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THRESHOLDS IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

O.M.A. at MoMA

**REM KOOLHAAS
AND THE PLACE OF
PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE**

NOVEMBER 3, 1994–JANUARY 31, 1995

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

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REM KOOLHAAS AND THE PLACE OF PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE

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I. The Office for Metropolitan Architecture (O.M.A.), founded by Rem Koolhaas with Elia and Zoe Zenghelis and Madelon Vriesendorp, has for two decades pursued a vision energized by the relationship between architecture and the contemporary city. In addition to the ambitious program implicit in the studio's formation, there was and is a distinct mission in O.M.A./Koolhaas's advocacy of the city as a legitimate and positive expression of contemporary culture.

The metropolis—both an invention and a victim of the last one hundred and fifty years of urban development—is perhaps the least likely of survivors. In its political complexity, technical ethos, and frequently overwhelming density, the metropolis has come to mirror the forces that have shaped this century: rapid industrialization, expansion of capital markets, and the prevalence of a populist mass culture. Yet, even as these forces transformed the city, it became an object of derision and fear. Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City and Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin are but two of the countless proposals put forward in this century whose aim was to solve the "problem" of the metropolis with more spacious, more orderly models.

The urban projects of O.M.A./Koolhaas perceive the city as a survivor, requiring no justification beyond its own existence—its *raison d'être* is revealed in the indestructibility of its root characteristics, in the face of the twentieth century's overall antipathy toward urban culture.

Few contemporary architects or urbanists have been willing to embrace the residual graces of the metropolis, the most evident of which is the city's unrelenting artificiality. At a time when the natural, the *unbuilt*, is vested with unquestionable moral value, the urban visions of Koolhaas and O.M.A. unabashedly celebrate the constructed environment, even at its most extreme.

For O.M.A./Koolhaas, the sheer scale of the city's

presence is a source of exhilaration; the density it engenders, a potential to be exploited. In his "retroactive manifesto" for Manhattan, *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas writes: "Through the simultaneous explosion of human density and an invasion of new technologies, Manhattan became, from 1850, a mythical laboratory for the invention and testing of a revolutionary lifestyle: the Culture of Congestion."

Long after the coherent social and economic structures of the City Beautiful were transferred to the suburbs, the metropolis envisioned by Koolhaas remains an unself-conscious and spontaneous heterotopia, a place of infinite negotiation. The paradox of planning the unplanned is evident—though no greater than the historical paradox represented in the ongoing migrations to the metropolis of those seeking a sense of freedom within the manifold confinements of urban culture. The tension between this sense of freedom and confinement, identity and self-effacement, desire and restraint, is fundamental to O.M.A./Koolhaas's vision of the contemporary metropolis.

II. The "place of public architecture" refers both to the *role* of architecture in defining the public realm and, more literally, to the *place* that is created: the space in which what we call "public" is activated.

The architectural projects by O.M.A./Koolhaas presented here specifically address issues relative to the place of public architecture: the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (Competition entry, 1989); the Zentrum für Kunst und Medien-technologie, Karlsruhe (Competition winner, 1989); the Kunsthal, Rotterdam (completed 1992); the Jussieu Library for the University of Paris (Competition winner, 1993); and Congrexpo, a large multipurpose exhibition and convention center in Lille, France (completed 1994). The texts accompanying each project are, unless otherwise noted, from Rem Koolhaas in collaboration with Bruce Mau,

S, M, L, XL (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995).

The architectural programs of these projects are those typically associated with the high values of Western urban culture: museums, libraries, and congress and exhibition halls. Further, underlying each of the O.M.A./Koolhaas proposals is the recognition that these programs have an intrinsic public dimension.

Yet, even as the projects validate the cosmopolitan pleasures of the intellectual and the aesthete, they do so without nostalgia for the forms of the traditional city and its monumental architecture. Indeed, the marked sense of "formlessness" celebrates contemporary culture's tendencies toward fragmentation and destabilization. The monumentality is not triumphant: the humanist values intrinsic to the programs are characterized less as fundamental than residual to mass culture.

These "formless" qualities undermine many current ideas about architectural design and its role in the public realm. The projects presented here are characterized by a reduced emphasis on form, relative to the other qualities architecture might possess. There is a notable inclination toward a comprehensive generic character, evident, for example, in the simple volumetric conception of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF). Yet, even as the exterior of the Kunsthal approaches an overall Miesian simplicity, it confounds expectations with its twisting internal geometries and the screen-like character of its facades.

That a facade might not be a facade but a permeable membrane is most literally exploited in the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) project, where the principal elevation is an enormous, ten-story projection screen. Less explicitly, but just as successfully, the interior of the BNF is "projected" through the translucent skin that encloses the structure.

The museum, library, and congress and exhibition halls are defined by the way specific functional requirements intersect with their public dimension. In the BNF, the interrelationships are explicit: the building is conceived as a solid mass of program (the stacks for the millions of documents in the library's holdings), with the public spaces existing as voids within.

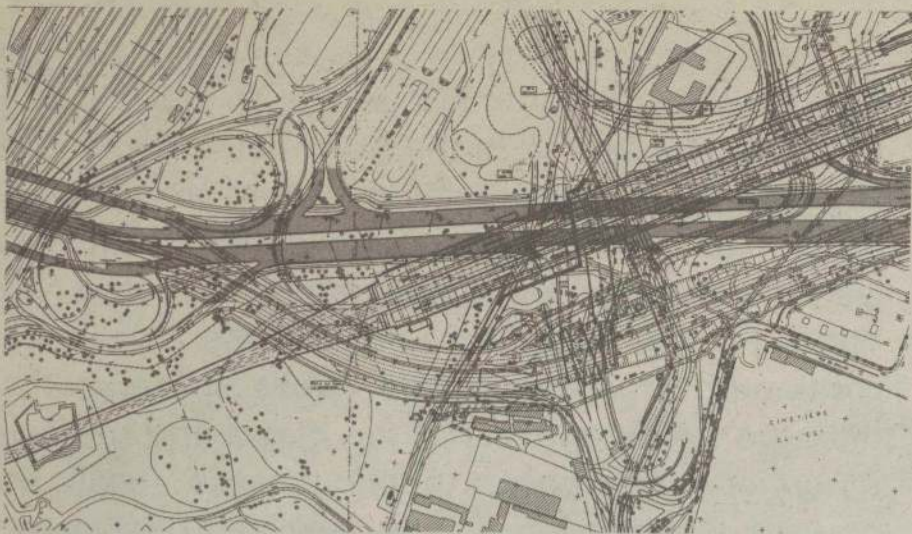
The Jussieu Library and the Kunsthal similarly activate the programmatic space of the structure with a public aspect. In the Kunsthal, a public passageway through the building leads to an enormous covered terrace. The internal circulation of both projects is a series of continuous ramps that, as in New York's Guggenheim Museum, provide a seamless continuum of program and public space. Rather than the stable models of the *piazza* and the *cour d'honneur*, Koolhaas's public spaces recall the boulevard's transience. The elongated escalators reach through six stories of the ZKM's monumental entry hall, becoming a symbol of the potential grandeur of mass culture.

O.M.A./Koolhaas's designs of public space and monumental architecture for contemporary mass culture are not oblivious to the implications of its scale—specifically the potential for overwhelming the presence of the individual—but treat it unsentimentally. For example, the open-air terrace of the ZKM gives no false sense of comfort but encourages a sense of exhilaration in the spectacle of mass culture.

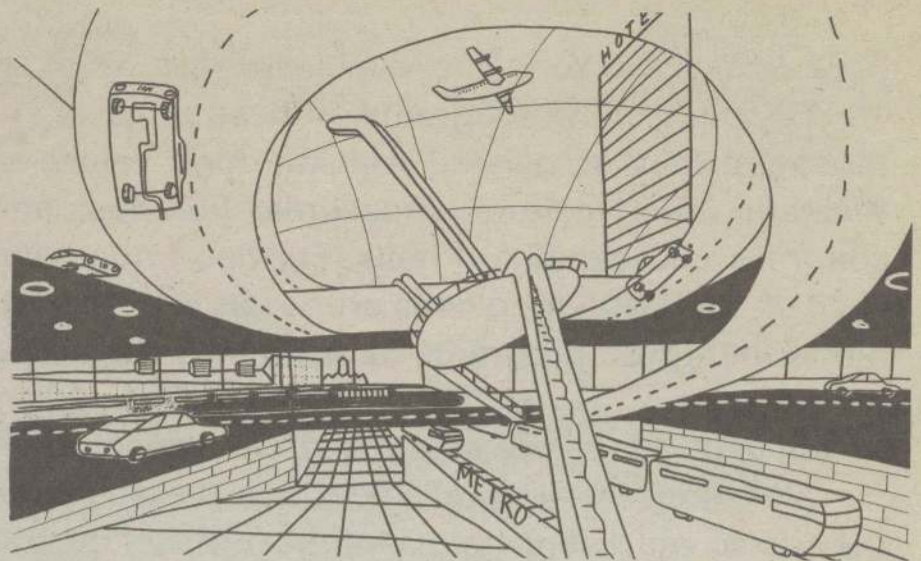
This exhilaration is evident in the physical scale of Congrexpo, whose footprint alone covers nearly 300,000 square feet, but also in its very identity as a central meeting place for the tens of millions of travelers from London, Brussels, Paris, and their metropolitan regions, all to be united by high-speed train connections.

O.M.A./Koolhaas gives public expression to the cultural values of the late twentieth century, in the framework of an internationalized mass society—a significant moment in the development of the metropolis. This public expression counters the withdrawal from real space represented by cyber technologies, while militating against the withdrawal from real time represented by attempts to simulate the appearances of the preindustrial city. In so doing, O.M.A./Koolhaas makes a positive argument for the architect's continuing role in defining the public realm.

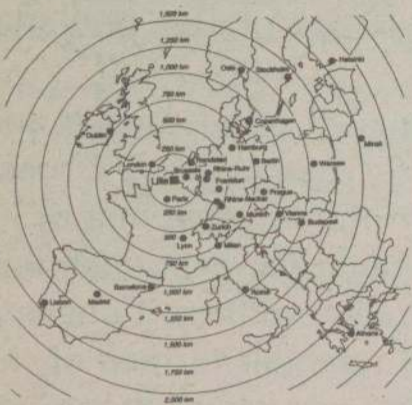
Terence Riley
Chief Curator
Department of Architecture and Design
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Plan of transportation infrastructure



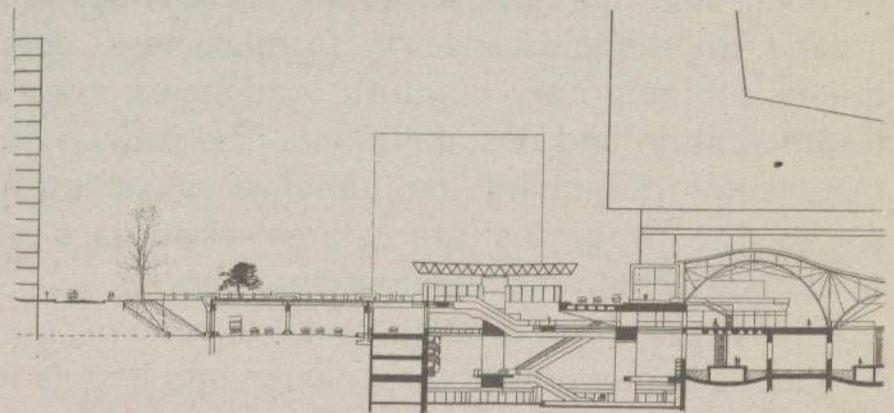
Espace Piranésien, perspective sketch



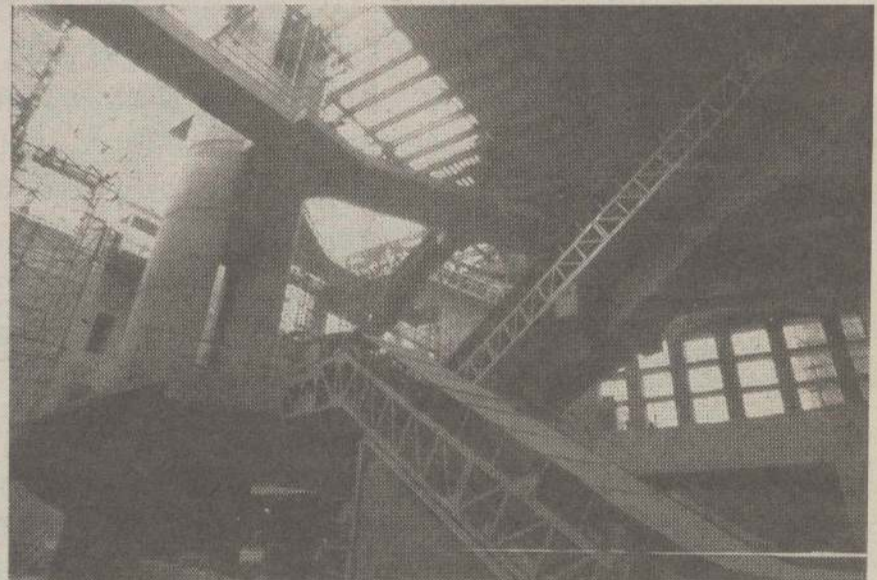
Lille, with 250-km isodistance lines (cartography: Spiekermann and Wegener, IRPUD)



Time-space map of rail trips from Lille in 2010 (cartography: Spiekermann and Wegener, IRPUD)



Espace Piranésien, principal section through TGV lines



Interior view of Espace Piranésien. Photo: Hans Werlemann

Euralille International Business Center
Lille, France. Master plan, public spaces,
 general architectural supervision. Phase 1
 completed 1994

Program (phase 1): 1. *Le Centre Euralille* (Triangle des Gares), by Jean Nouvel—Emmanuel Cattani and Associates. 2. *La Gare Lille-Europe* (TGV Station), by Jean-Marie Duthilleul, SNCF. 3. *World Trade Center*, by Claude Vasconi. 4. *Tour Crédit Lyonnais* (Credit Lyonnais Tower), by Christian de Portzamparc. 5. *4 Star Hotel*, by François and Marie Delhay. 6. *Lille Grand Palais* (Congrexpo), by O.M.A. and François Delhay. 7. *Le Parc Urbaine*, by Empreinte in association with Gilles Clément, Claude Courtecuisse.

Design Seminar, 1980: Rem Koolhaas, Donald van Dansik, Xaveer de Geyter, Georges Heintz, Willem-Jan Neutelings, Luc Reuse, Alex Wall, Art Zaaijer. Engineers: Cecil Balmond, Ove Arup & Partners.

Collaborators, 1988–1994: O.M.A./ Rem Koolhaas, Donald van Dansik, Floris Alkemade, with Age Albers, Edzo Bindels, Erik van Daele, Richard Eelman, Douglas Grieco, Hassan Karamine, Jan-Willem van Kuilenberg, Alexandre Lamboly, Mel-Ling Leung, Christine Machynia, Isabelle Menu, Edu Arroyo Munoz, Jim Njoo, Loes Oudenaarde, Karin Penning, Mark Schendel, Karolien de Schepper, Marleen Vink, Sarah Whiting, William Wilson, Stefan Witteman, Art Zaaijer.

Engineers: Ove Arup & Partners: Cecil Balmond (structure), Alain Marcetteau (geotechnics), Ahmed Bouariche (traffic), David Johnson (infrastructure).

EURALILLE: CENTRE INTERNATIONAL D'AFFAIRES

International Business Center
Lille, France
Completed 1994

"Until recently, Lille (pop. 1,000,000), a formerly significant city, was leading a slightly melancholy existence. Once a mining and textile town, it had fallen on hard times. But two new givens—the tunnel between England and the continent and the TGV network (the French superfast train that will run through it)—will transform Lille as if by magic and make it important in a completely synthetic way.

"Not only will it become the intersection of major north-south and east-west axes, but reduced travel times, through train and tunnel combined, will minimize the importance of distance and suddenly give Lille a strategic position: it will become the center of gravity for the virtual community of fifty million Western Europeans who will live within an hour-and-a-half traveling distance. . . .

"Based purely on this hypothesis, Euralille, a public-private partnership, . . . conceived a vast program that will ultimately consist of around 800,000 m² of urban activities—shopping, offices, parking, a new TGV station, hotels, housing, a concert hall, congress accommodation—to be built on 120 hectares on the site of the former city fortifications, by Vauban.

"The program will enrich life in Lille but is at the same time autonomous: it equips Lille for its role as headquarters of the theoretical community generated by the new infrastructures.

"In 1989 O.M.A. was selected to be master planner of this speculative enterprise. . . .

"As master planner and architect in chief, O.M.A. had influence on the choice of architects for the various buildings. . . . The hotel, facing a circular park, went to Kazuo Shinohara. Other choices were forms of reverse typecasting: Jean Nouvel for the enormous but cheap commercial center; Christian de Portzamparc for an office tower over the tracks. The station was designed by SNCF [the French national railroad] architect Jean-Marie Duthilleul. . . .

"The most important coherence is not formal but programmatic—a continuous pedestrian trajectory: a viaduct leads to the station; the station is conceived as a public arcade; a diagonal axis that connects the city to the end of the new station runs through Nouvel's commercial center. The towers become part of this urban network. . . .

"O.M.A.'s only architectural intervention in the central sector was not an addition but a subtraction: at the point of greatest infrastructural density, an *absence* of building reveals the highway, railway, three levels of parking, and the metro, which dives underneath the whole complex, in one overtly metropolitan moment—Espace Piranésien. . . .

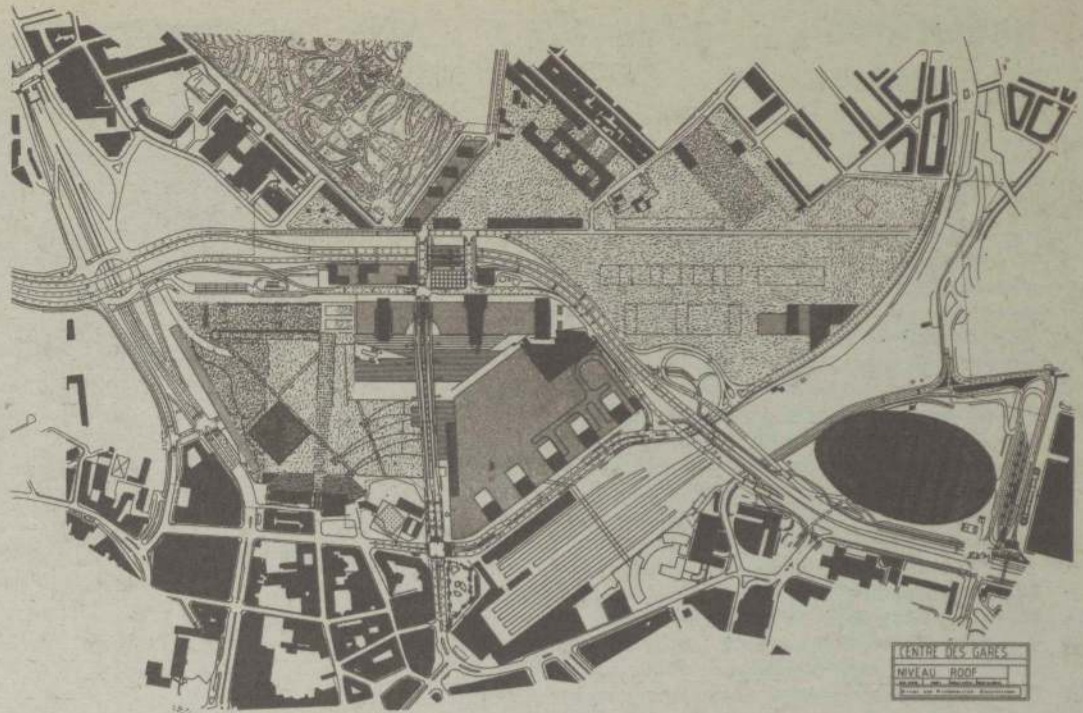
"It was three years later, with the site already turned into a gargantuan infrastructural playground, that the 'father' of the plan, Jean-Paul Baretto, revealed that our seemingly spontaneous action had been nothing but a figment of his imagination. . . .

"To create something worthwhile at the end of the twentieth century,' Baretto explained, 'you need three conditions. First, you need limits. In the beginning of the century you could be a hero by offering generalizations; at its end only the hyperspecific is credible. . . . In Lille, we have a limited territory and make no claims beyond it. . . .

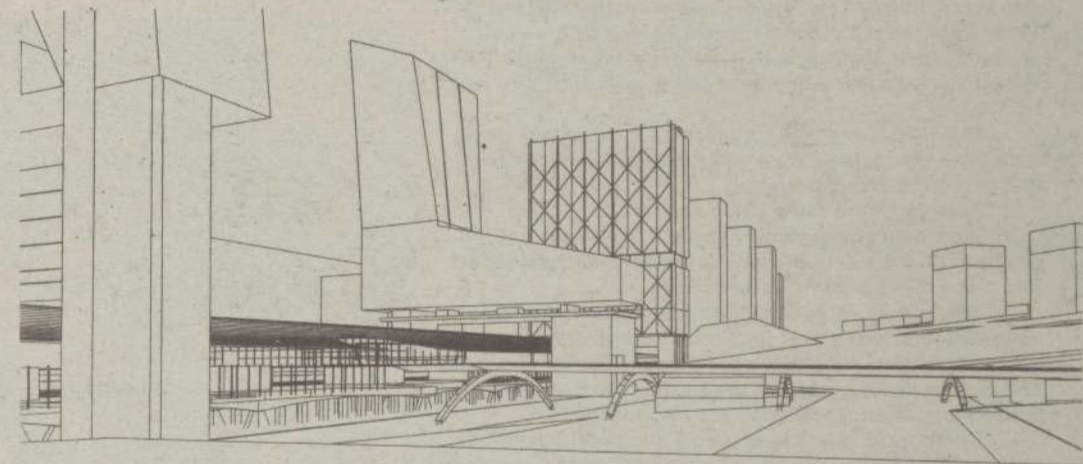
"The second condition is external demand, a compelling motive. . . .

"With these two conditions, you create the third: you establish on your domain a *dynamique d'enfer*, a dynamic from hell. . . . So complex become all the interconnections, the mutual dependencies, the proliferation of interfaces, the superimposition of users and owners that together they form a group of prisoners, shackled by mutual obligation, exacerbated by the very complexity that you offered unwittingly. . . ."

—Rem Koolhaas



Urban plan, phase I



View of office towers and extension of rue Le Corbusier



Aerial view. Photo: Phot'r Photographies Aériennes

URBAN RING

Yokohama, Japan
Project, 1992

"We went to Yokohama.

"Yokohama is a port city south of Tokyo, and, as in most port cities, the harbor activity is pulling away toward the sea, leaving vast abandoned territories.

"Along the perimeter of Yokohama's bay, the city identified five sites that could be redeveloped to form a circle, five kilometers in diameter, that would be completed by a new bridge. They asked a group of architects and artists to imagine this circle.

"Our site (A) is next to a future city (B)—Minato Mirai 21—which in thirty, or maybe even twenty, years will be the densest part of Japan. It is one of the 'SubCenters' the Japanese are trying to make around Tokyo, which is in their opinion too dense. This relatively small area will contain densities—up to three million people per square kilometer—almost unimaginable to Western eyes.

"At Minato Mirai we saw the emergence of a particular building typology, one we will soon have to recognize as the dominant typology: a completely inarticulate container with no architectural pretensions, whose only purpose is to accommodate certain processes or offices, and which simply represents a massive quantity of square footage imposed on an urban site without any more positive contribution.

"Our scheme, to a large extent, had to complement this future city, or at least it had to be read in connection with it.

"The difficult thing about our site was that it was already spoken for: it was almost completely occupied by two enormous market halls; one was also a parking facility. Because in twenty years this could be one of the densest areas of Japan, the permanent presence of the market hall was guaranteed; in other words, to serve the city, they had to stay.

"But we noticed that, although they physically dominated the island, they were used intensely only between 4:00 and 10:00 in the morning.

"The rest of the day nothing happened.

"It became obvious that we would have to invent programs to fill the rest of the day, which would achieve maximum use of the existing infrastructure.

"We thought we could adjust the parking lot—create a single warped plane that would be sometimes highway, sometimes ramp, sometimes parking, and sometimes roof and that could accommodate the endless programs that we would insert in an amorphous and informal manner.

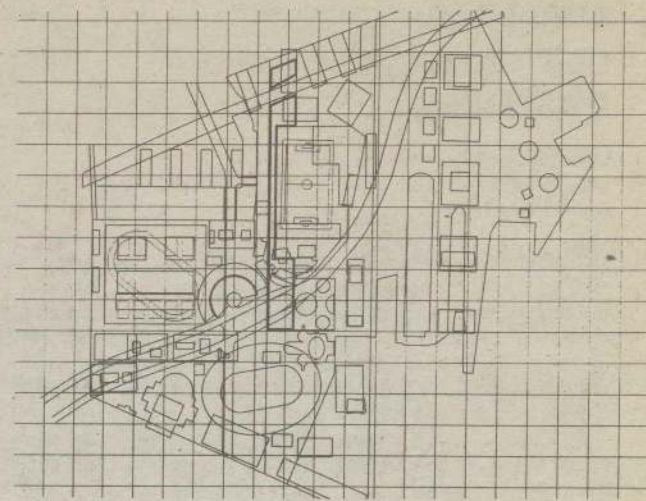
"Compositionally, it was simply an opportunistic infiltration of the island's residual space; into every gap and every slit and every available space we pushed programs with minimal containment, minimal cover, minimal articulation of mass, to generate the greatest possible density with the least possible permanence."

—Rem Koolhaas

O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas, Winy Maas, Yushi Uehara with Gro Bonesmo, Fuminori Hoshino, Kyoko Hoshino, Ron Steiner. Model: Parthesius & de Rijk with Ron Steiner, Claudi Cornaz.



Plan of Yokohama with location of site indicated

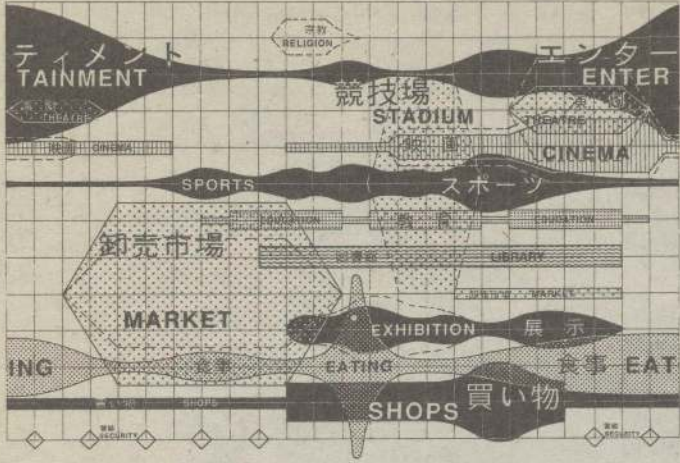


Site plan diagram

Master plan, collage

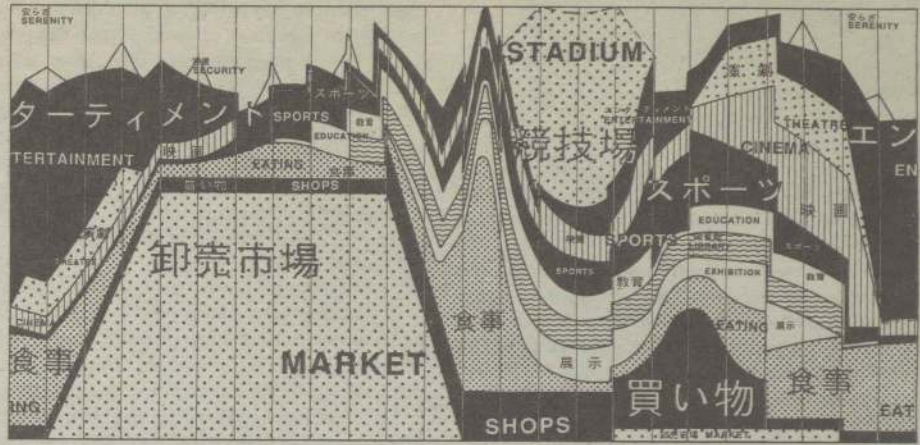


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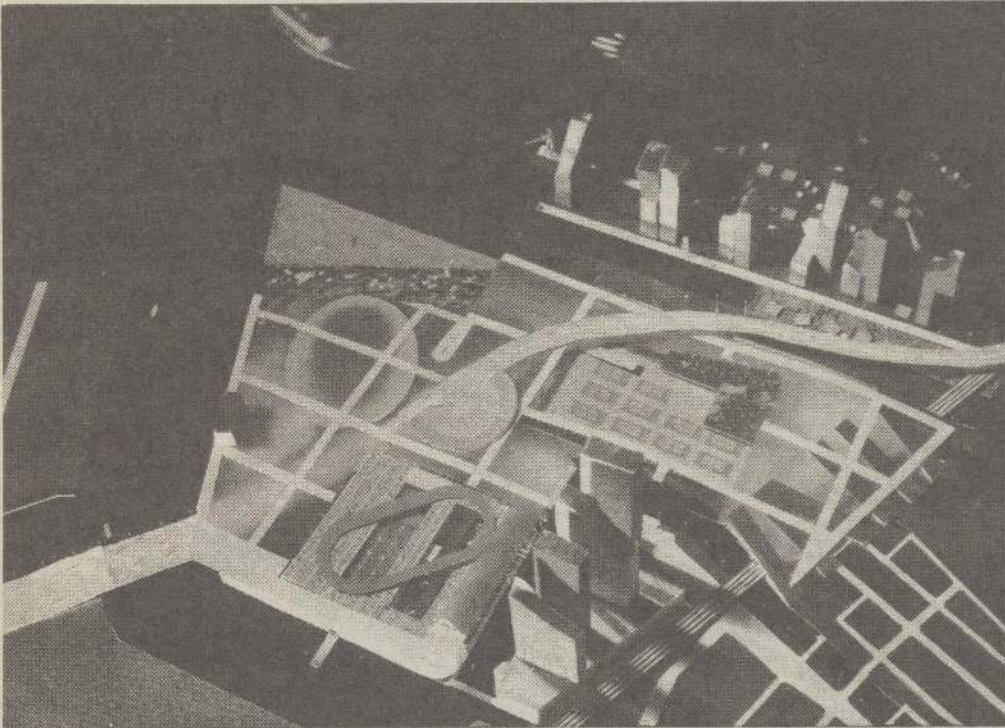
Analysis of assemblage of programs

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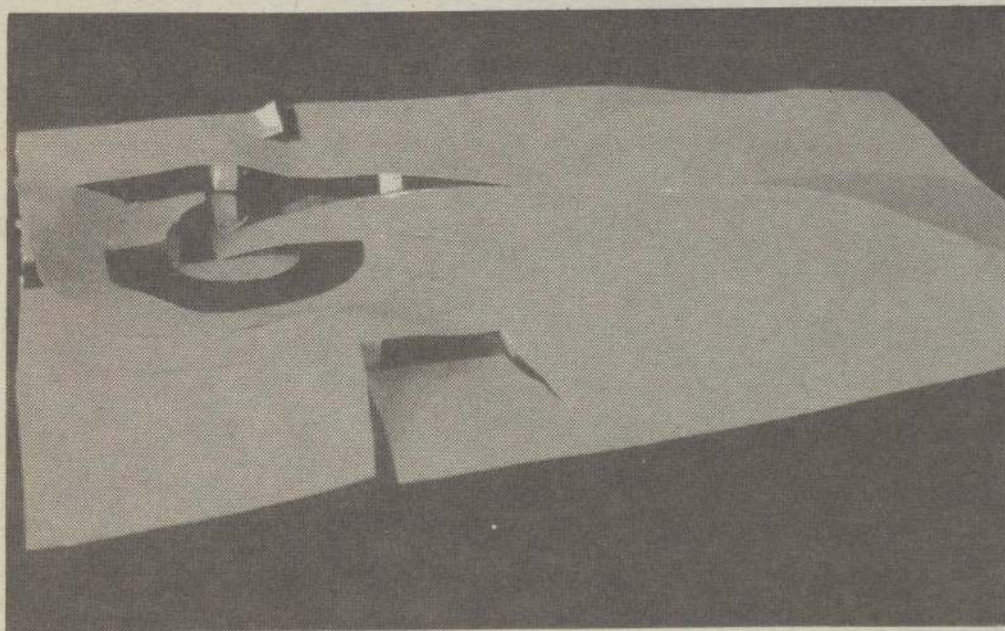


Analysis of peak hours

Computer study. Photo: Hectic Pictures



Study model of warped plane at parking level. Photo: Hans Werlemann



VILLE NOUVELLE

Melun-Sénart, France.
Competition, 1987

"It was heart-breaking . . .
if not obscene . . .
to have to imagine here, a city.

"The site of Melun-Sénart—the last of the *villes nouvelles* that encircle Paris—is too beautiful to imagine a new city there with innocence and impunity.

"The vastness of the landscape, the beauty of the forests, and the calm of the farms form a daunting presence, hostile to any notion of development.

"It would require a second innocence to believe, at this end of the twentieth century, that the urban—the built—can be planned and mastered. Too many architects' 'visions' have bitten the dust to propose new additions to this chimerical battalion.

"Today, consensus builds around avoidance; our most profound adhesion is to the nonevent.

"The built is now fundamentally suspect. The unbuilt is green, ecological, popular. If the built—*le plein*—is now out of control—subject to permanent political, financial, cultural turmoil—the same is not (yet) true of the unbuilt; nothingness may be the last subject of plausible certainties.

"At a moment when the complexity of each three-dimensional undertaking is infernal, the preservation of the void is comparatively easy.

"In a deliberate surrender—a tactical maneuver to reverse a defensive position—our project proposes to extend this political shift to the domain of urbanism: to take urbanism's position of weakness as its premise.

"This project is more discourse on what should *not* happen at Melun-Sénart than on what should.

"We took a careful inventory of the situation:

"There was a highway across the site; there were old villages; there were two enormous forests, farmland, a future campus, and a very beautiful area of landscape between the forests where the French kings chased deer from one mini-forest to another, and shot them as they ran for cover.

"And we began to analyze by reverse logic:

"Instead of starting the competition by saying, 'This is what we want to do,' we defined very carefully what we did *not* want to do. We asked not 'Where to build?' but 'Where not to build?'. We asked how to *abstain from architecture*.

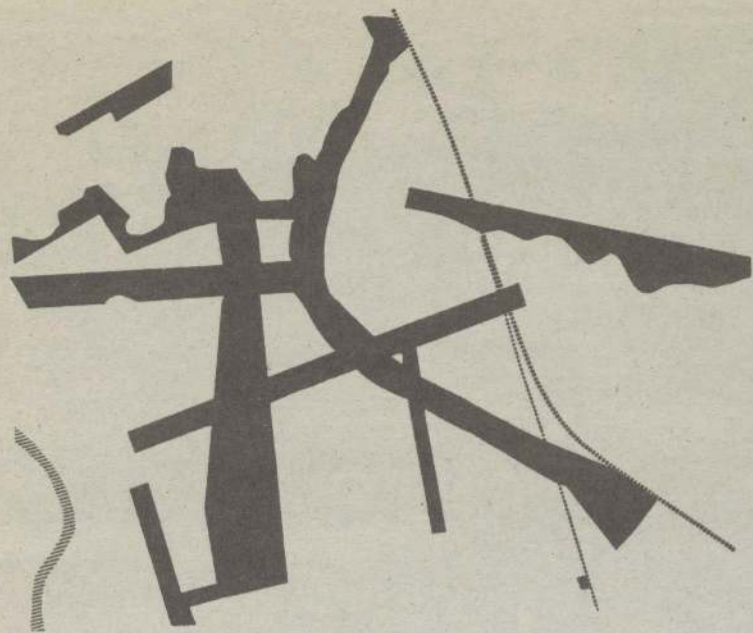
"Instead of projecting onto the landscape, we deduced from it, hoping that we could invent a reverse logic of building a city. Through this process of elimination, we arrived at an almost Chinese figure of void spaces that we would protect from contamination by the city—a new controlling element that would give the city, which was obviously not a classical city, but maybe a contemporary city, a form of coherence, of aesthetic pleasure and conviction.

"And then we said, 'The rest we will surrender to chaos.' We will abandon the residue—the terrains around and between the Chinese figure—to what the French call

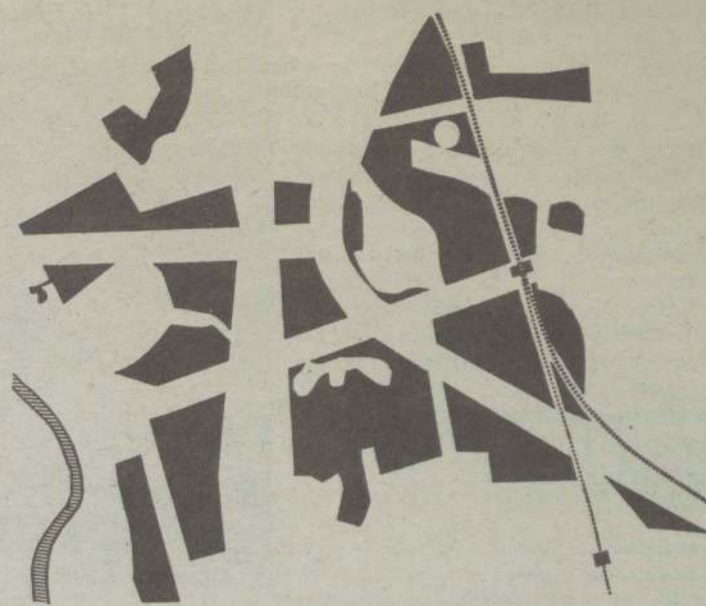
merde—to the average-contemporary-everyday ugliness of current European-American-Japanese architecture, and generate, through that ugliness, a potentially sublime contrast between the empty areas of the site—those we had protected from building—and the uncontrollable, almost cancerous chaotic growth of the city as a whole.

Master plan





Bands



Interbands

The Bands

"A system of bands—linear voids—is inscribed on the site like an enormous Chinese figure. We propose to invest most of the energies needed for the development of Melun-Sénart in the protection of these bands, in maintaining their emptiness.

"Some bands are traced to preserve the original landscape or historic particles, to assemble a maximum of beauty. Other bands run parallel to the highways to make them 'attractive' urban elements for the implantation of supermarkets and individual headquarters—linear office parks. Bands along the TGV line spare the city its noise pollution. Irregular bands reveal the 'facades' of the two forests. Other bands distribute the major programmatic components of Melun-Sénart across the site. One band defines the campus of a new university.

"Instead of a city organized through its built form, Melun-Sénart will be formless, defined by this system of emptiness that guarantees beauty, serenity, accessibility, identity regardless—or even *in spite of*—its future architecture.

The Islands

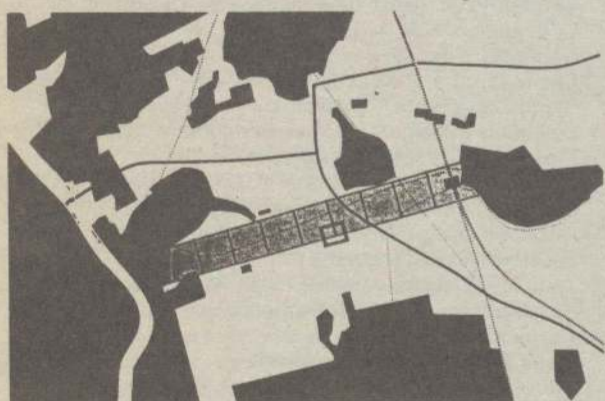
"Together, the bands define an archipelago of residue—the islands—of different size, shape, location, and with varying relationships to the givens of nature and infrastructure. They are the counterforms of the surrounding voids.

"Each of these islands can be developed independently of the others, according to the specific demands of site and program. They can even constitute an anthology of projects from the competition. They will be infinitely flexible in accommodating different architects, different styles, different regimes, different ideologies. They can be sponsored by the state, the city, developers, individuals. They accommodate intensity or boredom, density or sparseness. They will be beautiful or flawed. They will not be homogeneous; during the more than twenty-year construction of the city, each island will be a microcosm of a different interval. Their perimeters, always contaminated by their interface with the bands, will take on programmatic coloring and architectural specificity.

"The model of the archipelago ensures that each island's maximum autonomy ultimately reinforces the coherence of the whole."

—Rem Koolhaas

O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas, Yves Brunier, Xaveer de Geyter, Mike Guyer in collaboration with DBW: Yves Bories, Françoise Debuyst, Patrick Chavanne. Model: Herman Helle.



Equipment band



Landscape band



Communication and development band, scheme 1



Communication and development bands, scheme 2



Connection bands



Void bands

TRÈS GRANDE BIBLIOTHÈQUE

National Library of France
Paris, France
Competition, 1989

"The ambition of this project is to rid architecture of responsibilities it can no longer sustain and to explore this new freedom aggressively. It suggests that, liberated from its former obligations, architecture's last function will be the creation of the symbolic spaces that accommodate the persistent desire for collectivity.

"At the moment when the electronics revolution seems about to melt all that is solid—to eliminate all necessity for concentration and physical embodiment—it seems absurd to imagine the ultimate library.

"But that was exactly what the French government proposed when it organized a competition for the TGB in the summer of 1989: a colossal building of 250,000 m² on the east side of Paris, on a site near the Périphérique, facing the Seine.

"Along with conference centers, restaurants, offices, etc., it would consolidate five separate and autonomous institutions in which the complete production of words and images since 1945—the Bibliothèque is as much cinema as library—would be contained: a cinemathèque, a library for recent acquisitions (magazines, books, videos), a reference library, a library of catalogs, and a scientific research library.

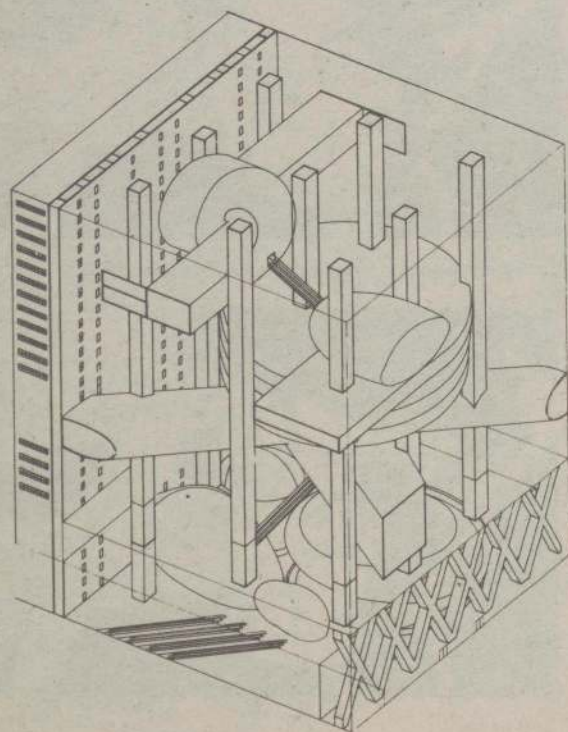
"The scheme is based on technological scenarios developed with inventors, systems analysts, writers, electronics companies. They all anticipate the utopia of fully integrated information systems to materialize before the opening of the building: books, films, music, computers will be read on the same magic tablets. The future will spell not the end of the book but a period of new equalities.

"The Very Big Library is interpreted as a solid block of information, a repository of all forms of memory—books, laser disks, microfiche, computers, databases. In this block, the major public spaces are defined as absences of building, voids carved out of the information solid. Floating in memory, they are multiple embryos, each with its own technological placenta.

"Since they are voids, they do not have to be 'built'; individual libraries can be shaped strictly according to their own logic, independent of each other, of the external envelope, of the usual difficulties of architecture, even gravity."

—Rem Koolhaas

Axonometric



Night view of west facade. Photo: Hans Werlemann

KUNSTHAL

Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Completed 1992

"The program demanded three major exhibition spaces—to be used jointly or separately—an auditorium, and an independently accessible restaurant.

"The site presents a dual condition: the southern edge is bordered by the Maasboulevard, a 'highway' on top of a dike. The southern side, a level lower, faces the Museum Park—conventional contemplation.

"The building was conceived as a square crossed by two routes: one, a road running east-west, parallel to the Maasboulevard; the other, a public ramp continuing the north-south axis of the Museum Park.

"With these givens, and the fact that these crossings would divide the square into four parts, the challenge became: how to design a museum in four parts that could function as four autonomous projects—a sequence of contradictory experiences that would nevertheless form a continuous spiral.

"In other words, how to imagine a spiral in four separate squares.

"The concept of the building is a continuous circuit. The pedestrian ramp is split, with a glass wall separating the outside, which is open to the public, from the inside, which is part of the circuit. A second ramp, running parallel and reversed, is terraced to accommodate an auditorium, and beneath it the restaurant. On the level where the two ramps cross, a 2.5-meter-wide band defines the main entrance. From there the visitor enters a space between a ramp going down to the park and one going up to the dike.

"Approaching the first hall, one confronts a stairway and an obstructed view, which, as one descends, is gradually revealed—a landscape of tree-columns with a backdrop of greenery framed, and sometimes distorted, by the different types of glass of the park facade.

"From there one follows the inner ramp leading to Hall 2, a wide-open skylit space facing the boulevard.

"A third ramp leads to the more intimate single-height hall, and further on to the roof terrace."

—Rem Koolhaas,
from *Mies van der Rohe Pavilion: Award for European Architecture 1992*. Published by the Commission of the European Communities and the Fundació Mies van der Rohe—Barcelona

Très Grande Bibliothèque

O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas, Art Zaaijer, Xaveer de Geyter, Georges Heintz, Heike Lohman, Ron Steiner, Alex Wall with Christophe Cornubert, Ramon Klein, Yushi Uehara. Engineers: Cecil Balmond, Ove Arup & Partners. Models: Parthesius & de Rijk.

Kunsthal

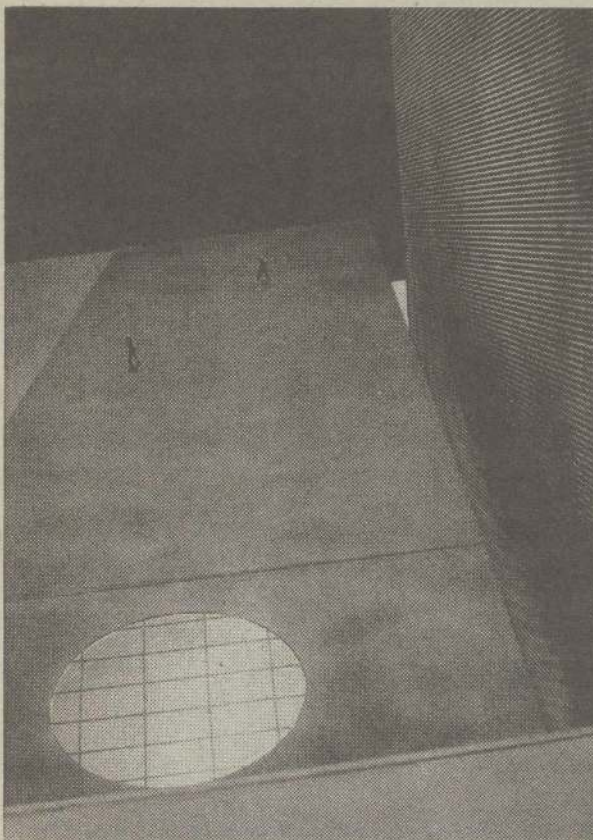
O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas, Fuminori Hoshino with Tony Adam, Isaac Batenburg, Leo van Immerzeel, Herman Jacobs, Edu Arroyo Munoz, Jim Njoo, Marc Peeters, Ron Steiner, Jeroen Thomas. Interior garden: Petra Blaisse. Engineers: Cecil Balmond, Ove Arup & Partners.

Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie

Competition: O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas, Heike Lohman, Georges Heintz, Alex Wall with Christophe Cornubert, Riente Dijkstra, Xaveer de Geyter, Mark Schendel, Ron Steiner. Engineers: Cecil Balmond, Ove Arup & Partners. Preliminary design: O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas, Wim Kloosterboer, Jacob van Rijs, Jeroen Thomas with Christian Basset, Marion Goerd, Ruud Kobussen, Maartje Lammers, Heike Lohman, Laura Weeber. Definitive design: O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas, Sven Ollmann, Jacob van Rijs, Christophe Cornubert, Farshid Moussavi, Alejandro Zaera, Ingenieurgruppe Bauen, Jaeger + Partner. Engineers: Cecil Balmond, Ove Arup & Partners.

Deux Bibliothèques de Jussieu

Competition: O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas, Christophe Cornubert, Xaveer de Geyter, René Heijne, Markus Röthlisberger, Yushi Uehara with Hernando Arrazola, Siebe Bakker, Gary Bates, Gro Bonesmo, Arjen de Groot, Jerry Kopare, Markus Lüscher, Peter Oudshoorn, Jacob van Rijs, Roland Stuy. Preliminary design: O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas, Christophe Cornubert, Annemie Depuydt, René Heijne, Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs with Mathias Bauer, Frans Blok, Patrick Cosmao, Michael Hsu, Ray Maggiore. Engineers: Ove Arup & Partners: Cecil Balmond (structural), Rory McGowan (structural), Crispin Matson (mechanical), Sean Billings (facade); Coyne Bellier. Program consultants: DA&DU. Advisor: Jean Attali. Model: Daan Bakker, René Heijne, Ad Kliphuis, Markus Lüscher, Gijs Niemeyer, Stein Vossen, Ronald Wall.



Model, view of entry plaza. Photo: Hans Werlemann

ZENTRUM FÜR KUNST UND MEDIEN TECHNOLOGIE

Center for Art and Media Technology
Karlsruhe, Germany
Competition, 1989

"... Karlsruhe is a city in denial.

"While, with the imminence of a united Europe, each city positions itself by claiming—and if necessary constructing—maximum centrality, Karlsruhe is Europe's geographical middle, a condition it can therefore afford to ignore. It prefers the oblivious pose of 'typical West German city at the end of the twentieth century.' Its citizens serenely inhabit the baroque idyll of their reconstructed townscape, united in their determination to resist unpleasantness from wherever it may come.

"Take a futuristic institution—ZKM, Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, also known as Electronic Bauhaus—and place it in this context! Projected on the perimeter of the baroque town, on a narrow strip of land on the wrong side of station and tracks, it faces on- and off-ramps of the Autobahn.

"Its program amalgamates a museum of media art; a museum of contemporary art; research and production facilities for music, video, and virtual reality; a theater for media; lecture hall; media library (a future Hochschule für Media); etc. It represents a laboratory open to the public—a huge apparatus to investigate, once and for all, the elusive connection between art and technology, a Darwinian arena where classical and electronic media can compete with and influence each other.

"To generate density, exploit proximity, provoke tension, maximize friction, organize in-between, promote filtering, sponsor identity, and stimulate blurring, the entire program is incorporated in a single container, 43 x 43 x 58 meters.

"The east and west sides of the core are defined by huge walls of black concrete. Between the walls span seven vierendeels, each six meters deep, creating an alternation between floors completely free of any structure—to exploit this literal incarnation of the free plan, one of the rooms is round—and floors of inhabited structure that are 'marked' by the different vierendeels, which oscillate between structural support and architectural definer, utility and aesthetics, necessity and decor.

"The deep core is surrounded by four thinner zones. A public void space faces the historical city to the north: the atrium as facade. A system of elevators, escalators, ramps, balconies climbs upward in a continuous movement from event to event. Two-thirds of the way up, this route enters the core itself to merge with the slope of the lecture hall. It

exits again, to end, via a short detour through one of the mechanical rooms, on the roof. Its facade combines blue, red, transparent, and etched glass in a mask that sometimes mimics, sometimes contradicts the movement behind it. Facing the lecture hall—it opens to the atrium—the steel mullions turn to nonreflective glass to form a transparent 'eye.'

"In the east zone, behind a screen of expanded metal, balconies and ramps allow open-air escape from the interior. This metal wall is used as electronic billboard: activities of the center leak out and are projected in real time, alternating with commercial messages, railway network bulletins, CNN, etc. The screen faces a ramp that leads directly to the ZKM entrance, on the level of the trains, and below it, to a new station hall. A passage runs beneath the tracks to connect north and south entries, a mixing chamber of the two publics. Below is a reservation for a future metro line, 'temporarily' claimed as part of the media domain.

"On the south is the 'robot,' an adaptation of the fly tower of a conventional theater: a void space that runs the entire height of the building to allow stage sets, electronic devices, projectors, art, containers, capsules to move up and down or to be locked in place to create new conditions on particular floors. Behind a corrugated polyester skin, these movements become signals of activity to the Autobahn traffic.

"The west zone, clad in giant glazed bricks, contains offices and individual plant rooms for each major program, to provide the most specific, direct, precise servicing.

"In this hybrid of utilitarian and cultural program, a linear antechamber with a medieval German motif (fireplace, log beams on the ceiling) at the level of the trains represents a platform for culture: a seemingly endless escalator transports the visitor from here through a hole in the wall to the realm of the media. The theater is connected to this lobby by a 30-meter-wide door that can move up and down. At certain moments, passengers in the TGV to Milan see a flash of the spectacle."

—Rem Koolhaas

DEUX BIBLIOTHÈQUES DE JUSSIEU

Library for the University of Paris, Jussieu campus
Paris, France
Competition, 1992

"The construction of two libraries at Jussieu University should undo the social deficit that has accumulated since the construction of the campus was aborted after the events of May '68. While the project represents the insertion of a new core, it should also resuscitate the significance of Albert's original project. Certainly beautiful, Albert's *parvis*—the roof of the podium—is windy, cold, empty; but there are more important reasons for its disfunctionality:

"Jussieu is a three-dimensional network, not a building. Its endless connections absorb all circulation, psychologically exhaust in advance any attempt to inhabit it.

"Intended as the stage for social appearance—the essence of the campus—the *parvis* is experienced as residue, a mere slice of void sandwiched between socle and building.

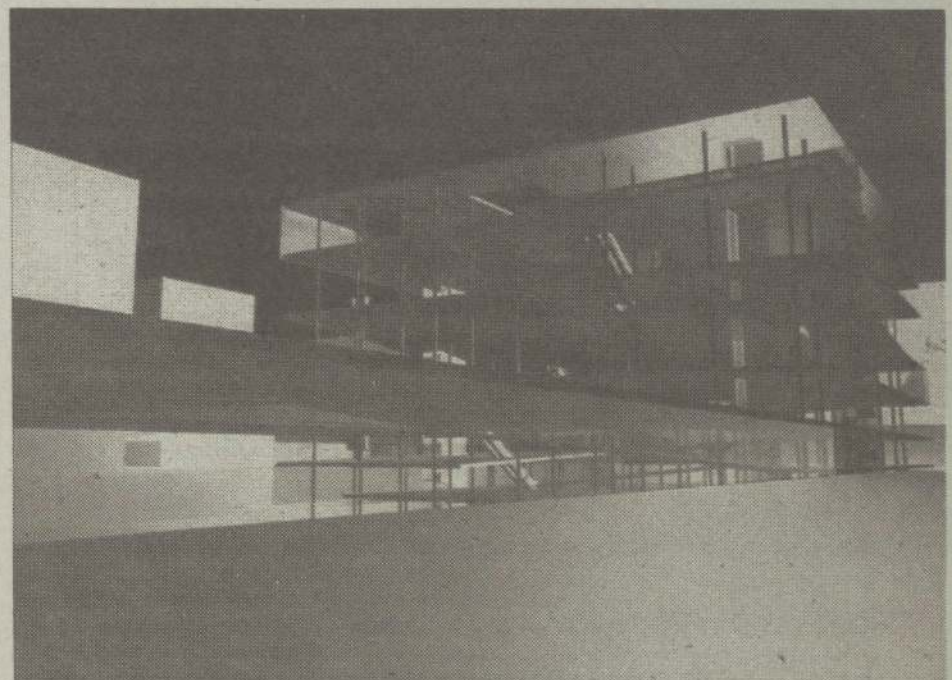
"To reassert its credibility, we imagine its surface as pliable, a social magic carpet; we fold it to generate density, then form a 'stacking' of platforms; minimal enclosure makes it a building—the culmination of the Jussieu network.

"If the essential problem of the present podium is dispersal, then this reconfiguration generates, with the same substance, concentration. To create more density still, the two libraries are superposed: science is embedded in the ground; humanity rises upward. Between them, the *parvis*—connected in the south with the metro station and in the north with the Seine—runs into the building to become the *accueil*.

"These surfaces—a vertical, intensified landscape—are then 'urbanized': the specific elements of the libraries are reimplanted in the new public realm like buildings in a city.

"Instead of a simple stacking of floors, sections of each level are manipulated to touch those above and below; all the planes are connected by a single trajectory, a warped interior boulevard that exposes and relates all programmatic elements. The visitor becomes a Baudelairean flâneur, inspecting and being seduced by a world of books and information—by the urban scenario."

—Rem Koolhaas



Computer-generated rendering

CONGREXPO

Exposition and Convention Hall
Euralille International Business Center
Lille, France
Completed 1994

"We built on the 'wrong' side of the tracks, literally.

"On a site separated from the station and commercial center by the railroad tracks, O.M.A. did its own building. It is 300 meters long and has a very diagrammatic organization, with three major components: Zenith, a 5,000-seat concert hall; Congress, a conference center with three major auditoriums; and Expo, a 20,000-square-meter exposition hall. In the east-west direction, each of these components can be used independently, but openings between the components make it possible to use the building as a single entity on the north-south axis, to mix programs, to generate hybrids.

"There are two huge metal doors between Zenith and Expo that can close or open; when they open, the separate parts become one, so you can also think of it as a theater with a 200-meter-deep backstage area, or any other combination of these parts.

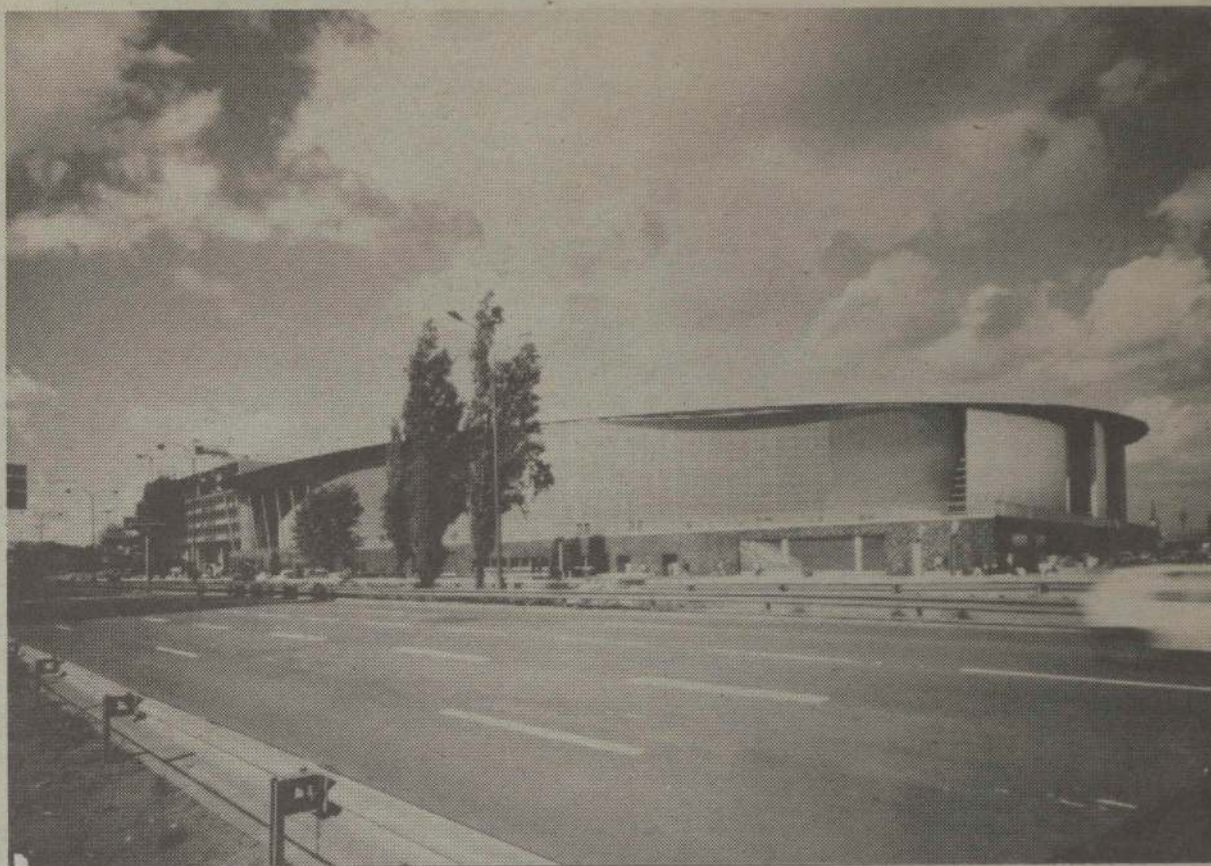
"Architecturally, it is 'scandalously' simple: an enormous plane of concrete, deformed into a scallop shape in the north, accommodates the concert hall; a concrete plate, folded according to the different auditorium slopes to become a bridge, forms the conference center. The bridge is simply placed on the field of the building, on enormous pilings, in such a way that the connection—but also the separation—between the concert hall and the exhibition space can be made easily. The only gesture toward entity is a single roof under which all these elements are contained. It is not a building that defines a clear architectural identity, but a building that creates and triggers potential, in an almost urbanistic sense.

"This was when we began to realize that our architecture was changing through our experience in urbanism. It became interesting to do what we could do in urbanism—extend limits, generate possibilities—in architecture.

"Congrexpo is a piece of equipment that with minimal dissociation from the generic urban plane, minimal means of intensification, accommodates the urban condition—but inside rather than outside.

"There is an event planned for 1996: all the Mazda dealers of Europe are in Zenith; the doors are closed. The new model is driven through Expo; the doors open and it comes into the auditorium. The doors close; the dealers descend to the arena and throng around the car. In the meantime, the entire space of Expo is filled with 5,000 new Mazdas. The doors open; the dealers are guided to their own new Mazdas and drive out of the building. That event will take place in the space of 30 minutes."

—Rem Koolhaas



Exterior view from west. Photo: Hans Werlemann

Conception and realization: Architects: Rem Koolhaas/O.M.A., François Delhay. Engineers: Cecil Balmond, Ove Arup & Partners.

Design Development: O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas with Riente Dijkstra, Jan-Willem van Kuilenberg, Ray Maggiore, Mark Schendel, Yushi Uehara, Ron Witte. FM Delhay: François Delhay, François Brevart, Christophe D'Hulst.

Definitive design: O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas with Ruud Corbussen, Jan-Willem van Kuilenberg, Ray Maggiore, Mark Schendel, Diana Stiles, Luc Veeger, Ron Witte. FM Delhay: François Delhay, François Brevart, Christophe D'Hulst, Shoreh Davar Panal. Isabelle Lemetay, James Lenglin, Olivier Tournaine.

Construction: O.M.A./Rem Koolhaas, Mark Schendel with Ruud Corbussen, Jeanne Gang, Diana Stiles. FM Delhay: François Delhay, François Brevart, Xavier d'Alencon, Christophe D'Hulst, Bertrand Fages. Interior: Petra Blaisse in collaboration with Julie Sfez. Textiles: Petra Blaisse. Structural engineers: Ove Arup & Partners: Cecil Balmond, Rory McGowan, Robert Pugh, Mohsen Zikri (mechanical). Service engineers: Godeg: Joel Taquet, Pascal Beckaert, Gérard Cattuti, Bruno Fontana, Bruno Loiseleux. Facade consultant: Agence van Stanten, Robert-Jan van Santen. Scenography: Agence Ducks, Michael Cova. Acoustics: TNO-Bouw, Rents van Luxemburg. Economics: Cabinet Gaillet: Bernard Gaillet. Bureau de contrôle: Socotec: Christian Theys. Planning: GEMO: Mr. Talpin, Jean Foerderer. Synthesc SETIE, Bernard Gaillet. General contractor: Dumez-Quillery SNEP.

OFF-SITE

In addition to the models and drawings presented in the Museum, there are a number of installations in the immediate vicinity, including in the 53 Street E and F subway station and at various locations on 53 Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition involved the efforts of a great number of talented individuals, including Rem Koolhaas and the staff of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture. The installations outside the Museum were organized with the cooperation of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Arts For Transit, Sumitomo Realty & Development (N.Y.), Inc., and the Museum of American Folk Art. The production of the exhibition involved numerous staff, including Anne Dixon, who worked very closely with the curator on its more difficult aspects, Jerry Neuner, Karen Meyerhoff, Emily Waters, Alexandra Bonfante-Warren, Blanche Perris Kahn, Peter Geraci, Peter Reed, Gilbert Robinson, Harvey Tulcensky, Ezra Tolmatch, Mungo Thomson, and Curbie Oestreich.

Given the relative complexity of the exhibition, a number of other senior staff were involved to an extent beyond what might normally have been the case: James Snyder, Richard Palmer, and Diane Farynyk. Special thanks to Dan Wood, Gary Bates, Vincent De Rijk, and Cindy Poorbaugh.

Thresholds in Contemporary Architecture is a series of exhibitions presenting significant expressions in contemporary architecture. **Thresholds** focuses on themes and issues in recent work, in the form of monographic exhibitions and other formats, rather than on broad retrospective assessments. The series identifies designers whose work is innovative and promises important future developments.

The following exhibitions have been presented in the series:

Santiago Calatrava. The exhibition was accompanied by a publication: *Santiago Calatrava: Structure and Expression*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1993.

Bernard Tschumi. A poster-brochure accompanied the exhibition.

Thresholds/O.M.A. at MoMA was organized by Terence Riley, Chief Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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The Museum of Modern Art Library