by a few degrees. The blocks consist of two main towers that are interconnected at their



(132) Rem Koolhaas/Ole Scheeren/OMA, China Central Television Station (CCTV), Beijing, 2002–08, the diagram of functions. Source: Koolhaas, AMOMA et al., *Content*, 486-487 © 2015 OMA

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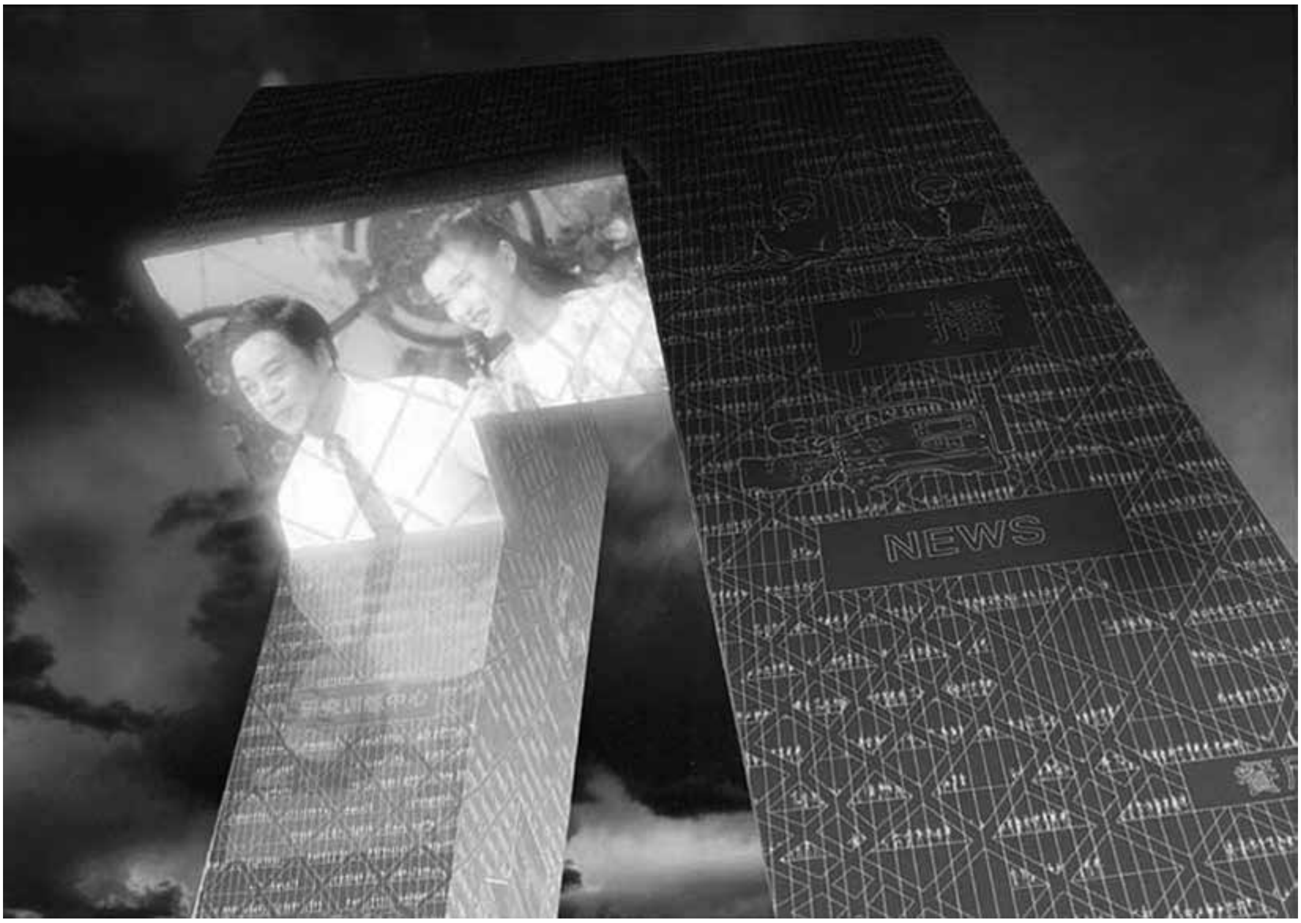
[1] Koolhaas, AMOMA et al., *Content*, 450.
[2] Ibid., 453.
[3] Ibid., 489.

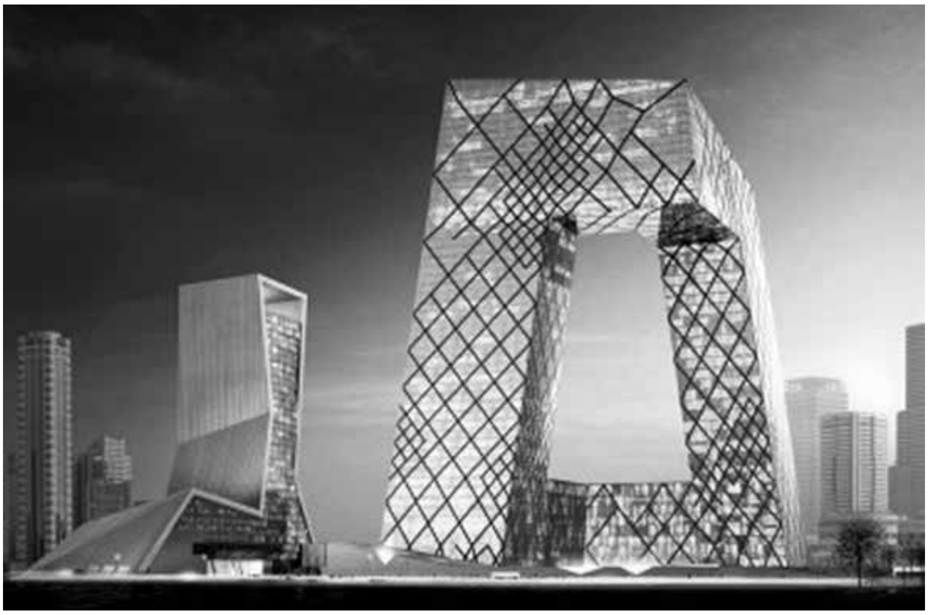


(133) Rem Koolhaas/Ole Scheeren/OMA, China Central Television Station (CCTV), Beijing, 2002–08, the interlocking towers, animation.
Source: www.e-architect.co.uk/beijing/central-china-tv
© 2015 OMA

bases by a common platform and again joined at the top via a cantilevered L-shaped overhang (→**132**,→**133**). The structure is an irregular rhomboid hollowed out at its core. Instead of distributing the individual programmatic parts to different buildings, Koolhaas accommodates them as a collective in a single construction. This scheme should not only demonstrate the organization as a coherent whole but also promote solidarity and collaboration among the users by interconnecting their activities. In the common bases, the two lobbies of the towers, the production studios as well as a series of secondary facilities are situated on nine floors partly underground. The two towers rising from this platform have different programmatic requirements: the first tower connected to the studios houses program production and broadcasting; the second tower adjacent to the TVCC is dedicated to research as well as public services, education, and events. As a third part of the building, the cantilevered element that connects the two towers accommodates the management, a sky studio, and public areas, such as the restaurant and viewing lounge. In this way, certain parts of CCTV are open to public visitors, offering a panoramic view of a predetermined pathway through the loop of the building.

The primary structure is shown on the outside surface of the construction. The irregular framework of the surface layer displays the disproportionate loads caused by the cantilevered overhang and the two inwardly leaning towers. At points of great stress the triangulated grid is doubled, even tripled, whereas redundant elements are eliminated (→**134**,→**135**). As William Millard points out in "East Anatomy: Dissecting the Iconic Exosymbiont," this shape represents the idea of interlocking and interdependence because four of the six blocks could only maintain their structural stability as a whole and would be unstable in separation. He characterizes the building as an "exceptionally perceptive and adaptive organism" because its construction is "a visible rigid exoskeleton, an adaptation borrowed from the arthropod phylum, that strengthens structural resistance to either the acute or the chronic form of collapse."[4]

Millard continues with this medical examination of the building's surface structure that is like "epithelial layers" because the skin of the built organism functions analogously to the skin of natural organisms in terms of protecting the internal organs, thermal and moisture regulation, and sexual attraction. According to another reading by the architectural theorist Xiao Mo, CCTV is a building of "genital worship"; this reading is based on several images in *Content* that reveal Koolhaas's sexual suggestions of the structure.[5] However, Koolhaas denies that there is a hidden meaning with an explicit pornographic content. In any case, for Millard, the CCTV organism represents a new species because all the major functions of a media organization operating at the national scale are accommodated within a single shape like organs covered by skin. He further states that one of the CCTV building's most significant characteristics is its ability to respond to the



(134) Rem Koolhaas/Ole Scheeren/OMA, China Central Television Station (CCTV), Beijing, 2002–08, animation.
Source: www.kultur-online.net/node/1782
© 2015 OMA

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[4] Ibid., 490.

[5] Grace Quiroga, "Pants on Fire?," in *Architecture in the Age of Empire, Die Architektur der neuen Weltordnung: 11th International Bauhaus Colloquium*, ed. by Kristian Faschingeder et al. (Weimar: Bauhaus University, 2011), 378–93, here 383; Koolhaas, AMOMA et al., *Content*, 542.

surrounding environment; for example, the laminated glass-mesh skin that displays news images is interpreted as an adaptation to the urban environment.

(135) Rem Koolhaas/Ole Scheeren/OMA, China Central Television Station (CCTV), Beijing, 2002–08, the structural forces and changes of the diagonal members, diagrams.
Source: Koolhaas, AMOMA et al., *Content*, 520
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New Typologies of the City

In *Delirious New York* Koolhaas discusses the Manhattan skyscraper and "the fire of Manhattanism inside the iceberg of Modernism."[6] Within the confines of the gridded block, a new urban strategy emerges, an artificial world. However, in *Content,* he claims that since its invention the skyscraper has become a less interesting, mediocre, and even corrupted and discredited form because "the promise it once held – an organization of excessive difference, the installation of surprise as a guiding principle – has been negated by repetitive banality. The intensification of density it initially delivered has been replaced by carefully-spaced isolation."[7] Thus, he fundamentally questions the typology of the free-standing or autarkic tower, not only because of its ubiquitous and banal presence but also as a generator of urban density and circulation. Referring to the model of the city as an archipelago of thematized spaces, it finally leads to "spatial apartheid, a universal archipelago of 'scripted spaces' separated by hard boundaries and strict checkpoints. An event about monocultures."[8] If the skyscraper as ultimate typology of the city has become an outdated model, what are the key characteristics of the "new adaptive species" of the city? How do they interact with the environment and with the existing typological forms? What social implications do the new configurations suggest?

Currently, the skyscraper is scattered around the world, however. Cities such as Hanoi, Seoul, Shanghai, and Beijing have undergone dramatic transformations in city scale. Due to unprecedented expansion, these Asian cities have to deal with both the preservation of traditional structures and the conception of the new Central Business District. As definitive typology, the skyscraper seems to be exhausted by its pervasive application that excludes all other possibilities. Assuming that more than 300 new skyscrapers are planned, this assembly of free-standing towers—once a symbol of business and the metropolitan life—can only demonstrate architectural mediocrity. The skyscraper has just become a kind of requisite for rapidly developing countries and the economy of emerging markets. In recent years, the idea of the skyscraper has been merely reduced to an arms race for the world's tallest building.

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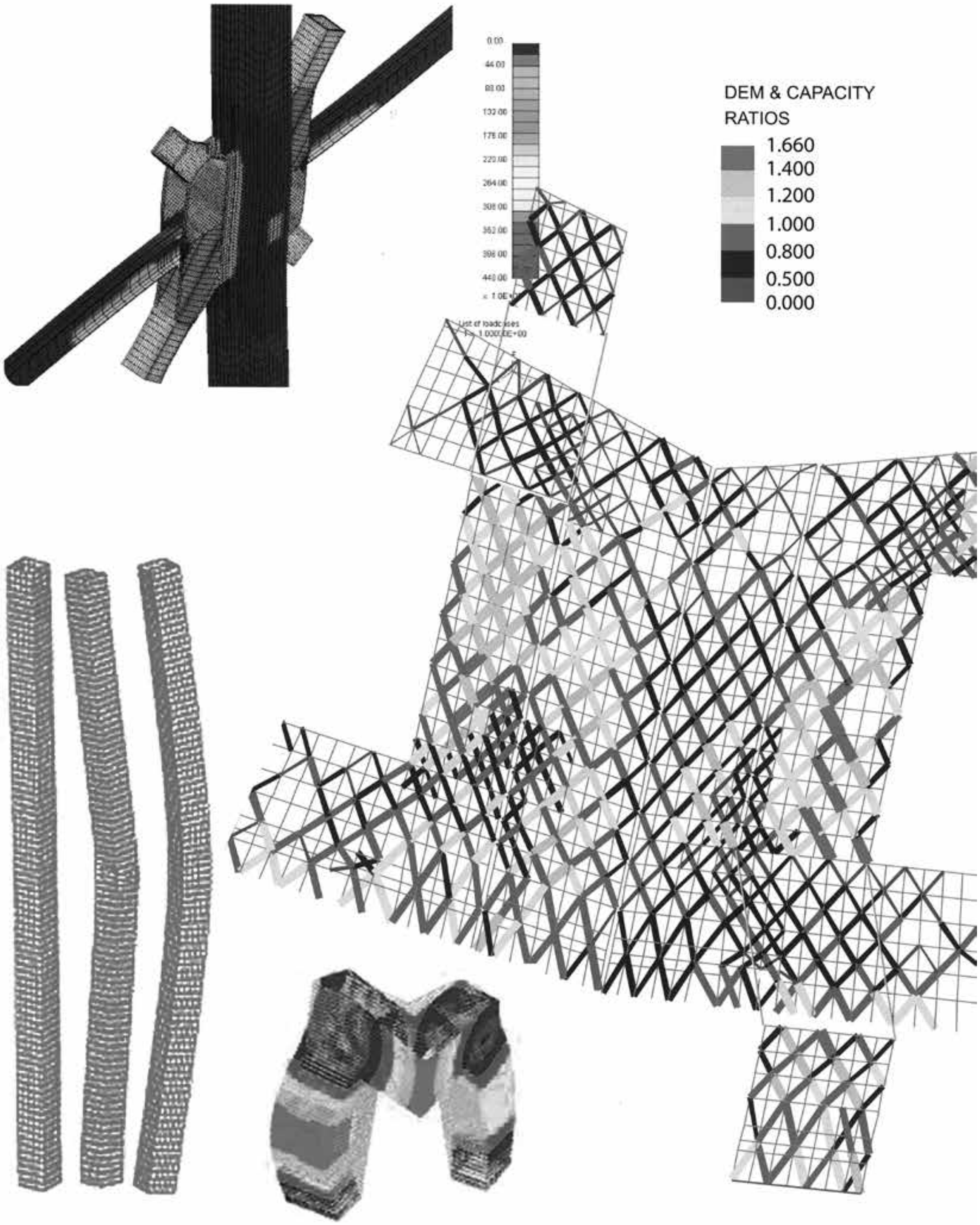
[6] Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 171.
[7] Koolhaas, AMOMA et al., *Content*, 473.
[8] Ibid., 31.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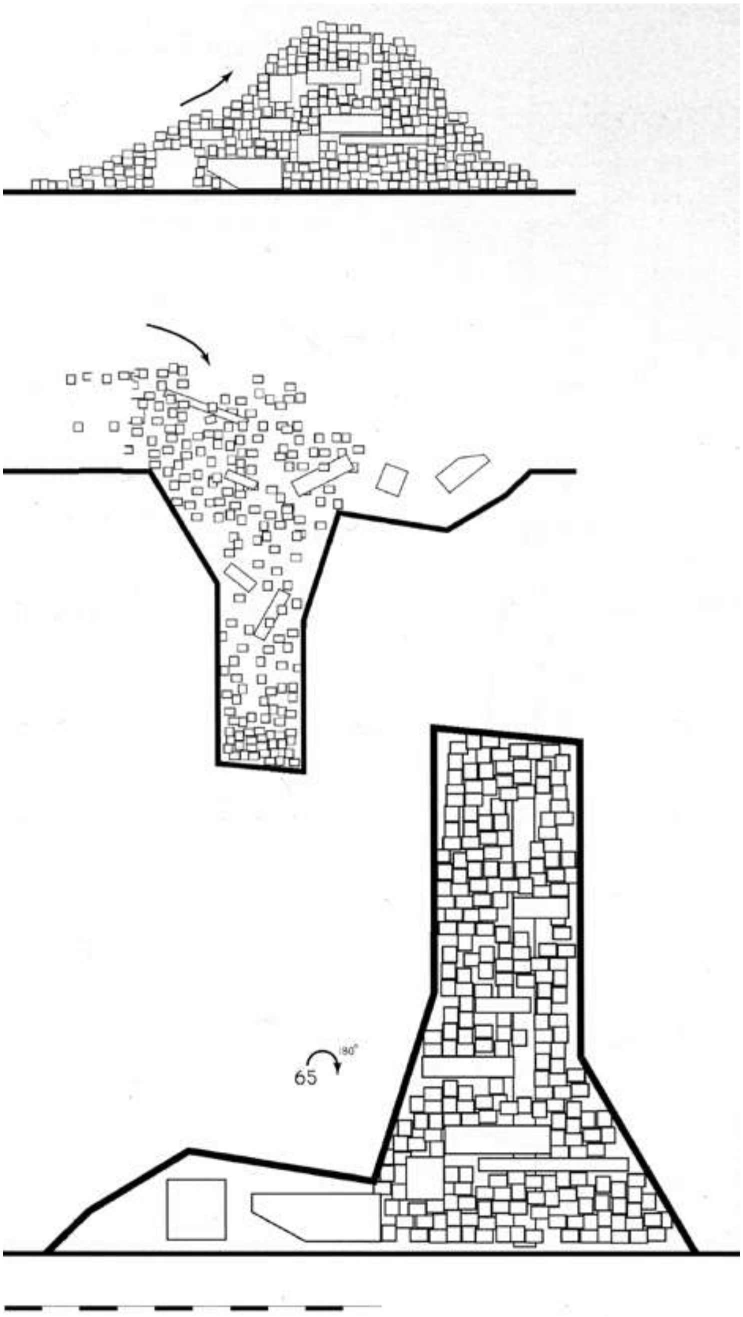
Referring to the city as a space for uncontrollable development, Koolhaas speaks of urban uncertainty and the illusion of anticipating future needs. Therefore, "strategies that accommodate – even exploit – uncertainties must be devised."[9] As the isolated cores of the typical skyscraper limit the potential of urban life and direct social interchange, he suggests four new types of configurations that he calls the "Universal Modernization Patents." The CCTV and the TVCC buildings represent the two realized applications of the "Universal Modernization Patents:" first, the "Skyscraper Loop," also called "Bent Skyscraper" (2002): "METHOD OF AVOIDING THE ISOLATION OF THE TRADITIONAL HIGH RISE BY TURNING FOUR SEGMENTS INTO A LOOP"; second, the "Cake-Tin Architecture" (2002): "ACCOMODATION OF THE RESIDUALS OF A DOMINANT PROGRAM IN A NOUVELLE CUISINE MOLD."[10] (→**136**) These concepts mainly focus on the shape of the building and its interference with the urban surroundings. Whereas the "Skyscraper Loop" also relies on the circulation and infrastructural aspects, the "Cake-Tin Architecture" merely provides any arbitrary mold for the complex program.

Another application of the patents for new configurations of high-rise buildings is the concentrated Hyperbuilding for Bangkok. The patent for "Tall & Slender" (1996) is conceived as a self-contained metropolis within a single building: "ARRANGEMENT OF MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE TOWERS TO REACH NEW HEIGHTS WITHOUT WIDE BASE."[11] To accommodate a population of 120,000 residents, the building consists of a collection of towers, intermediate horizontal plates, and diagonal elements (→**137**). The individual slim parts of the configuration structurally support each other and create ever-taller towers.[12] At the same time, this scheme avoids the dark cores that occur in buildings with a single monolith mass. A system of vertical and horizontal connections provides fluid circulation inside the whole arrangement. Another example of hyperbuilding is the concept of the Togok Towers in Seoul. Again, the construction scheme operates with a composite stability of members locked together by structural braces at critical points. Through this device, a super high-rise building with stunningly slender towers emerges.

The patent for "The End of the Road" (2003) is presented as a further option to the exhausted, outdated typology of the skyscraper: "ACTIVATION OF THE Central Business District ARCHETYPE BY EITHER CONCENTRATING OR DIFFUSING THE CORES OVER A SINGLE URBAN CARPET."[13] In contrast to the hypertowers, this type is a diffusion of low-rise structures with a variety of programmatic issues

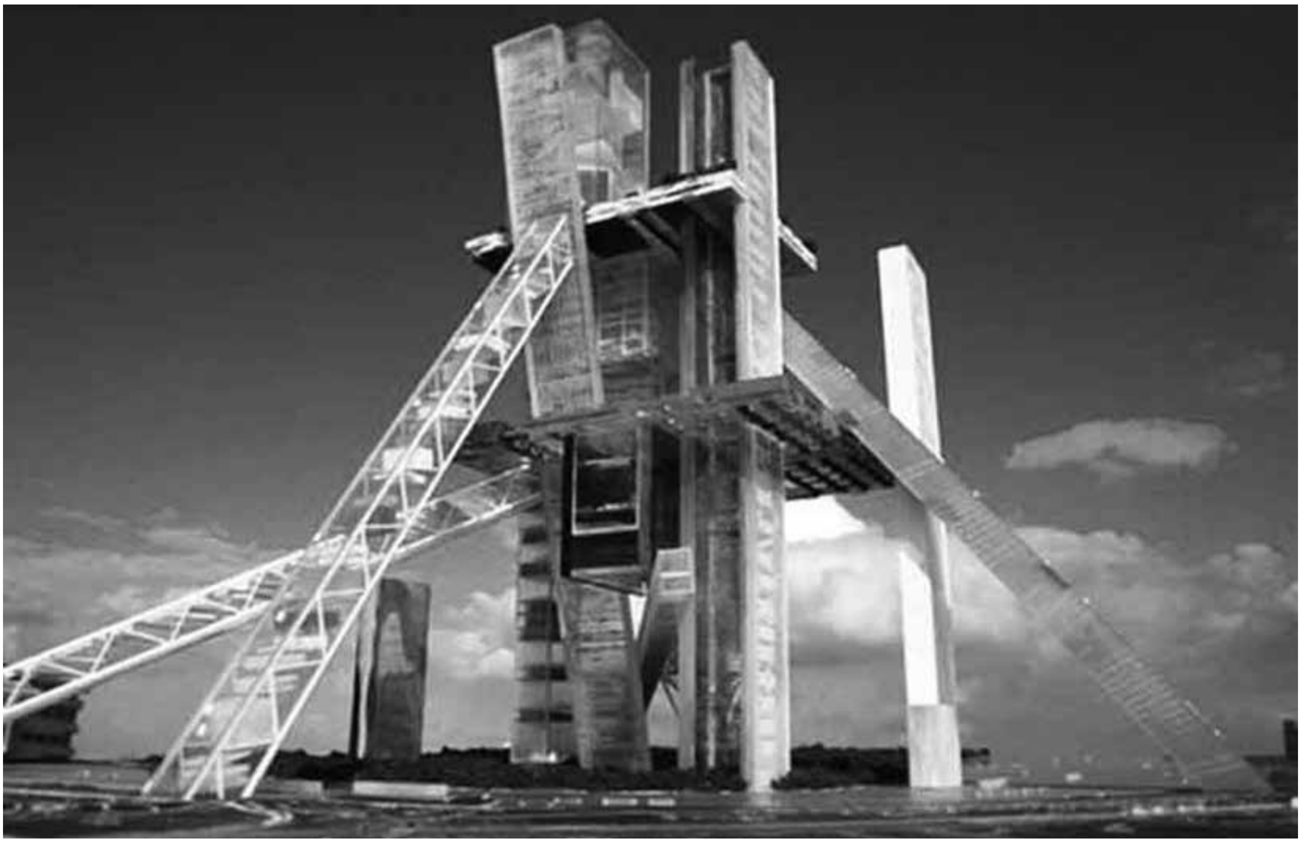
[9] Ibid., 431.
[10] Ibid., 511–2.
[11] Ibid., 510.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 513.



(136) Rem Koolhaas/Ole Scheeren/OMA, Television Cultural Center (TVCC), Beijing, 2002–08, the patent for Cake-Tin Architecture, drawing.
Source: Koolhaas, AMOMA et al., *Content*, 512
© 2015 OMA

over an expanded urban area. Koolhaas abandons the typical gridiron of streets by substituting it with an area of dispersed cores that refer to traditional clusters of Chinese courtyards, the *hutongs*. These patterns are basic forms of the urban fabric, which Beijing has initiated to preserve via a conservation plan for the historic substance of the Old City.

With the patents for new urban structures, Koolhaas basically refers to innovative high-rise buildings (except the traditional low pattern termed "The End of the Road") that can even generate composite super-high schemes. However, the high-rise structure as metaphor of urbanity was given a cruel jolt when on September 11, 2001 two



(137) Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Hyperbuilding, Bangkok, 1996, the patent for Tall & Slender, animation. Source. www.bdonline.co.uk/top-10-unbuilt-towers-bangkok-hyperbuilding-by-oma © 2015 OMA

Boeing 767s, their tanks full of high-octane fuel, crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. This act of terrorism was a spectacle of devastation that had only been previously seen in movies. The WTC collapsed into twisted, charred ruins, and five buildings around them were completely ruined. The towers of the World Trade Center (built 1966–72) were briefly the tallest buildings in the world until they were superseded by the Sears Tower in Chicago in 1974. The main concern of their architect, Minoru Yamasaki, was to conceive the buildings as one object separated from their changing surroundings. Twenty years earlier, a cartoon showed the two towers in an S-shape cloud, making them look like the two bars of the $ sign. The gibe turns them into an emblem of financial world domination, a monument to the triumph of capitalism.

In the post-9/11 era, commentators state that the destruction of the WTC inflicted a wound on the apparently invincible system more severe than the destructive impact on the urban fabric. On the one hand, the twin towers were a symbol of New York, and their obliteration changed the skyline of the city irrevocably. But on the other hand, the damage to the ideology of the New World is far worse. In addition to being a powerful symbol of economic strength, the World Trade Center represented a symbol of utopian ventures as well as imperialism, both military and cultural.

For Koolhaas, it is evident that neo-liberalism and its "unstable ideological environment" have changed the conditions of architectural practice and the responsibilities of the planer. Consequently, what are the effects of neo-liberal urbanization? How can architects decline to serve systems of power and the planning structures that assert the values of power?

Shape as Content and Container

In Bill Millard's article "Banned Words!," one entry (along with "Big," "Community," "Mass," "Program," and "Society") "Content" states: "If a building or building-idea or book has content, conveys content, disseminates content, then it is a container: in other words, it is close to nothing."[14] In "12 Reasons to Get Back into Shape," in the same volume, Robert E. Somol argues that shape avoids the opposition between content and form.[15] He refers to the recent projects by Koolhaas, particularly the CCTV building, and the specific qualities of their shapes. Somol defines twelve attributes of shape: illicit, easy, expandable, graphic, adaptable, fit, empty, arbitrary, intensive, buoyant, projective, and cool. He sets up the concept of *shape* as oppositional to that of *form*. Whereas form claims to be essential, abstract, and immaterial, shape is contingent and situational. It operates with the calculated vagueness of the atmospheric in the surface area. Shape relies on the immediacy of the sensual experience. Created "by the seduction of contour, shape has a requisite degree of slack."[16] Somol also mentions the idea of the *formless*, which has been presented as an alternative to the form. Shape, as opposed to form, is not involved, however, with the qualities of the formless.

For Somol, shape is contrary to the architectural properties of form and mass as they appear, for example, in the work of Frank Gehry. On the one hand, this notion of form is concerned with increasingly elaborate geometry and leads to the rhetorical excess of architectural object-sculptures. On the other hand, mass is an expressive means related to the spectacle that serves as a signature and derives its value from the author. Shape has become a great taboo, an "expletive of professional denigration," because shape has been commodified and hence anyone may claim a special competence in its field. In addition, shape is projective because it "is experienced more like a visitation from an alternative world."[17] With shape, the inconsistency between the independent interior and the exterior wrap appears natural. Shape exposes its hollowness like leftover packing material after the object has been taken away. Somol presents shape as a residue: "the twisted knot of CCTV [by Rem Koolhaas] operates as a minimalist frame for a monumental void … where that which is missing receives the greatest attention."[18] The shape of the CCTV building thereby *reframes* the city: "The OMA shape projects don't only operate with the graphic immediacy of logos, generating a new identity, but they are also holes in the skyline that reframe the city. One doesn't look *at* them so much as through them or from them. To radically paraphrase Carl Andre, a shape is a hole in a thing it is not."[19] In contrast to the abstract and immaterial realm of form, shape as covering surface for volumes basically depends on the material world, that is, the immediacy of sensual experience, such as the presence of large-scale objects. Yet, "*shape must float*": Shape has the effect of entropy on architecture, because it cools down the discipline. Similar to mere size, or as Koolhaas calls it Bigness, the vagueness of shape has mainly performative properties.[20]

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[14] Millard, "Banned Words," 91.
[15] Somol, "12 Reasons to Get Back into Shape," 86–7.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

In his 2004 essay "Architecture and Content: Who is afraid of the Form-Object?" Pier Vittorio Aureli refers to Somol's concept: "the superficiality of Shape is nothing but the solidification of excess content, metaphors, meanings, and symbols without sense; a solidification for which the architectural form is often literally a mold. Shapes can be interpreted as hieroglyphics; incomprehensible, yet their stubbornly figurative and symbolic character wants to be deciphered."[21] Reappropriating Michel Fried's term *objecthood*, Aureli argues that the shaped architecture—such as projects by Koolhaas, Herzog & de Meuron, Diller + Scofidio, or MVRDV—is concerned with its *contenthood*. Form and its content have the value of a commodity, as Piero Sraffa describes, that is not determined by the factors of production, redistribution, and consumption but by the economic process of supply and demand. In this circular system the certain properties of the produced things are not surplus or automatic by-products but rather represent an abstract system itself. In Sraffa's economic theory, the productive circle is based not on the material properties of the thing but on the performative qualities of the commodity so that the form of the commodity is understood as a material necessity for the circular process without any further meaning or content in itself.

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Pier Vittorio Aureli, "Architecture and Content: Who's Afraid of the Form-Object?," in *Log* (Fall 2004): 29–36, here 29–30.

NEO-LIBERAL CONDITIONS OF ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE

Plasticity, or The Dialectic between Form and Shape

Following Aureli's notion of the commodification of architecture, the rhetoric of opposite codes is most stunningly applied in the case of the CCTV building: it may suggest a moon gate of a traditional Chinese garden, a bracket structure, a lattice window, a spider's web, interlocking Ls, a pet, a donut, a hand signal, and an empty TV screen. Any of those interpretations refers to the spatial perception and hence the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the three-dimensional object. For Sylvia Lavin, shape produces "a multivalent sensibility in which the clarity of view at the core of the Enlightenment project gives way to the density of experience."[22] It invokes plasticity in architecture, which leads to a "radical reorientation in the notion of architectural space. Rather than an empty abstraction, the plastic diagram of space describes a gradual differentiation of material densities ranging from the invisibility of a gas, to a translucent liquid, to a solid form."[23] (→**138**) For example, Diller+Scofidio's Blur Building on Lake Neuchatel in Switzerland (2002) works with the plasticity of a solidifying atmosphere and provides the visitors with a kind of opacity of space. The plasticity of reinforced concrete largely contributed to the success of modern architecture and demonstrates the essence and greatest potential of the material. In addition to the rationality of the framework of the Dom-Ino structure, concrete enables flowing curves that have a more gestural, even expressive, organic quality with a strong emphasis on the texture of the new shapes.

Plasticity is derived not only from the use of materials that allow for new structures but is also intimately connected with synthetic materials that lack the conventional, hierarchical connotations of traditional materials. The new forms respond to the inventiveness made possible by new technologies and material techniques. Plasticizing is closely related to the generative opportunities of plastic material in architectural form. For example, molded fiberglass enriched by luminosity gives the design a radical indeterminacy as to the material used. Glass, as one of the most important materials of the modern movement, is often understood to represent the qualities of truth and lightness. Plastic, in contrast, is unable to establish any relationship between material and truth, whether truth *to* material or truth *of* material. But there is another difference between the modernist materials, like glass, steel, and concrete, and the artificiality of plastic: it is a synthetic liquid material and requires a molding process in the production of its smooth, jointless, textureless surface. The term itself is derived from the Greek *plassein*, which means to mold and describes the particular fluidity of its process of manufacture. Yet, long before plastic played a major role in architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright proclaimed in his essay about the nature of materials that plastic is "peculiarly modern" [because of its] "true aesthetic of genuine structural reality."[24] During the nineteen-sixties an intense interest in the new material, both in art and in architecture, entailed the use of techniques of plasticity. For instance, Michael Webb's Cushicle is a mobile home consisting of a plastic inflatable suit designed to be carried by a man on his back. It is a shell to "house" the equipment for a domestic program that can be unfolded in various configurations. The choice of the material is necessitated by the fact that this kind of plasticity can only be achieved by a molded plastic shell that creates modular units and self-contained environments.[25]

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[22] Sylvia Lavin, "Plasticity at Work," in *Mood River*, ed. by Jeffrey Kipnis and Annetta Massie (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2002), 74–81, here 80.

[23] Ibid.

In present-day life, there is an excess of plastic, since practically everyone is nearly always in contact with some form of it: in someone's body as a reconstructed knee or breast implants, in clothes, or in the room furnishings. However, plastic seems to be a material without a nature to which essential characteristics can be assigned. It lacks essence and immutable qualities and hence its identity is somewhat undeterminable. Although plastic is now virtually everywhere, it is marked as a product of commodification and waste. Referring to the pervasive use of plastic material within the human body, which provides "3 to 5 million individual upgrades" and the "intromission of a new species into its self-made Junksphere," Koolhaas suggests, "the cosmetic is the new cosmic…"[26]

Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting link the new plasticity of form to the neo-liberal conditions of architectural practice. In the essay "Notes around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism" (2002), they discuss the possible move away from critical architectural practice towards projective practice, using Peter Eisenman's highly articulate *forms* against Koolhaas's diagrammatic and non-specific *shapes*.[27] One of the central problems of form is its inherent ambiguity because it refers to *idea* and *essence*, on the one hand, and

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[24] Frank Lloyd Wright, "In the Nature of Materials: A Philosophy" (1942), in *Architecture Culture 1943–68*, ed. by Joan Ockman (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 31–41, here 35.

[25] Koolhaas and Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, 280.

[26] Koolhaas, "Junk Space," 171.

[27] Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, "Notes around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism," in *Perspecta* 33: *Mining Autonomy* (July 2002), 72–7, here 75.

(138) Diller+Scofidio, Blur Building, Lake Neuchatel, 2002, rendering. Source: Diller and Scofidio, *Blur* © 2015 Diller+Scofidio

to *shape*, on the other hand. According to Eisenman's point of view, form is a conceptual quality of things as they are known to the mind, while Koolhaas suggests form as a perceptual quality known by the senses in real space.[28] Furthermore, a key aspect of their argument is that both architects represent two different orientations towards the discipline, the first as autonomy and process and the latter as force and effect.

Somol and Whiting argue that Eisenman and K. Michael Hays adopt an indexical reading of architecture since the index combines the material trace of the architectural object with signification. For instance, in Hays's description of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion as well as in Eisenman's interpretation of Le Corbusier's Maison Dom-Ino, the material object serves as a physically driven sign. In order to demonstrate self-referentiality, Eisenman and Hays have to deploy a series of reproductions because the architectural objects are missing: Eisenman redraws axonometrics of the Dom-Ino scheme, Hays describes historical photographs of the demolished Barcelona Pavilion. In "Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-Ino and the Self-Referential Sign" (1979), Eisenman refers to the attitude of the modern movement toward the autonomy of an abstract system within preexisting cultural values.[29] For example, in literature there was a move away from narrative to non-narrative forms that led to a new relationship between subject and object.

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[28] The concept of form in antiquity was proposed by Plato in the Dialogue of *Timaeus*. He distinguishes between the eternal "idea" and the "thing" apparent to the senses. While forms are objects of thought but not of sight, things are bound to surface and objects of sight but not of reasoning. See Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, 52.

Comparing Le Corbusier to Renaissance thinking, Colin Rowe also interprets the Dom-Ino prototype as a variation of "historical change mirrored in unchanging modes of representation. 'Modern' in Rowe's context seems merely to indicate the new style of supposed abstraction and the symbology of the machine."[30] For Eisenman, however, Le Corbusier's scheme is a self-referential sign. It analyses the "minimal conditions for any architecture."[31] Architecture cannot be reduced to mere geometry, which is a substantial part of the building, but instead the geometrical ordering of the Dom-Ino house is a deliberate architectural sign. "Thus, in cases where a simple geometry exists as a basic diagram, the 'architecture' seems to be reduced to the decorative grafting of some aesthetic skin or the insertion of a particular use into the given geometry."[32]

For Eisenman, the diagram of the Dom-Ino house has a specific configuration of elements, although another ordering would provide the same functional and structural requirements. He interprets Le Corbusier's location of the columns as a significant redundancy because they reinforce the geometric relationship between the two different sides of the rectangular plan. The marking through "the sign must overcome use and extrinsic significance to be admitted as architecture."[33] Architecture is understood as both substance and intention: "the sign is a record of an intervention – an event and an act which goes beyond the presence of elements, which are merely necessary conditions."[34]

In turn, Somol and Whiting argue that, in contrast to Eisenman's critical-indexical reading, Koolhaas's deployment of the frame structure is diagrammatic and projective. In *Delirious New York* Koolhaas presents the section of the typical Manhattan skyscraper as architecture for instigating unprecedented events and behaviors. The diagrammatic section of the skyscraper becomes an instrument of projecting a multiplicity of virtual worlds onto a single metropolitan site. According to Somol and Whiting, Koolhaas uses the frame structure as the diagram of "force and effect" for producing new events: "The diagram is a tool of the virtual to the same degree that the index is the trace of the real."[35] Koolhaas's proposals of new high-rise buildings are no typical skyscrapers, though, but instead plastic icons and automonuments that can adapt to many different meanings and programs—a case in point is the shape of CCTV. The projective qualities of shape should set into motion the emergence of new engagements, alternative realities, and the virtual in architecture.

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[29] Somol and Whiting, "Notes around the Doppler Effect," 75.

[30] Peter Eisenman, "Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential Sign," in Hays, *Oppositions Reader*, 189–98, here 189–90.

[31] Ibid., 191.

[32] Ibid., 193.

[33] Ibid., 196.

[34] Ibid., 197–8.

[35] Somol and Whiting, "Notes around the Doppler Effect," 74–6.

Post-Criticality

Somol and Whiting challenge the notion of a criticality in architecture by providing an alternative position that they characterize as projective.[36] They challenge the avant-gardist position that architecture is an autonomous discipline and that this autonomy of the arts is the precondition for engagement. The dominant paradigm of criticality mainly understands autonomy as enabling critique and signification, whereas projective practice uses architecture as projection and performativity. While criticality is linked to the indexical, the dialectic, and "hot representation," the projective relates to the diagrammatic, the atmospheric, and "cool performance."[37] Though they argue against the oppositional policy of critical dialectics, they outline the binary model *critical* versus *projective* practice by constructing contrasts: Eisenman and Koolhaas, difficult and easy, autonomy and instrumentality, representation and performativity, signification and pragmatics, index and diagram, dialectic and atmosphere, hot media and cool media.

In describing the shift from critical to projective practice, Somol and Whiting also refer to the distinction between hot and cool media as first proposed by Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media* (1964). On the one hand, film, radio, or a photograph is a hot medium because it is filled with data and is hence high-definition. On the other hand, cool media, such as television, the telephone, or a cartoon, is low-definition and only provides a small amount of precise information so that much has to be filled in by the audience. So both hot and cool media have completely different effects on the user. McLuhan proposes that "hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience."[38]

In describing the effect of the virtual in projective practice, Somol and Whiting introduce a scientific metaphor, the so-called Doppler Effect.[39] Rather than focusing on the oppositional method of dialectics, the Doppler analogy in architecture should explain the multiple contingencies of the discipline. It shifts the understanding of architecture's field as autonomous to rethinking the discipline as performance and practice. Projective practice is not only engaging with architecture's inherent topics, such as materials, program, and technologies but also overlaps with politics, economics, and theory. However, although the Doppler effect is perceivable and measurable, its analogy in architecture is vague and inexact as it is not clear which terms should be related to each other.

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 39.

[39] Somol and Whiting, "Notes around the Doppler Effect," 75.

Although they embrace capitalist conditions, Somol and Whiting emphasize that "this projective program does not necessarily entail a capitulation to market forces, but actually respects or reorganizes multiple economies, ecologies, information systems, and social groups."[40] The projective practice is conceived as a model in which the architect is finally freed from many responsibilities to the program, ideology, society, or technological resources since the former critical position has exhausted architectural practice by inhibiting design creativity and by excluding any interdisciplinary approach.

On the occasion of a conference of the Canadian Centre for Architecture organized by *ANY* magazine in 1994, Koolhaas challenged the position of criticality and autonomy in architecture: "the problem with the prevailing discourse of architectural criticism is [the] inability to recognize there is in the deepest motivations of architecture something that cannot be critical."[41] According to Koolhaas, it is through Bigness that architecture loses its autonomy and that "it becomes [an] instrument of other forces, it *depends*."[42] Its extraordinary size demands that one give up control and surrender to technological, political, and economic conditions or any other forces beyond the reach of the architect: "Maybe some of our most interesting engagements are uncritical, empathic engagements, which deal with the sometimes insane difficulty of an architectural project to deal with the incredible accumulation of economic, cultural, political but also logistical issues."[43] Under the Regime of ¥€$ and the large-scale economy there is no outside of global-driven capitalism.

Accordingly, in another statement in *S,M,L,XL*, although referring to the renovation project of the panopticon prison at Arnhem, Koolhaas argues that "changes in regime and ideology are more powerful than the most radical architecture."[44] There, it is the space-consuming plan of the panoptical principle, once for centralized monitoring, that now provides the flexibility for future programs. Ideological changes can turn even such a rigid spatial organization as the panopticon prison into an architecture with a fundamentally different agenda. Hence, there are new tasks for the architect in our data-driven, mass-produced media society, like reorganizing a large corporate identity such as Koolhaas's venture with Prada. The architect is just one of a train of identity providers for a targeted group of consumers. Architects can also reinvent themselves as the conscious collector and manipulator of statistical data in order to ground their projects in analysis and the rational realm of data. For instance, AMO, the antithesis to Koolhaas's firm OMA, was initially tied to his professorship at Harvard University and involved in independent research but is now a multinational consultancy, mainly photographing and collecting information and statistics about global phenomena.

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[40] Ibid., 77.

[41] See George Baird, "'Criticality' and Its Discontents," in *Harvard Design Magazine* 16 (Winter/Spring 2002): 136–49, here 137; see also *The Canadian Architect Magazine* 39 (August 1994): 10.

[42] Koolhaas, "Bigness," 513.

[43] See Baird, "*'Criticality' and Its Discontents,*" 10.

[44] Koolhaas and Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, 239.

In the essay "'Criticality' and Its Discontents" (2002), George Baird, like Koolhaas, criticizes the notion of criticality as an outdated and irrelevant concept that only inhibits design creativity.[45] Yet, if they do not aim for architecture's capacity for social transformation, new forms of projective practice run the risk of representing only another formal category, just as several other architectural styles have done previously. Without the supporting body of a projective theory, "this new architecture will devolve to the 'merely' pragmatic, and to the 'merely' decorative, with astonishing speed."[46] It seems as if criticality constrains professional efficacy in a way. In this discourse of post-criticality (or at least an extended criticality) the advocates of the projective position make reference to Koolhaas, who is seen to perform a bridging role between the efficacious business practices and an avant-garde architecture. However, for Baird, Koolhaas's critical engagement amounts to nothing more than attacking Andres Duany for his approval of the new project of Manhattan's 42nd Street, for Duany should have spoken out against the Disneyfication of the urban realm to preserve the existing street culture beyond any market-driven efficacy. This event concerning 42nd Street recalls the destruction of the historic residential districts of Beijing; Koolhaas disapproved the proceedings of the Chinese authorities but also failed to prevent their demolition.

The CCTV and the TVCC buildings are part of the monumental modernization campaign that made an investment of $ 40 billion in the capital city for the Olympics in 2008. The Chinese government was astonishingly successful in asking Western architects for collaboration, such as Herzog & de Meuron for the Olympic Stadium, Schuermann Architects for the Laoshan Velodrome, PTW for the National Swimming Center, SOM for the World Trade Center, and Steven Holl for the Linked Hybrid building. However, as it is the same repressive one-party regime that shot thousands of civilians in 1989, Ian Buruma makes a distinction between Koolhaas's project and the other proposals because CCTV is something else; it is "the voice of the party, the centre of state propaganda."[47] He even compares the ambitious plans for authoritarian governments with building for General Pinochet or Saddam Hussein. Eventually, with the global economic crisis, the erection of the propaganda buildings also came to a halt since there are now 100 million square feet of vacant office spaces.

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[45] Baird, "'Criticality' and Its Discontents".
[46] Ibid.

Originality and the Avant-Garde

In contrast to the collaboration of many other architects with authoritarian ideology, Eisenman and Hays (following Tafuri and, before him, Georg Lukács and Theodor Adorno) are among the prominent figures that succeed in embodying resistance to and criticality against the late-capitalist consumer society. They are accompanied by additional figures, such as Fredric Jameson and Rosalind Krauss, and, in more recent times, the design practice of Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio. Hays quotes Adorno: "Art remains alive only through its social power to resist society. … What it contributes to society is not some communication with the same but rather something more mediate – resistance. Resistance reproduces social development in aesthetic terms without directly imitating it."[48]

As a built example, he refers to Mies's Seagram Building, which might be the paramount example of critical resistance, and Tafuri's interpretation of its glass surface, where abstraction becomes a neutral mirror of the urban chaos around timeless purity.[49] Even Mies's preceeding projects, the two designs of Glass Skyscrapers for Berlin (1922), demonstrate architecture's ability for resistance because of the autonomy and the materiality of the refractive glass surface within the repetitive steel structural elements: "Abstraction – the pure sound of the Sirens, the organizing absent presence – is the maximal limit of the avant-garde."[50] Through abstraction, architecture acquires a means of resistance to escape the reification, to refuse to be a mere thing among others. Koolhaas also links the position of resistance to the urban, for "the city will always be the screen on which the avant-garde projects its ambitions, against which the avant-garde prepares its (usually futile) stratagems of substitution."[51] The European avant-garde in 1922 experimented with the skyscraper typology that already existed in America as an "unacknowledged, invisible utopia, a section of 'pure' avant-garde."[52]

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[47] Ian Buruma, "Don't be Fooled – China is Not Squeaky Clean," in *The Guardian* (July 30, 2002), accessed May 6, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/jul/30/china.features11.

[48] Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 335–6; see also K. Michael Hays, "Abstraction's Appearance (Seagram Building)," in *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-Garde in America*, ed. by Robert Somol (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997), 277–91, here 278.

[49] Manfredo Tafuri and Franscesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979), 342; see also Hays, "Abstraction's Appearance (Seagram Building)," 285.

[50] Ibid., 291.

Although the elision of avant-garde with autonomy and originality is common sense, the idea of originality is a modernist myth, particularly in the case of the avant-garde.[53] The origins of the French term avant-garde have specifically military associations of an advance guard or front guard of soldiers in a military maneuver or expedition. In contrast to the modernist values of authenticity, medium specificity, autonomy, and originality—which Walter Benjamin held in suspicion—the historical avant-garde projects instead involved themselves with new technological means of reproduction, multimedia, and between-media practices, events, and collective modes of reception (for example, an extraordinary fascination with film), as well as the attempt to collapse the disjunction between life and art.

In *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), Peter Bürger argues that the avant-garde critique challenges bourgeois art and the autonomous institutions of art.[54] The autonomy of art, proclaimed as an ideal in Enlightenment aesthetics by the end of the eighteenth century, turned into the central subject of art during the following century. This kind of autonomy in bourgeois art occurred in the form of a withdrawal from the world and consequently came under attack by what Bürger refers to as the historical avant-garde, the artistic movements such as constructivism, futurism, Dada, and surrealism. The ready-mades and collages challenge the principles of an autonomous art, attacking audience, institution, and market alike. Resonating with Marx's remark in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) that all great historic events repeat themselves, first as tragedy, then as farce, Bürger claims that while the historic avant-garde failed heroically, the attempts of the neo-avant-garde are opportunistic, cynical, and at best farcical—and must fail again. With artists like Duchamp and Yves Klein provocation was soon turned into bourgeois spectacle, an avant-garde scandal, the transgressive act into the institutional event. This way, the historical avant-garde failed to destroy the traditional categories and did not become socially significant.

Hays's essay "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form" (1985) situates architecture in "the critical position between being a cultural product and a discrete autonomous discipline."[55] It seems as if criticality requires the condition of *betweeness*: for example, Clement Greenberg's opposition between kitsch and avant-garde, Michael Fried's art and objecthood, Manfredo Tafuri's capitalist development and design, or Colin Rowe's literal and phenomenal.

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[51] Rem Koolhaas, "Eno/abling Architecture," 294.

[52] Ibid., 299.

[53] Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

[54] Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).

A more radical stance is Michael Speaks's claim that architects should abandon the issue of resistance and instead adopt contemporary business management practices. Projective practice not only challenges the notion of criticality but also attempts to develop utopian concepts, just as it was a matter of concern for the modern movement.[56] In "Design Intelligence" (2002), he argues that in the contemporary critical discourse "visionary ideas have given way to the 'chatter' of intelligence."[57] Instead of this perpetual definition of the professional identity, he argues for a "post-vanguard" architectural practice, defined as "design intelligence." According to this particular usage of the term "intelligence," an allusion to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), he opts for an Open Source Intelligence (called OSINT by the CIA) that collects from other disciplines whatever appears to be useful. Thus architectural practices become "adaptable to almost any circumstance almost anywhere."[58] When the shape of CCTV is characterized as a "new species" and "exceptionally perceptive and adaptive organism," these designations can also imply an ideological framework and its effect on architectural production. Are architects opportunistic if they choose to agree to collaborations with regressive governments? Can architecture claim a critical and autonomous position if the planners consent to the current business practice of a neo-liberal globalized economy?

As a star architect, Koolhaas is commissioned when the client seeks a signature building or an icon. In globalized building production, the authority of a famous architect can sometimes help to push through an unpopular project or one that is not entirely in line with community regulations. In such cases, however, politicians usually like to emphasize that the proposed solution, sanctioned by the name of the star designer, has been derived from the specificities of the particular situation with great precision, as opposed to being merely an application of a type or a universal patent.

The public performance of the architect (and the office as well) has become a central feature of the superstar system, as "the idolatry of the market has drastically changed our legitimacy and status even though our status has never been higher … it is really unbelievable what the market demands now. It demands recognition, it demands difference and it demands iconographic qualities."[59] The architect of promise does not only create a new type of iconic building—by amplifying the specific brief as well as the discipline as a whole—but also negotiates global media to promote his or her reputation and commissions. The successful designer has become a market label comparable to the brands he seeks to immortalize. Referring to the CCTV building, this strategy also works for reinvesting and reinventing old power with new trappings, although the involvement of the avant-garde architect with political authority has always been the rule.

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[55] Somol and Whiting, "Notes around the Doppler Effect," 74–5; see also K. Michael Hays, "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form," in *Perspecta* 21 (1984): 14–29, here 27.

[56] See Roger Riewe, ed., *Space Condition* (Wien: Springer, 2005), 19.

[57] Michael Speaks, "Design Intelligence," 12.

[58] Ibid., 16.

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[59] Charles Jencks, *The Story of Post-Modernism: Five Decades of the Ironic, Iconic and Critical in Architecture* (Chichester: Wiley, 2011), 227.