



2010 READING LIST: HTS Brett Steele

This reading list has been given to the library by a unit tutor or is compiled from the 2009/10 Course Booklet. We have placed the list on the internet in the form that we received it. Please note that the library does not necessarily hold all the books included on this reading list and that only a percentage of items maybe held on the unit Programme Shelf. For location details please consult the library catalogue.

BoOMA: The Bookspace of OMA

Brett Steele

Writers are really people who write books not because they are poor, but because they are dissatisfied with the books which they could buy but do not like

Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library'

Course Introduction

This course looks at documentation—in the form of books and publication activities—through which architecture travels our world. This seminar will foreground an AA retrospective exhibition in 2010, on the books of OMA.

OMA is an architectural office that for more than thirty years has been dedicated to the production of experimental architectural ideas through the thinking, making and production of experimental architectural publications. Founded initially in 1972 through by the making of a single collaborative document (the A4-sized booklet 'Exodus or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture'), the ideas of OMA are first given form in the five-year research and writing of *Delirious New York*, after which the office begins work as an architectural practice.

Throughout the 80s, 90s and the past decade OMA has gone on to produce hundreds of in-house books and documents that record the research, ideas and projects of the office. This course will survey this oeuvre, including the key monographs produced by the office and how these relate to the twentieth century legacy of monographs, magazines and manifestos that are largely the location of modern architecture's invention, communication and evolution.

A century ago modern architecture was conceived and promoted through modern print media, advertising and other communication revolutions. These are precursors.

Le Corbusier, Gropius, Wright and even Mies (who later said he had no interest in 'paper architecture or printed words—only building') were initially all renowned editors, writers and promoters long before they become well-known, influential builders. This course will

look at something of the strange circumstances of their modern re-incarnation as OMA (and more recently, its re-invention as AMO).

The course is organized in two distinct halves: Sessions 1-4 look at the 20th century legacy of modern architecture and printed matter; Sessions 5-7 looks at OMA. At the end, students will each make brief presentations in the final Session 8.

References

In addition to copies of the reading texts listed below, two books on reserve in the AA Library provide examples of diagrammatic and analytic tools that will play a part of your eventual course submissions. Please consult these early on this autumn to discover ways for you to undertake an analysis of a selected OMA publication(s) in relation to other modern examples. This will be the basis for your course submission due in January.

These references are:

Robert L. Harris, *Information Graphics: A Comprehensive Illustrated Reference. Visual Tools for Analyzing, Managing, and Communicating* (Atlanta: Management Graphics), 1996

Harris is the bible of contemporary statistical description. Hundreds of graphs and charts organized by type. Examples include extensive descriptions.

Edward Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, Reprint, 1997

This is a classic text on the visual presentation of statistical information; Tufte is considered the world's expert on visual information scholarship. Everyone should read. Look at volumes 2 & 3 (published after *Visual Display*) for even more materials. I'll put these on reserve also.

Session One

INTRODUCTION: ARCHITECTURAL KNOWLEDGE AS PROJECTS

Tues 6 October, 2.00pm

Everything in the book intends to be part of a unified meditation on the melancholy of the creative mind's desperate insistence upon priority

Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*

This initial class sets the stage for the course by reviewing the ways in which architectural knowledge is produced, experienced and communicated. A comparison between building, planning, design and other activities, vs. the publication, promotion and circulation of ideas related to those projects—in printed publication.

Readings: No readings required for Session One.

Session Two MONOGRAPHS: ARCHITECTURE AS A BODY (OF WORK)

Tues 13 October, 2.00pm

That a publisher and two young architects should have joined forces to make this book a sort of balance-sheet of my work is naturally gratifying to me as a proof of the younger generation's sympathy for it. All the same it would be a sorry business if the present volume were to be considered a "definitive edition", which summed up my development and brought me to a close with a full stop

Monographs are the essential form of promoting and circulation an architect's body of work. Monographs (to distinguish them from two other popular printed forms that we will examine the next two weeks, magazines and manifestos) compile years of work into a single, edited, presentation. How representations of projects in these forms compare to (or as) the buildings or other projects they are assumed to represent is the focus of this session.

Required Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York), 1968, pp. 122-38
Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973)

Session Three

MAGAZINES: ARCHITECTURE AS SERIAL COMMUNICATION

Tues 27 October, 2.00pm (note no class on 20 October—write a preliminary abstract during the week off!)

Advertising, which in the nineteenth century was simply the publicizing of a product, before becoming in the twentieth an industry for stimulating desire, is set in the twenty-first century to become pure communication. To this end it will require the unfurling of an advertising space which stretches to the horizon of visibility of the planet.

Paul Virilio, 'The Information Bomb', 2000

In the late 19th century in Europe and North America the industrialization of modern printing presses leads to an immediate explosion of new media in the form of serial, or periodic, publications. Architectural periodicals rapidly appear in America and Europe. *Architectural Review* begins its century-long run in the 1890s, and is soon joined by many others.

The Avery Index of Architectural Publications lists more than fifteen hundred architectural periodicals, whose regular arrival on library and bookstore shelves worldwide dominates the forms of information and image exchange delineating today's thoroughly mediated, global, architectural discourses.

Examples presented this session include *L'Esprit Nouveau*, *De Stijl*, *Architecture Principe*, *Any*, *Art & Architecture*, *Perspecta*, *AA Files*, *Oppositions*, and other magazines.

Readings: Magazines, Fanzines and online examples of your choice.

Session Four

MANIFESTOS: ARCHITECTURE AS ARGUMENTATION

Tues 10 November, 2.00pm (Note no class during Open Week-Prepare one-page abstract! For submission at this session)

We intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness.

. .

We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind. . .

The oldest of us is thirty: so we have at least a decade for finishing our work.

When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts—we want it to happen!

Modern architecture was first built by printing presses and designed by editors. Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*, one of 57 books the architect wrote in his lifetime, is the classic modern statement of print as architecture. Echoes are to be found in countless contemporary and subsequent examples presented this session: Team X's *Primer*, Buckminster Fuller, Claude Parent's *Function of the Oblique*—and not long after, OMA's *Delirious New York*.

Readings: Futurist Manifestos, ed. And with an introduction by Umbro Apollonio, translations by Robert Brain, R. W. Flint, J.C. Higgitt, Caroline Tisdall (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973)

1923: Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, transl. with an introduction by Frederick Etchells (London: Architectural Press, 1927)

Following Session Four, and during the AA's Autumn Open Week during Week 6, all students must prepare a one-page abstract and outline describing initial research ideas for an analysis of a selected OMA publication in relation to another, 20th century, architectural example. Compare, contrast, and uncover the content of each.

Session Five

OMA in the 70s: *Delirious New York*

Tues 17 November, 2.00pm

Session Five starts with each student hand-in of their one-page abstracts. Brett will read and comment on to help shape presentations in Session Eight, and subsequent submissions.

Delirious New York is the transition between a thesis project written (much more than drawn) and later OMA projects (other than books).

Presented as a 'retroactive manifesto', *Delirious* is one of three iconic 1970s books that featured travel by architects (or their theorists) to places other than the familiar destinations of modern architecture. The book (alongside those of Venturi et al and Rowe) is important for 1) conceiving a 'critical' architecture in relationship to its past (something that was an important feature of *Learning from Las Vegas* as much as *Collage City*; two contemporaries of *Delirious*); and 2) arguing an essential link between architecture and the city (building upon the 1960s sensibility of Rossi and others).

Reading: Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1978

Video: Rem Koolhaas, 'Manhattan', Lecture at AA 1977

A young Koolhaas, introduced by Peter Cook, presents some of the research associated with the book.

Session Six

OMA in the 90s: *SMLXL*

Tues 24 November, 2.00pm

*Architecture is a hazardous mixture of omnipotence and impotence.
Ostensibly involved in 'shaping' the world, for their thought to be*

mobilized architects depend on the provocations of others—clients, individual or institutional.

Rem Koolhaas, 'Introduction', S,M,L,XL

This is OMA in middle age: following nearly twenty years of work, a massive encyclopedia of 1400 pages presents a carefully edited, highly ordered, compilation—and analysis—of the office and architect's first two decades. A 'novel' that seeks to turn a conventional architectural monograph inside-out, with great success.

Reading: Rem Koolhaas & Bruce Mau, *Small Medium Large Extra-Large Office for Metropolitan Architecture*, ed. By Jennifer Sigler, Photography by Hans Werlemann, New York: Monacelli Press; format 6 lbs., 3 oz.; reprinted Koln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag 1997

Video: Rem Koolhaas, 'Starting Over', Lecture at the AA 1996
A lecture at the AA, during which the book is launched, and explained by its principal (but not sole) author.

Session Seven:

OMA in the 00s: Content and Al Manakh

Tues 1 December, 2.00pm

This book is born out of [that] instability. It is not timeless; it's almost out of date already

Rem Koolhaas, *Content*

Two recent books by OMA seek to release architecture—or at least, architectural books—from the familiar professional conventions dedicated to design and building. *Content* (featuring OMA projects alongside all kinds of other stuff, including Gucci ads and Pirated Prada salesmen) and this year's recent *Al Manakh* (on OMA's analysis of the Gulf and Dubai) are investigative ventures into the conditions of cities, architecture and culture today.

Reading: Rem Koolhaas, Brendan McGetrick, *Content* (Taschen, 2004)

Video: Rem Koolhaas, 'Recent Works' AA May 2007

Session Eight

PRESENTATIONS: STUDENT ABSTRACTS & RESEARCH

Tues 8 December, 2.00pm

I can't stand to read anything about myself

Mies van der Rohe

Books call attention to architecture, force the reader (viewer) to focus, and generally arouse amusement or disgust

Philip Johnson, 'Postscript' to *Five Architects*

A final session of the class, during which you will briefly present a summary of your submission abstract and preliminary research ideas, leading to your class presentation in Session Eight and later course submission.

Course Requirements

Attendance, weekly readings and discussions, a 5-minute presentation, submission to Brett of a one-page Submission abstract during due at Session 6, a 5-minute class

presentation during Session Eight, and a written essay/graphic submission to not exceed 3,000 words or five pages, due Week One of Spring Term.

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