

ADIP

RETHINKING BERLIN //
a city and its river

urban and architectural research

Rem Koolhaas



Workforce of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture
OMA



Bijlmermeer present situation
KLM Aerial Photography Schiphol

Rem Koolhaas / S,M,L,XL

studied and summarized by

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Rem Koolhaas is a Dutch architect, architectural theorist, urbanist and "Professor in Practice of Architecture and Urban Design" at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University, USA. He is the principal of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture and its research-counterpart AMO.

S,M,L,XL shows his work and the work of his bureau, in the form of essays, manifestos, diaries, fiction, travelogues, and meditations on the contemporary city. It is not primarily in a chronological order, but ordered by size. That explains the title of the book: Small, Medium, Large, Extra Large. In the beginning of the book there is a collection of diagrams with data about his firm. The book is made out of full-colour graphics mixed with texts. It illustrates his way of working, an eclectic mix of layers.

The book aims to provide specific tools for specific scales, by ordering it by size. He also argues that scale is the only difference in architecture. Except for scale, every project is eventually based on the same questions.

The methods that are typically for Rem Koolhaas. He makes layers filled with either dots, strips, lines or texture and then places them on top of each other. Every layer represents one answer to one question.

INTRO imagining nothingness

Rem Koolhaas criticizes strongly the way architecture is used as an answer for urbanistic questions. In order to explain this point of

view, he takes the example of Berlin. Its destruction during the war, its non-density, and the fact that no real centre does exist, makes it a characteristic city. By thinking of how to remodel the city without having any recourse to substance, he's trying to think about a new method which would resolve this urbanistic questions.

Bijlmermeer Amsterdam

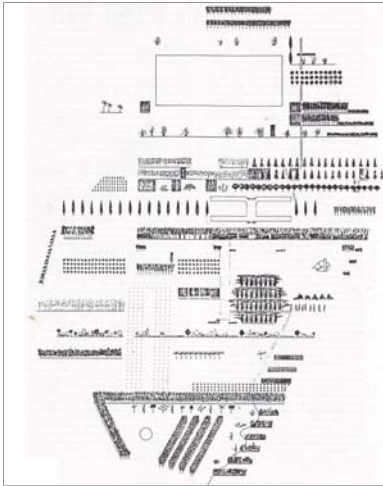
The late sixties expansion southeast from Amsterdam is the Bijlmermeer polder. It was build after the principles of the CIAM group, made up in the thirties. Modernistic planning including strict zoning and traffic on different levels was implemented in an unprecedented scale. Concrete slabs in hexagonal shapes were build on allotments of 400x400 meter. This urbanistic strategy together with social mismanagement caused the suburb to suffer with social problems and a very bad reputation throughout Holland.

Rem Koolhaas sees the Bijlmer as refreshing. He recognises the monumental grandeur and the architectural spectacle of the suburb. "The Bijlmer offers boredom on a heroic scale. In its monotony, harshness, and even brutality, it is, ironically, refreshing."

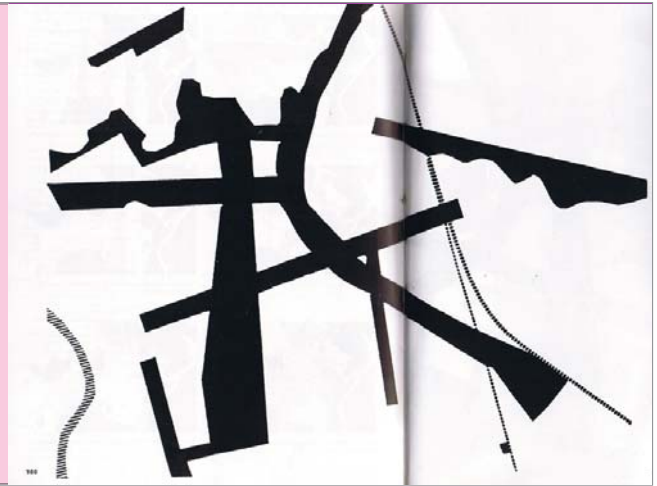
Furthermore he defines a few weaknesses like monotony of materials, only housing, hidden collective facilities and most of all: the neglecting of the car.

De design solution for the Bijlmer proposed in the book consists of layers. In the first layer bands of parking strips are projected. These would bring the car back in the environment. The second layer is constructing a boulevard with marketplaces under the monumental metro-line. Then there is a layer of connecting the big fragmented pieces of green into a wild bush with bush-qualities. The next layers are about specific walkways throughout the system and bombarding the plan with random buildings. The last layer proposes an own identity of each courtyard by creating unique programme, like sports fields, parks etc. This working with layers is typical Rem Koolhaas-like. Therefore this is a good example for looking at his method.

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Final plan for Parc de la Villette
OMA



Plan for Melun-Senar
OMA

Le Parc de la Villette

According to Rem Koolhaas, the Parc de la Villette is an example of the potential of the European culture of congestion: "a terrain vague between this historical city and the plankton of the banlieu". It's the potential of emptiness that the design must not destroy but on the contrary tend to exploit. To do this, Rem Koolhaas uses a specific method into steps: first, he draws a plan which is the superimposition of several layers of programmatic bands; then from this 2D combination he defines the landscape of the park.

The first part is divided into four phases:

- **the stripes**: the most important advantage of this system is to offer the maximum length of borders, increasing of the possibilities between each adjacent programs
- **points grids**, or confettis: they are distributed according to convenience, the strong characteristics of each of them combined with their irregular distribution able a kind of unity through fragmentation.
- **Access and circulation**: boulevards and promenades reveal some particular points of connection between the bands.
- **The final layer**: it contains the major elements of the program and becomes significant in a position to the three last layers.

This method of layers aims at proposing a design as dynamic as possible in order to keep the potential of emptiness undamaged: "how to orchestrate on a metropolitan field the most dynamic coexistence of activities and to generate through the mutual interference a chain reaction of new, unprecedented events; or, how to design a social condenser, based on horizontal congestion."

This quality of congestion echoes to the analysis Rem Koolhaas led on the New Yorker building in his book *Delirious New York*. La Villette reproduces the vertical congestion in its complex 2D structure. The only element of stability is to be found in the landscape (the trees and the roundforest).

Melun-Senar

It is the last of the villes nouvelles that encircle Paris. "today our most profound adhesion is the nonevent the built is fundamentally suspect, the unbuilt is green, ecological, popular...nothnigness may be the last subject of plausible certainties."

His reflection and research begins with what shouldn't happen at Melun-Sénart: he proposes the preservation of the void and "to take urbanism's position of weakness as its premise".

His method of analysis begins with an inventory of the situation and then with this reversal meaning. He decided what he didn't want to do and where he didn't want to build.

How to abstain from architecture?

Instead of projecting onto the landscape, he deducted all from it and he comes through this process of elimination to a figure of void spaces that he wanted to protect from contamination by the city. "The rest we will surrender to chaos, we will abandon the residue" - that means the terrains which were around and between the figure - "to the contemporary ugliness".

That means that he wanted to create a contrast between the empty areas he would protect from building and the uncontrollable chaotic ugly rest of building areas.

phasing: inventory, minimum public investment for maximum preservation of existing qualities, first programmatic reservations and studies for development choices. As a result of his research with different layers of non-action, he becomes to figures:

bands which represent linear voids and major programmatic components that he wanted to protect

"instead of a city organized through its built form, Melun-Sénart will be formless and defined by the system of emptiness regardless or in spite of its future architecture"

islands which are defined by the residue of the bands. This



Postcard Berlin Wal

archipelago of different size, shape, location is the counterforms of the surrounding voids.

In his mind, each island could be developed independently of the others, according to the specific demands of site and program. Those islands would be infinitely flexible for each ideology, regime, architect and style, they accommodate intensity or boredom, density or sparseness. The model of the archipelago ensures that each island's maximum autonomy ultimately reinforces the coherence of the whole.

Whatever happened to Urbanism?

As mentioned in the introduction, Rem Koolhaas disagrees with the current way of using architecture to resolve urbanistic problems.

In the text "What Ever Happened to Urbanism?", he insists and develops more this point of view.

The urbanist profession is also strongly criticized and even considered as a "chess play". Urbanization is going through a "crisis". Both issues of quantity and quality are still not resolved (as modernists failed in this task), and the population are dissatisfied with the city.

Therefore, Rem Koolhaas suggests to think (without finding any precise answer) of a new way of thinking urbanism, to take "insane risks", to reinvent it, to make it an ideology and not only a single profession.

However, what could be opened to criticism is that the author doesn't base his opinion on any precise examples which would demonstrate his negative point of view about the current state of cities.

By showing all these examples of projects, he suggests a method to answer the question without obviously being really able to solve it, knowing the scale of the problem and the change of mind it would need.