



Review of 'Content' by OMA/AMO

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GUIDE TO ECSTACITY

Nigel Coates

• 82

► appears, sitting at the massive Shibuya interchange in Tokyo, waiting for 11 years for his master to return (a small voice or is it a bark in the massive metropolis?). Few architects would present themselves as Coates does sitting at the beach like some kind of Canute II with reversed baseball cap, holding back the waves that will destroy his 'Jarmanesque' muse of the city made of sand. Coates knows only too well that reality can be bruising to architectural theory and seeks a kind of promiscuous distance from mainstream architecture. His "Body-Zone" featured at length in the book draws him ever closer towards the Body Politic.

In order to really enjoy this book you have to forgo some typical expectations and just 'go with it', trusting Coates' narrative ability as our assumed tour guide to his 'E-land world'. The underlining of words that

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refer to the counter spine glossary - which works distractingly in reverse, breaks up the main text. Some of the themes are perhaps overrun while others seem cropped to fit the various narrative sections. Inevitably London is the most 'fleshed out' of the seven cities while the others feel more peripheral to the text.

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Paul Clarke

Guide to Ecstacity

By Nigel Coates

Published by: Laurence King Publishing

Price: £35.00

CONTENT

BY: AMOMA / Rem Koolhaas /
Simon Brown & Jon Link

Can it really be almost a decade since "S,M,L,XL" literally blockaded the architectural shelves as the heavyweight champion of "bigness"? Having spawned a multitude of similar books Koolhaas/OMA and now AMO, have returned with a sequel. It was always going to be a hard act to follow and inevitably "Content" was produced faster than its predecessor and for quicker consumption in the rapidly changing world of architectural publishing and exhibitions. Gone is the graphic design force of Bruce Mau and the comprehensive coverage of OMA's buildings and urbanism. Instead we are offered a fast paced magazine romp through the "Junk-space" graphic world of 2004. Images of dripping paint support the 'hot off the press' look, which catches the OMA/AMO projects on the hop.

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'bookazine'. "Content" is deceptively dense and extensive with at times compacted and tiny print that tests your vision to the limits. Birkhauser's "IN - EX projects" publications are perhaps the closest rival in trying to put architecture on the magazine shelves. The price alone makes this a much more accessible book than previous 'wallet busting' productions.

The 'agit-prop' cover becomes an unexpected foray into the world of "Private-Eye" type photo collages. George W sports his crown of freedom fries against the massive

CCTV complex that aims to welcome a debate on the cat and mouse game of architecture and politics. Several essays explore the geo-political-spatial landscape that shapes the life or death of any large scale project. Such is the flux of the modern world now that buildings are branded (before being built) so they can survive in our market driven culture. In "Content" the branded building icons take on an aggressive anthropomorphic character.

Koolhaas assures us that "Architecture is a fuzzy



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amalgamation” which is exactly what the book feels like. Deliberately open ended the glue is almost dripping between each cut and paste. As “Editor-in-Chief” Koolhaas pulls together diverse essays and critical voices that aim to set a wide context.

AMO’s emergence provides studies that use architectural thinking in areas out with the production of buildings. Timelines are used to place architectures’ achievements (judge for yourself) against current events and politics. Europe is explored in its

statistics and symbolism including the well-published proposal for the EU “Bar Code Flag”. There are Interviews with Martha Stewart the US lifestyle guru, Stefan Aust the editor of Der Spiegel and the Venturi’s of ‘Complexity and Contradiction’ fame. Some of these are re-runs of sections from “The Harvard Project on the City” books.

Describing himself famously as “a surfer on the waves”, in “Content” you begin to feel a little sea-sick as the ‘waves’ get bigger and are

charted in expansive detail. In contrast the buildings provide ample foothold to the novice surfer. The new projects take us into a different phase in OMA’s output. “Seattle Library”, the extension to “NewWhitney” and the surreal “Casa da Musica” mark out new approaches. The “Casa da Musica” in Porto floats over its site with a mesmeric ‘lunar landing craft’ quality. The white concrete, spatial configurations and perfect shoebox acoustics show just how good these architects are. OMA’s potent mix of critical intelligence matched with a prodigious sense of invention allows them a seemingly limitless ability to refresh and re-invent themselves. The small vignettes of the buildings in “Content” will leave you wanting more, which perhaps an ‘El Croquis’ will fulfil later?

The mantra of the book is “Go East”, proclaimed at the top of nearly every page that ultimately leads from various geographically indexed locations in America to the colossal CCTV structure in Beijing. It is too early to tell what will become of the “adventure” in the east with this XXL project or of the political controversy Koolhaas finds himself in relation to China.

New York is scorned as Koolhaas finally burns the bridges back to the city that made him famous. In “White briefs against filth” his scathing criticism of the response to ground zero leaves Libeskind’s project feeling corrupted by the market and the cultural malaise left by the void of 9/11.

This book is full of ideas. The ‘ice wit’ writing style of Koolhaas in such texts as “junk-space” and “Crib-death” continue to strengthen his role as scriptwriter to architectures’ alter ego. The book is a plea to extend the intelligence of architects beyond the realms of building and reveals painfully the dilemma of architectures’ complicity in the market economy. Meanwhile in the face of these uncertainties Koolhaas and OMA continue to produce some of the most remarkable buildings in contemporary architecture. ●

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