

Summary

Rem Koolhaas in an interview
with Nikolaus Kuhnert
and Philipp Oswalt(excerpts)
p. 24

There is a fundamental re-structuring taking place in Europe today - a new, second phase of modernity. Established values and seemingly fixed strategic elements such as harbours, mountains, motorways, i.e. the set image of a strong relationship between geography and infrastructural topology, are in the process of dissolving. The major determining elements in Europe today are still rooted in the Middle Ages.

This close, natural combination of geography and logistics is increasingly beginning to dissolve in the wake of highly synthetic interventions - the expansion of the motorways, the construction of the Tunnel, high-speed trains, the development of the new media technology etc. Information is being spread in real time, artificial networks are covering the countries and regions. Urbanists and architects are only a small part of all these changes, but this aspect is highly significant because it is the most visible. This new conception of Europe - partly unconscious, partly conscious - is probably uncontrollable and seems to resemble a kind of artificial nature instead of something that is being consciously created. Taking place independently of our intentions, this process forces us to redefine the role of each major centre and its relationship with these developments. A new generation of strategies is being formulated, and they will completely change the landscape, both in the literal and symbolic sense. (...)

The areas where modernization achieves its greatest intensity are concentrated in a kind of belt running from the north to the south, extending from London all the way to Turin. Within this famous "banana" of development true integration is taking place, and new hybrids are being formed. Along this European belt, running from London by way of Northern France, Karlsruhe, Strasbourg, Basel to Northern Italy, all kinds of transnational cooperation are taking place in scientific research, in industrial production and in the services sector. All definitions are being revised, and terms like "German" or "French" have already become meaningless. In turn, these regions tend to radiate and draw other neighbouring regions into this development, for example the South of France all the way to Toulouse. The same phenomenon is found on the American East Coast, in the area around Boston, New York, Chicago and Pittsburgh. The economy of this entire area used to be based on heavy industry, linked by way of lakes, rivers, railways, coastal shipping routes and harbours. Later, industrial production in this region lost its crucial significance; labour and economy became increasingly abstract terms, dissociated from the primacy of manufacturing specific goods, and everyone thought: Why should we want to live in this ugly area with such lousy climate, such polluted environment and such horrible cities - why don't we live in Paradise? And so many people moved south, into the sun belt. It was almost a mass migration. Something similar

is happening today in the vicinity of Lyon, Toulouse, Limoges and Geneva.

Let us look a little closer at this current rush of modernization, taking the example of the Channel tunnel which will open in 1993 and completely change the landscape of Europe. As an architect one is constantly confronted with certain demands and aspirations - and that gets one thinking. Some time ago I received a commission as planner for the city of Lille - until very recently a rather insignificant industrial town in the north of France. With the opening of the tunnel, this town will suddenly find a new significance, an entirely synthetic meaning.

Arriving on the train from London, Lille is the first French stop on the Continent. Lille is located in the centre of a network of rail lines. The TGV connects the city with Paris. In the future, Paris will be only fifty minutes away. It will only take 48 minutes to reach Brussels, and the high speed rail connections extend all the way to the Ruhr district and Frankfurt am Main. It takes only 60 minutes to reach the city centre of London - in the past, the same distance took 7 hours and 10 minutes. It will take less time to reach the City of London from the Lille railway station than from the periphery of the city itself. Britons are beginning to buy houses and offices in Lille and building houses there because in terms of transportation time they will be closer to London than at the periphery of the city. That is quite fascinating.

As a result, we have to find a completely new definition for the concept of the centre. The unquestioned, simple re-introduction of the idea of centrality will only have the effect of a huge soufflé which collapses immediately upon being taken out of the oven. Who still cares today, where the centre is? In terms of society, the geometrical definition of a centre is completely meaningless today. What the centre is, is today measured in minutes, in categories of time.(...)

The fundamental powerlessness of architects and townplanners has to do with the fact that we don't have an exact inventory list of what one can achieve and what is no longer possible. There is no lucid, credible, intelligent identification of areas where we still have power [to change things] and those where we have no power. That is why we continue to pretend that we have options which we do not have in reality. For example, we have today lost the opportunity of planning a city in its three-dimensional substance, to consider it as a vision, a model. Those days are gone forever. (...) Nothing can be decreed or prescribed any more; one can only try to regulate, modify or shift those development processes which are taking place anyway. None of these processes can be blocked or re-directed.

There are three reasons for this increasing erosion of the role of the architect and planner: First, there is a kind of intellectual weakness concerning the idea of the centre and its significance. In the sixties and seventies, the historical city centre was re-discovered throughout Europe - an important rediscovery because this centre was indeed a highly endangered species. But that was a retrospective discovery which was turned into a prospective description. Of course, public squares, boulevards and streets are wonderful - but that doesn't mean that we can still build wonderful squares today,

under the current conditions. The IBA in Berlin was a laboratory of this rediscovery, but it also demonstrated for the first time that it is impossible to make this rediscovery the guiding principle of future planning.

Then there is a political weakness. Politicians have very little money at their disposal and must depend on others, on a third party, if they want to build something. But aside from financing, politicians are always aiming for a consensus and are rarely prepared to run risks or to show courage.

A third important factor is the developer. These real-estate companies are acting in an increasingly primitive way; they are intuitively and untiringly resisting any attempt at integrating their schemes into a programmatic concept. Today we are no longer dealing with the citizen as a responsible resident of a city who is trying to express his role [as citizen] in the form of a building relating to the city as a whole. Today's developers are no longer city residents - they are multi-national corporations, vagrant capitals which are prowling around, driven by a quasi-biological instinct, for investment opportunities of all kinds, even on the most vulgar levels. They are at work in Berlin, they have discovered Prague, they are already on the way to Shanghai, South China or Africa, always looking to take advantage of opportunities which present themselves. These may be logical processes, but they never create the kind of stability required for programmatic work.

If today you are asked, as we were asked to do Lille, to complete a large-scale project in four years, with railways, motorways, train stations, office buildings and everything, all within such a short period of time, you will be amazed at the number of events which influence such a project - political, technological, financial, psychological considerations etc. The result is a certain nervousness in weekly rhythm - there is no longer any enclave of certainty from which one can work. Again and again, everything is being debated, modified, rejected, down to the last moment. The decision not to build the ZKM (Centre for the Arts and Media Technology) in Karlsruhe is a good example. And yet planners and architects act as if it were not like that, as if these conditions did not exist. It is the task of the architect to be aware of that.(...)

I am very much interested in the conclusions which can be drawn from the American experience. I have tried to express that with the term "culture of congestion". Today we can no longer clearly distinguish between private and public space. In a way, simple concentration is a response to earlier conditions. Extreme concentration creates genuine substitutes through itself, i.e. alternatives to classical public space.

Thanks to all these processes of modernization, the idea of contextualism becomes obsolete and absurd. We must find a way of dealing with a large number of large buildings of enormous dimensions. Conceding that buildings of this size never existed before in Europe, even if one considers the surrounding areas, we must develop a new discourse about context. As long as we fail to do that, we won't get anywhere.(...)

We have to abandon the idea of a unified aesthetic system. We have to develop forms of perception which allow us to see beauty

through and beyond the various systems. Everyone is susceptible to the beauty of the centre of Prague or Paris, but we also have to be able to recognize the beauty of other, wilder, accidental, more recent complexes.

American cities such as Atlanta - a mixture of originally modern forms, covering a large area with a low-rise build-up, interspersed with a few clusters of high-rise buildings, more like a region than like a city - can be experienced to have a special kind of beauty. The expanse and technical furnishings of the city create a new kind of urban space. The city centre has exploded into thousands of fragments which have scattered all over a primeval forest. The texture of this city is rather formless, rarely revealing the orthogonal pattern of a grid. Essentially the form of this city is based on an intersection of roadways whose branches are connected by way of a circular system of motorways. Again, it is much more like a region than like a city. Along the highways the novel beauty of a modern townscape unfolds, a bizarre combination of untouched nature and gigantic structures. The beauty of the co-existence of some of the high-rise buildings, from modern to post-modern, recalls the beauty of the surrealism of the twenties and thirties, when beauty was the random encounter of an umbrella with a sewing machine on a dissecting table.

To me, Alexanderplatz in Berlin as it is today - with the base of the television tower, with the emptiness of the open area - represents an aesthetic quality, a tragic aesthetic perhaps. It is suffused with history, and it seems almost a crime to condemn some parts of the city by rejecting these confusing but highly complex aesthetic perceptions which are still around. This kind of thing is happening all over Berlin. Even Marzahn has its beauty, in this rather tragic sense. What is at issue here is not a positive evaluation or simple acceptance of these aesthetic qualities, but one needs to find ways of working with them and living with them without denying and condemning them. Just like so many other areas of town, Alexanderplatz or Marzahn must become accepted as legitimate parts of the city.

The Jussieu Libraries p. 34

The task of this project was to complete the Jussieu campus of the Sorbonne University in Paris, unfinished since 1968, with two libraries and a number of communal facilities. The campus is located on the south bank of the Seine and consists essentially of a grid-like building complex erected in the 1960s to designs by architect Edouard Albert. Construction was never finished, however, as the Sorbonne played a crucial role during the events of May 1968, after which the state abruptly stopped the building process as a kind of punishment. The open flanks of the building were simply walled up and left unrendered. The north and east sections of the complex were never built. As an additional punishment, the entire concept of the university was revised. Originally it was planned as a purely scientific university but then a department of humanities was added. The architect based his design on the idea of a close coincidence of form and program. Originally, each part of the building had

been assigned a specific program, one for chemistry, one for biology etc., but then this entire system was scrapped. Now there is complete chaos, with an AIDS laboratory next to administration offices, the French department and a department for radioactivity research. Some professors even live in the building. Jussieu is a three-dimensional labyrinth, completely confused, in which anything can be anywhere. All the rules of modern architecture were turned upside down. And yet the building functions extremely well. The deck is elevated on a socle which is c. 1.50m high on the south side and 4m on the north, as the site slopes down to the River Seine. Thus the campus is completely isolated from the city. The deck was designed as a circulation space for the campus but it is empty. Contrary to original intentions, people circulate not on the open deck but inside the building, inside this three-dimensional labyrinth of staircases and corridors.

Our task was to create a lively public domain, to integrate the campus into the city and to turn it into an urban experience. Albert had designed the deck above the socle as a traditional campus without programmatic intensity or diversity - the deck is just a vast, unused empty space. One of the greatest problems is its vastness. In order to reactivate this space and bring it to life, we imagined a kind of flexible space, a kind of magic social carpet which we could fold, thus condensing the vast void into a compact volume.

In a second step the public space is activated and infused with program. Together with the new libraries, the communal facilities and a new convention center, the new subway entrance acts as a center of gravity for all kinds of activities. (From the new Métro entrance, one emerges in the center of the campus.) All these elements are part of a newly created "urban axis" running north-south. This urban axis forms a plateau that rises up from the Seine. It begins at the embankment road with a kind of forecourt and then penetrates the perimeter development of the block (which is also part of the university), extending to and running through the library before finally merging with the deck of the campus at the Métro entrance. In this way the isolated buildings of the university are connected with the main complex, at the same time creating a link with the city itself so that the campus opens up to the city. Thus the new connections activate the unexploited potential of the existing elements.

In the library the urban axis intersects with a second, so-called green axis. This green axis runs parallel to the River Seine. To the east of the campus is the Jardin des Plantes, the Botanical Garden of Paris. It is here that the green axis originates; it runs through the library, emerges to form a sunken park, and finally terminates at the plaza in front of the Institut du Monde Arabe.

The library building consists of the same urban substance as the campus deck, although in a more concentrated form. Metaphorically speaking, it was created by folding the deck. We prefer to think of the building as a kind of public space instead of a building proper. The structure acts as a skeleton for condensing and stacking the urban space. The distance between two levels

of this urban terrain is 7m on average (varying between 4m and more than 12m).

The two libraries, each covering three floors, are stacked one above the other. The science library with its relatively large proportion of closed storage areas is partly sunk beneath ground level, with the freely accessible storage facilities of the humanities library above. Both libraries are separated by the entrance and reception area which is part of the urban axis linking the Métro station with the River Seine. This realm of social activities extends into the lower library in the shape of a double helix, forming an entrance to the conference center adjoining the library. This double helix of the lower part of the building consists of two elements: the *vie sociale*, a ramp with cafeteria, auditorium and squash courts, and the series of ramps serving the science library. Both of these ramps intertwine in one and the same space without touching.

The entrance to the building is located at a medium level so that no more than half of the complex has to be traversed to reach even the remotest areas. In urbanistic terms, the Métro station on campus also provides central access to the complex.

The individual superimposed floor levels of the building are cut and deformed in such a way as to connect with the next level above and below, forming a continuous circuit which winds through the entire building like a meandering boulevard lined with all the elements of the library like houses lining a street. The boulevard is 1.5 km long and shows endless variety. The visitor becomes a flâneur who is seduced by this world of books and information, of urbanist situations such as plazas, parks, monumental stairways, cafés, boutiques etc. which supplement the program of the two libraries. The building is like a series of incidents, and because every floor has different incidents, there is also a kind of identity for each floor. It is no longer simply a library but rather a system with many different components.

Dissolving the horizontal layering opens up fundamentally new possibilities of spatial relationships. With very simple means each part of the building can be made totally different. By continuously transforming the spaces along the boulevard, individual areas are created without resorting to partitions. The spatial variety is achieved not through sliding and dispersing and contrasting individual areas but through a continuous transformation. The space expands and contracts, it rises and falls, it curves, splits up and merges again.

Elevators and escalators help the pedestrians move around, offering shortcuts along the 1.5 km long boulevard and short-circuiting the various levels. If the architectonic movement of the ramps is indeterminate and ambling, the mechanical movement of the elevators and escalators is linear and determinate. Together these two types of connections form a complex network of spatial relationships, a variety of different paths through the building.

It is on this architectural and urbanistic terrain that the secondary layer of uses is spread out. The building is like a series of landscapes which are cultivated by an up to 2 m high layer of libraries. The separation between architecture as an urban skeleton on the one hand and the secondary uses on the other was the primary concept of design.

The elements of secondary uses enrich the spatial experience, and at the same time they are kept to moderate height in order not to dissect the space of the "urban landscape" - they look rather like plants in a landscape, never dominating the interior. In this way, they open up great possibilities for further differentiating the urban terrain. At the same time, their life span can be much shorter than that of the principal structure: the circulation paths and flows correspond to the constancy and permanence of a city, while the furniture of the libraries resembles individual buildings.

Within this structure the uses are free to change without infringing on the unique character of the architecture. The architectural space does not define or prescribe specific uses, being articulated in the vertical and largely neutral on the level of the plan. Thus all areas of the building are suitable for almost any function.

On the various levels, partitions, walls and curtains serve to create a typology of enclosed spaces, ranging in character from complete openness to cozy intimacy. The result will be an additional tension between the individual spaces.

About one third of the floor space is not on the level. The various grades are suitable for different uses: grades of 2-4 percent are used for reading rooms, book racks, bars, cafeterias and circulation areas; grades of more than 4 percent are either terraced to create level areas or used either as amphitheater or for circulation. The entire building is enclosed in a transparent envelope of non-reflecting glass which is tinted in different colors for some areas. This glass skin consists of huge irregular sheets which are overlapping like shingles on a roof, thus creating a building skin that is not air-tight but breathing. The interior of this urban building can be read from the outside like an x-ray photograph, revealing the dialectic between the regularly spaced needle columns and the irregularly deformed floor levels. Floating within this structure are various enclosed volumes: reading rooms, separated studies, the cabins of the hydraulic elevators, book repositories etc. Looking from the Institut du Monde Arabe, the building appears so transparent as to be almost invisible. If the building thus seems to dissolve when seen along the green axis, it shows a stronger presence along the urban axis, facing the city. It is placed in such a way as to be visible when looking from the banks of the Seine through the "window" of the undeveloped corner of the block. Thus the activities inside the university become a conspicuous part of city life.

Translated from the German by Hans Harbort

The Reinvention of Geometry Sanford Kwinter p. 72

Classical Greek geometry - the study of straight lines, regular solids, and restricted curves - was in essence a timeless geometry: every real shape was seen simply as the reflection or extrusion of an ideal, unchanging, and eternal form. The qualities of a circle or square were constant, based on relations between magnitudes; changes, that is, transformations and emergences, were

not considered real things at all, but imperfections, degradations, perversions of a noble, even divine and pre-given mathematical rectitude.

These basic premises remained almost unchallenged until the nineteenth century, when deep transformations in the theory of time started to give way. Such transformations manifested themselves not only in the new sciences of evolution and thermodynamics but also throughout the urban literature of the latter half of the century, in Flaubert, Dickens, Engels, Baudelaire. Massive and intensely accelerated industrial, economic, and technological innovations had begun to transform our experience of the material and historical world: the once imperceptibly slow and stable rhythms of history that earlier furnished a kind of immobile ground for the more labile and fluid human figure began to oscillate and vary in patterns of shorter and shorter duration, effecting an epochal reversal in social and historical experience. What once appeared as a fixed and global continuum subtending human temporal experience - the historico-material assemblage, for example, known as "the city" - began to multiply, mutate, and atomize so quickly and finely that it itself could no longer be conceived as anything other than a turbulent, punctuated fluid.

This new world seemed to force upon us an entirely new - or at least different - type of geometry, one whose roots may be traced with precision through Riemann, Lobachevsky, Bolyai, and Poincaré. In certain ways it may be said that in these mathematicians there may be found a deep and precocious disquietude that surreptitiously informed so much of our own modernity: that the model of discrete, inelastic, and quantitative reason was already precariously foundering even as its most prestigious and rigorous monuments - industrial capitalism, technoscientific rationalism, urbanization - were being assembled. These were the geometries that first broke with the conveniences and classical pieties of homogeneous, linear, or isotropic space; these were the proto-geometries of a new, still premature form of reason, one predicated on acausality, deformability, creative diversification, and active variability. Though it took nearly another century to reach a threshold, the crisis of geometry and reason finally arrived. Today, for the first time, a number of thinkers at the forefront of speculative philosophical, material, and cultural practice have begun systematically to extend their intuition of form to new levels, indeed, to free their intuition from three-dimensional experience, and in a bold, strange act of historical recovery, to deroute the Greeks by returning to the still-untapped power of the pre-Socratic world: in a phrase, to recognize that processes and events have shapes of their own.

Nowhere in the architectural world today is this embrace of asymmetry, nonlinearity, and the miracle and undeniability of indeterminate and spontaneously emerging material qualities - all manifested in deep, multidimensional geometric form - so rigorously taking place as in the work of Rem Koolhaas and the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA). All of Koolhaas's recent work is evolved - rather than designed - within the hypermodern "event-space" of complex,

sensitive, dynamical indeterminacy and change.¹⁾ It would be easy, far too easy, to support such an argument purely through a descriptive analysis of the morphological data that pertain to the stunning figures and exotic massing so clearly evident in every one of his recent building projects, the Bibliothèque de France, the Palais de Congrès d'Agadir, the Zeebrugge Maritime Terminal, the Karlsruhe Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie. But the novel, radical figures of single buildings or building systems, however advanced these may be, and however powerful the fascination they may exercise over intellectuals, planners, and architects, simply cannot do justice to the larger, if inchoate, project of OMA, its attempt to engage the contemporary forces that both carve up and produce our modern world. Indeed, OMA seems virtually alone within today's avant-garde architectural milieu (with the possible exception of Daniel Libeskind) in venturing into the space so shamefully abdicated by architects since the progressivist heyday of the 1960s: the space of the sociotechnical formation of collective subjectivity; in other words, the politics of metropolitan "delirium."

Koolhaas and OMA's trajectory has always been deeply linked to the larger processes that determine social formations - economics and historical trends, aesthetic ideosyncrasy as material fact rather than moral quandary, urbanism as a collection of continually diversifying practices. Yet, especially lately, this has not been at the expense of what could well be even more critical; that is, the minutiae of the public sphere - the chaotic fluctuations of markets, governments, and libidinal economies, the velleities of opinion, fashion, and taste.

To the question, What types of structure and form are possible today to sustain a maximum sensitivity to material fluctuations simultaneously at all scales, to sustain continual dynamic development over time within an "envelope" (one of Koolhaas's favorite words, roughly equivalent to what Althusser used to call a "conjoncture") that is fast becoming ludicrously narrow? OMA has ventured some of the most daring - and perhaps exhilaratingly dangerous - practical speculations to be found anywhere in late-twentieth-century culture. But most important of all, it has done this in a way that is consonant with the most compelling and fruitful intellectual developments of our age: the reinvention of geometry and the geometrization of the event.

Thus it is only in the full-scale urban projects (of which four are here presented in schematic form) that such a claim may properly be put to test. Yet what coherent worldview do they represent and what characteristics do they share? The first, perhaps most general, principle to note is that in OMA's proposals the argument always takes precedent over the project. In other words, there is always primarily an engine, be it discursive or diagrammatic, never a design that is introduced into the urban milieu to be reconfigured. It is never a question of organizing a space at the outset, but rather of unleashing, triggering, or capturing larger and already existing processes.²⁾

Second is the adamant refusal to repress either the material fact, the economic reality, or the technological brutality of rampant infrastructural systems, those vitalistic cir-

culatory systems of all modern civilizations, capitalist or otherwise. These infrastructural systems - highways, railways, escalators, roads, ramps, elevators, stairs, mechanical and ventilation systems - are generally approached as capillaries, engravings, or developmental pathways or canalizations to be inflected, redirected, or simply followed like the surf and *mise-en-délire*.

Third, elements are gathered, classified, and distributed never as preformed spaces, objects, or functions but as statistical intensities, pure potentials or virtualities, morphic resonances as variable densities of space-time, activity, or action. The idea is literally to program, like a dramaturge or film director, all the pathways and accumulations of information, recalling Cagney's virtuoso microgestures or Minelli's saturated cinematic fields. In these first three general axioms there may be discerned a very clear orientation toward evolutionary, timebased processes, dynamical geometric structurings, not structures per se, but forms that follow and fill the wake of concrete yet unpredictable events.

The fourth axiom has to do with a completely unneurotic belief in the possible freedoms that still lie unconfronted within the type of systems that common wisdom continues to refer to as the "artificial". Though the ethico-political ground here may seem shaky, many of OMA's most tenable and persuasive convictions on the subject are not. This is because instead of designing artificial environments, it deploys richly imbricated systems of interacting elements that set in motion rather artificial ecologies that, in turn, take on a genuine self-organizing life of their own. The common mistake is to miss the organicism and autopoiesis of OMA's approach and to attack simplistically both the mechanistic substratum out of which its fluid, metabolic systems are made, as well as the unarguably unjust, even nefarious economic and social processes off of which they shamelessly feed. This is true, of course, of all life-forms in all states of nature (nature sustains its forms only through the ongoing violence of capture and ingestion) and is a contradiction - or an ill-stated problem - that no philosophy has, or ever will, overcome.

The remaining axioms and principles follow from this latter one. All of OMA's recent urbanist work is about the setting into motion of dynamic self-regulating and self-driving informational ecologies: The idea that non-organic systems such as urban economies, or complex public-work structures, or even small electronic networks like those used in businesses or cultural institutions might have a life of their own (indeed, even the detailed mechanics of the simplest single-cell life-forms) still in our day escapes explanation, as if it were nothing less than a form of magic. Yet in the words of René Thom - and these words might just as well be the battle cry for the architectural methodologies by which OMA almost single-handedly is ushering us into the 1990s and into the century beyond - "Is not all magic, to the extent that it is successful, geometry?"¹⁾

Notes

1) Koolhaas, with reason I believe, has consistently and categorically rejected the pseudo-concept of a "post"-modernism.

2) "(Manhattan's) architecture relates to the Großstadt like a surfer to the waves" (Rem Koolhaas in *ZONE 1/2, The Contemporary City*, ed. Michel Feher and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1986, p.110).

3) René Thom, *Structural Stability and Morphogenesis* (Redwood City: Addison-Wesley, 1972)

A Machine for Manufacturing Fantasy Toyo Ito p. 79

Rem Koolhaas is free from place and time. He is also free from the domain of architecture. That is why his architecture is full of fantasy.

He will call you in Tokyo today from Paris, tomorrow he is in Tokyo himself. The next day he is in Fukuoka and then in New York or in Lille. No architect seems more borderless than Rem. Free from the constraints of region and people he can stand freely apart, anywhere, speak his mind and create architecture without compromise. Wherever he stands, this freedom has an effect. His straightness brings a new spirit to architecture and gives the region breath. This externality places architecture beyond the realm of architecture. His architecture is in fact non-architectural.

An architect begins designing with an analysis of the given conditions, then replaces the result in an abstract space by planning. He is already, at this moment, ready to substantiate that abstract space by supposing architectural elements such as a roof, floor, walls and columns. Then he moves on to design details and to choose materials. It becomes essentially a linear procedure, although it provides a way back and forth.

In the case of Rem's architecture, it does not seem that this ordinary process of producing architecture is ever followed. This is not to say that his work lacks architectural structure or detail designing. His architecture emerges suddenly from beyond the border of the world of architecture which is involved in a social system. Architecture which has already been resolved with details designed and materials decided is dashed off, as if it comes into existence from the world of dreams.

Rem's dream is different from that of Aldo Rossi which is nostalgic. His is full of the new and the fantastic.

For example, the apartment house project for the NEXUS World in Fukuoka, Japan. This project for 24 flats is read also as a gate to the center court of the entire housing complex. The building is split into two parts by the entrance road in the middle. It is designed to form the socle for Arata Isozaki's two towers. The black stone-like finished wall which surrounds the first floor volume presents a very special feature. Although his concept of forming a socle of Arata Isozaki's towers is a kind of cynical joke full of wit, he has achieved an apartment full of change in a cool beautiful grid plan.

A black false stone wall, the court beside the entrance where white round stones are spread out and bamboos are planted, terraces of slatted wooden flooring and a small green mound. All of these elements are in-laid without being held prisoner to any preconceived ideas.

It feels as if one is taking a walk in a park more than experiencing architecture.

This experience is reminiscent of Rem's project for la Parc de la Villette. It is as if the various fragmental scenes from the very charming drawing of la Villette project are replaced in the NEXUS World as a mosaic.

The same experience can be enjoyed when visiting la Villa dall'Ava in Paris. The existence of this architecture is already novel in a classical residential district of a Parisian suburb. The architecture covered with metal and glass gives an impression of the realization of a dream.

Careful manipulating the different levels of the site leads to a variety of comfortable spaces. The most impressive feature of this Villa is the dreamlike relation between exterior and interior space. For example, when you come through the gate, a space with a lot of random thin columns leads to the entrance like a path through a bamboo forest. At the end of a long slope from the entrance is a space surrounded by fullsize glass windows that has the same floor level as the exterior which is covered with grass. A fine view of Paris is provided from the poolside on the top, like Villa Savoy. Here again the overall impression is one of enjoying wandering in a small park.

Once I likened Rem to a machine for manufacturing fantasy when we had a conversation by fax for an architectural magazine. I compared him to a mechanical baseball pitching machine. I mean that he can pitch a right controlled ball called fantasy anytime, anywhere. Without bringing any inner feeling or sentiment, he can keep cool and accurate.

His dreamlike space reached its peak in TGB, the Paris National Library project. Although he used a dry and mechanical technique, it makes us feel we are watching a natural image. It seems as if the moon and clouds float in the cubic volume. It transcends the architecture and suggests the universe.

This feeling applies also to the project of Congrexpo in Lille. The giant oval seems to be a spaceship and it seems that a large forest spreads below it.

His projects break away perfectly from the image of architecture of the Machine Age. As architecture, they drive themselves and us beyond the image of architecture towards that of nature and a new universe. They are innocent like the dreams of a boy with a vivid imagination. They won't be restrained by any style or ordinary notions of architecture.

Although full of fantasy, his works bear relation to society. Neither regional nor climatic differences control his architecture but each project is concerned with a perceived social function. He does not rely on the given context which leads only to assimilation. He tries to find a new context with functions lacking in society and introduces these to the project. Thus his projects bridge the gap between the real social world and the dream. Rem Koolhaas's architecture is non-architectural and full of fantasy while at the same time relevant to society. This is why it is a penetrating critique of society and preconceived architecture. Rem's architecture makes us aware of the possibility of opening society by architecture and brings us courage.