

## "WE ARE LIKE A SURFER ON THE WAVES": WORK METHODS AT OMA

Rem Koolhaas

I think one of the fatal things that occurs in an architect's career is the moment when he begins to take himself too seriously –where his idea of himself coincides with what the others think of him– when he runs out of secrets.

I've always tried to find means and tactics with which to avoid this. Of course, at the beginning one of these was the creation of something called OMA, where my identity was submersed in a group, and that's how we've always worked, as a group. But somehow, the world insists on the individual.

Some of the important people who were present in the earlier phases of OMA have been coming back, although not on a permanent basis.

This external renewal generates a kind of intellectual discourse which is otherwise endangered by the «unbearable heaviness» of the profession.

So, rather than suffer alone and put up with your own contradictions, it's essential to insist on these kinds of injections that expand our thinking. [ABSTRACT FROM "QUADERNS" No. 183, OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1985]

All OMA's projects are the fruit of collective work.

It's by talking, discussing, criticising (and drawing very little) that we advance.

We begin by pouring onto the paper everything that occurs to us and we evaluate what others have done in order to decide what it is we don't like about their solutions. In this way we draw up a kind of inventory of things to be avoided, and at the end this is so long that, by means of a kind of strange inversion, we get to the definition of exactly what we want...

We have an unlimited store of clichés that we employ as if they were shorthand symbols. Often we find that the most impossible sources contain riches still to be discovered.

[ABSTRACT FROM "L'ARCHITECTURE D'AJOURD'HUI" No. 238, APRIL 1985]

A project always begins with intuition.

We play with evidences, with quotes (I won't tell you what they are; you can also play with them!), we prepare a kind of catalogue of prototypes. Sometimes we use them in negative; sometimes in positive. Sometimes as quotes; sometimes as a criticism. It's in this way that we transform empty concepts into rich concepts for our project.

These inventories of life, of what's topical, are constantly in movement. There's no exclusive territory. I'm omnivorous, I'm bulimic, I read the papers in several languages, all kinds of books, I go out, I like the cinema, I meet other people through architects.

I don't establish hierarchies; what counts is the panorama.

By means of questions posed, developments, implications, we once again define a situation in permanent transition. We find ourselves in a position of reversibility, of reaction in a second degree. And also of coherence, with this awareness we have of the fact that there is no absolutely fixed, completely immobile, value. I mistrust the definitive enunciation of a theoretical position. Our projects are not born from previously known reflections... *We are a bit like a surfer on the waves: he doesn't control them, but he knows them; he*

### OMA: PLAN OF ACTION

The Office for Metropolitan Architecture has as its program the definition of new ways – both in theory and in practice– in which modern architecture can align itself with contemporary cultural conditions.

The goal of OMA is:

- To visualize, spread and realize ideas about contemporary life in an international culture:
- design and realization of urban and landscape projects,
- research to equip the urban environment for the 21st century,
- design and realization of interiors, stage settings and exhibitions,
- industrial design,
- writing scenarios,
- publishing ideas in general.

Apart from the three OMA firms, a new unit is created, the Groszstadt Foundation. This unit takes care of OMA activities, that can be better realized and financed through a separate form of organization, like publications, exhibitions and research.

Projects amount to a sustained research and polemic about the nature of modernity, the possible relationship between the volatile condition of 20th-century culture, the metropolis and architecture, which Koolhaas has articulated in lectures around the world and in many articles.

*knows how to make use of them and also how to go against the current.*

To identify is very important for us. At the outset we use what exists as our starting point, with its defects and even with its banalities. Then comes a kind of idealisation through an exaggerated analysis that reveals much more than reality does: the unused potential of this reality.

The concrete graphic representations emerge when the project is defined. With these images we really touch the ideological dimension of a project. Their objective is to transmit something else, not just the physical representation of the project in a clinical sense. They evoke environments, impressions. Or else principles, directions. They introduce sensuality once again into the process of purification of the project. [ABSTRACT FROM "TECHNIQUES & ARCHITECTURE" No. 380 OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1988]

We're always submerged in this kind of evolution: exploiting the limits of architecture in order to discover other means (of conceiving, of designing, of constructing...) while at the same time attempting to express discoveries in an architectural way so that professionals can assimilate them, introducing other traditions. We're always caught up in a kind of zig-zag between expanding and reducing, exploring and concentrating. [ABSTRACT FROM "L'ARCHITECTURE D'AUJOURD'HUI" No. 262 APRIL 1989]