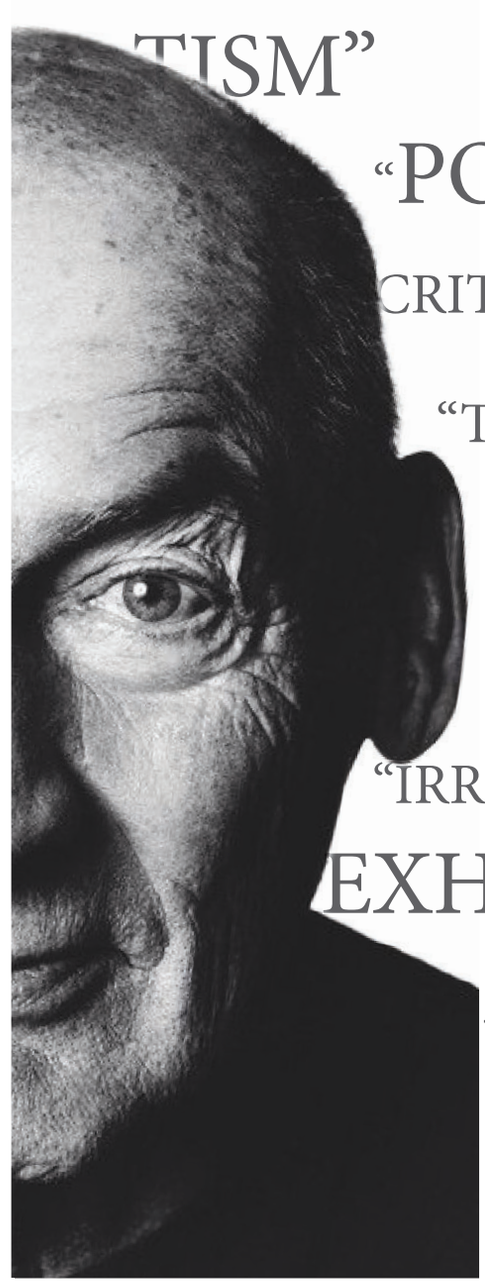
TECTURAL THEORY ARCHITECTURAL TH

3b 420-3b 42

"CRITICAL REGION-
ALISM"

"SUPER-DUTCH"

"DUTCH-PRAGMA-



"CAPITALISM - WITH A CONSIENCE"

"FREE - CAPITALISM"

Rem Koolhaas

As seen above there is an abundance of theory surrounding Koolhaas. I'm focusing the discussion around capitalism because I believe it seves as an underlying force in theory and should be explored. To me Rem is central to this discussion.

If Koolhaas finds his portrait opposite mine its because altough I have many architects and theorists that I can align with, a critique of Koolhaas's pragmatic views of neoliberal capitalism provides the perfect conterpoint to my budding architectural theoretical views.

Therefore this side of my essay will be dedicated to supporters, or ambivalent supporters, of neoliberal capitalism and its architecture. Because I feel a personal need to not only advance the theories I agree with but also critique theories (or lack there of) that are counter to my beliefs.

Sanford Kwinter

Theory wise Kwinter hits a home run for me and provides a clear platform to critique Koolhaas and neoliberal capitalism.

I can quickly and easily relate to Kwinter in his writings about architecture. There is a definite neoliberal climate driving most of the projects I get here at work. And I feel guilty as I grease the wheels of capitalism looking to my leaders and the leaders of my profession for a solution.

As Kwinter writes in Le Trahison des Clercs:

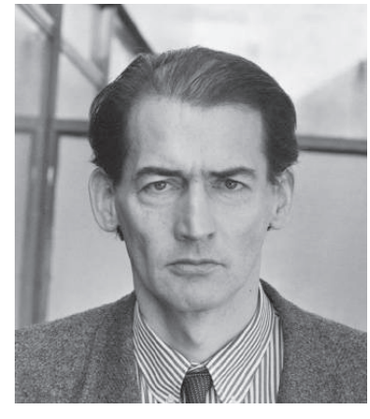
> *"The current intoxication with the magical flame of neocapitalism - expressed primarily through the exaltation of market forces and their legendary, but not proven efficacy and intelligence - has so subsumed contemporary culture, society, and media that even our intellectuals, if one can still call them that, can no longer muster the awareness that something troubling has happened. (Kwinter, 2014)"*

I consider Koolhaas as one of the 'intellectuals' Kwinter speaks of. Koolhass clearly understand the capitalist forces at play, he makes a living navigating these forces.

Ellen Dunham-Jones

As pointed out by Dunham-Jones instead of becoming involved and seeking control of the direction of the New World Order is taking us, Koolhaas proposes a go-with-the-flow attitude and became the lead surfer of the emerging capitalist wave. (Dunham-Jones, 2014).

Here goes...



Koolhaas in the 90s:

During the 90s Koolhaas became interrested in the New World Order and the shifting of the markets from regulated to free. As a response he sought opportunities for a new form of architecture. His reponse to the deregulation of the market was "Bigness" (Dunham-Jones, 2014).

His theories of the architecture of the very large is of course insightful and interresting. But he may have taken it too far as writen in Capitalism and Achitecture 1845 to the Present:

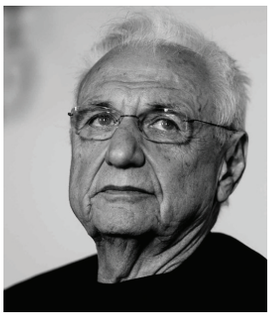
> *"...Koolhaas wrote threes essays. Collectively, they excoriate his profession for inadequately coming to grips with the New World Order's massive investments in urbanization, generic cities, and big buildings."* (Dunham-Jones, 2014)

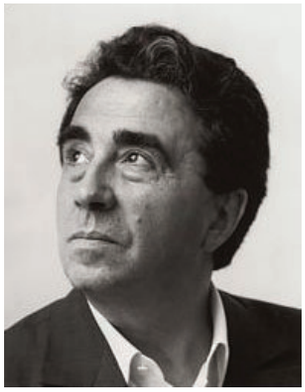
His projects at the time, such as the Euralille project, shows Koolhaas has his finger on the pulse and is at the very forefront of the new wave of modernization in Europe. (Dunham-Jones,2014)

In her work, Dunham-Jones seeks to cross-fertilize the worlds of contemporary theory and contemporary development. (Deamer, 2014). She co-authored *Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Subrubs*, which turns its gaze away from city centers and Bigness towards the smaller scaled revitalisation of the suburbs.

"Starchitects"

Koolhaas may have led the way but many more came to similar conclusions in seeking to follow neoliberal capitalism.





The fact that the profession has such elite members is symptomatic of the neoliberal capitalist climate we are in. It stands to reason that the architecture of the 1% necessitates an elite class of equally privileged architects.

MASS architects, Ennead Lab, and nonprofit architecture

A paussible response to Capitalist architecture as we know it could be architecture as a non-profit entity. What better way to counter an industry overun by capitalism and profits than by eliminating the very idea of profitting? Could non-profits provide a counterbalance to free-market pursuits?

Not many frims operate under a nonprofit banner. One of the fiew firms to do this is MASS Design Group, a group of form Harvard Graduates from the School of Design. An example of MASS's nonprofit work a project is in partnership with a charity for the building of a new school in a neighborhood of Kabeza. The school replaced the former facilities serving three hundred orphaned children.

Ennead Lab is an organization that often works with non-profit organizations such as the UNHCR, Heroic Food and the Audubon Society. While they seek to "collaborate on diverse research questions and impactful ro-active design projects"

One important project by Ennead Lab is the Toolkit they developed specifically for the UNHCR in order to provide better settlement planning in refugee camps.

To take it a step further perhaps there is another business model that a design firm can adopt to counter the refinement of capital. A typical architectural firm could donate all of its profits to a nonprofit 'sister' firm. The sister firm can self generate projects for their own chosen cause or undertake projects for other nonprofit organizations and its members.

Image: 1

onprofit Not for Profit Nonprofit Not for P

Peggy Deamer

Peggy undertook the task of showing some of the linkages between architecture and capitalism in her book Architecture and Capitalism 1845 to the Present.

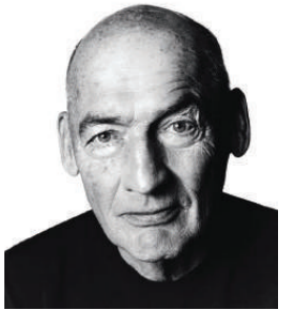
Her book is an invaluable account of capitalism and the architecture it produced over this time span. I introduced me to many likeminded theorists. This book to me is vitaly important as stated by Deamer:

> *"While the construction industry participates energetically in the economic engine that is the base, architecture (particularly as a design practice) operates in the realm of culture, allowing capital to do its work without its effects being scrutinized."* (Deamer, 2014, p.1-2)

Regionalism opposes Koolhaas' tabula rasa and his theories on Bigness.

While the import of new ideas to a new locale can be disastrous, it is nothing new. A new, stronger idea, replacing a old one or a new dominating force displacing the established have plenty of historic precedents.

One such spreading of ideas was the rise of Modernism in America and Europe in the early twentieth century. It too, like Koolhaas, looked for a clean slate and thus the urban renewal programs began in the United States - tabula rasa.



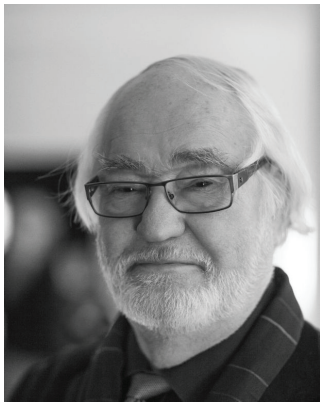
Rem Koolhaas appears in this volume with an entire chapter dedicated to him. In it he is characterized as favoring the tabula rasa, as written by Dunham-Jones:

> *"Koolhass likes the tabula rasa, the identity-less vacant lot, "those nothingesses of infinite potential." They are emblematic of the bulldozing inherent to modernizing the metropolis and echo the neoliberal reprise of the virtues of capitalism's "creative destruction." Don't stand in the way of progress!."*
> (Dunnham-Jones, 2014, p.158)

Further to his affinity for the clean slate Koolhaas decouples his buildings from the context they are in. In China for example Koolhaas doesn't challenge class structure or economic power of the status quo but rather distinguishes the elite patrons from the general public confronted by the architecture every day. (Dunham-Jones, 2014)

Tabula Rasa

While **critical regionalism** was opposed to this there was another form of regionalism that was more permissive, **regional modern.**



Juhani Pallasmaa

Pallasmaa in his essay on regional modern puts forward the notion of what he calls a more "realistic view of culture unblinded by illusions" (Pallasmaa, 1988). This view suggests an evolution of modernism and allows it to marry with it's locale rather than impose itself upon it.

Image: 2

GIONAL MODERN NEO TRADITIONA

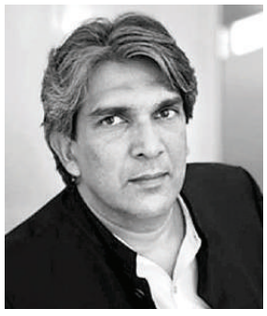
Image: 3

O TRADITIONALISM REGIONAL MOI

Brillhart Architects

Brillhart, with their Brillhart House, accomplishes two things. Firstly the house offers a critique of generic international architecture and resists the idea of the clean slate in its expression of regional modern. (more in line with pallasmaa and more vs koolhaas)

Second it offers elements of traditionalism which help to tie it into the local socio-cultural fabric of the region. Both regional modernism and traditionalism acknowledge local history and tradition while introducing contemporary thought.

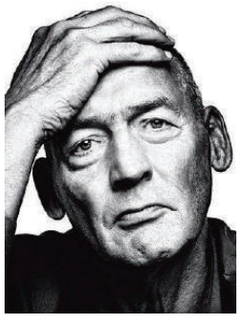


Studio Mumbai

Studio Mumbai takes regionalism and traditionalism it one step further by emphasizing the use of the local workforce and materials. They employ a neo-regionalism/traditionalism while maintaning clean, modern inspired aesthetics.

Bijoy Jain advocates for self-construction and believes it a vialble solution and economic alternative to the status quo (capitalist building) (Levene, 2019)

In the project portraid below, Studio Mumbai not only employed local materials to be assembled on a remote mountain top but they included women (as they often do) in the construction team.



Today, **Koolhaas'** is a distinct player on the global scale (Dunham-Jones, 2014). However, this doesn't exclude what XL architecture does at the local level. Large architectural projects are often insensitive to a locale and to the people living next to them, sometimes mere meters away…

While Koolhaas likes to refer to the CCTV building as free of association, therefore free from being the 'wrong' thing to do, it doesn't excuse it from being irrationally exuberant and insensitive to the existing city and its residents.

As per Dunham-Jones:

> *"… at the local level, instead of challenging the class structure or economic power of the status quo, high design increasingly serves to distinguish its elite patron class from the man in the street."*
> (Dunham-Jones, 2014, p.164)

A little regionalism/traditionalism could have gone a long way.

Nathan Rich

I'm presenting Gurgaon here not because I like this project, au contraire, this project represents a pseudo worst case scenario in regards to free market de-regulations and capitalism.

In essence the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of Gurgaon as presented by Nathan Rich in *Architecture and Capitalism 1845 to the Present,* is an example of what happens when neoliberal capitalism runs amock.

> *"The lesson of Gurgaon is, left to their own devices, private markets will never produce good urbanism or places that are sustainable in the long term."* (Rich, 2014, p.183)

If de-regulation leads to SEZs then it would be evident that if we wish to produce good urbanism that is sustainable in the long term we should protect existing regulations and improve on them. In *Vancouverism* the author writes "Regulation is our friend" (Beasley, 2019). The city of Vancouvert (image below) is an prime example of good urban design.

SEZs around the world

1 Bangladesh
2 Belarus
3 Botswana
4 Cayman Islands
5 Cambodia
6 China
7 Cuba
8 Democratic Republic of the Congo
9 Greece
10 Egypt
11 Ethiopia
12 India
13 Indonesia
14 Iran
15 Jamaica
16 Malaysia
17 Mauritius
18 Mexico
19 Myanmar
20 Nigeria
21 Democratic People's Republic of Korea
22 Pakistan
23 Panama
24 Philippines
25 Poland
26 Republic of Korea (South Korea)
27 Russia
    27.1 Technical/Innovational Zones
    27.2 Industrial/developmental Zones
    27.3 Tourist Zones
28 Thailand
29 Ukraine
30 Uzbekistan
31 Zambia

DE-REGULATION DE-REGULATION D

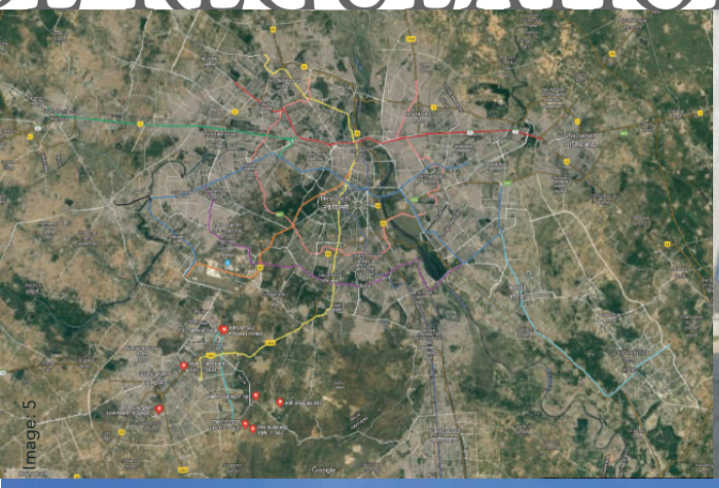


Image: 5

Image: 6

EGULATION IS OUR FRIEND REGULA

Reinier de Graaf (OMA)

de Graaf has made important observations in regards to the relationship between architecture and capitalism.

No doubt his findings are the result of the Dutch school's way of researching into larger ecnonomic and programmatic issues. After reading Pickerty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, de Graaf writes:

> *Once discovered as a form of capital, there is no choice for buildings but to operate according to the logic of capital. In that sense there may ultimately be no such thing as Modern or Postmodern architecture, but simply architecture before and after its annexation by capital." (Graaf R. d., 2017, p.422)*

To de Graaf, and OMA, the phenomena of international capitalism is an intense area of study.

Michael Sorkin

In *Architecture and Capitalism from 1845 to the Present* Michael Sorkin's contribution is to offer possible approaches to divorcing architecture from capitlism.

One of his offerings is a form of regionalism, or "localism", as a refusal to 'play ball' with the multi-nationals (Sorkin, 2014, p.218). Indeed I believe the work of architects such as the Brillharts and especially Bijoy Jain and Studio Mumbai are forerunners of this type of approach.

Irrational - exhuberance

Weither they are effective at countering the effects of neoliberal capitalist influences on architecture, especially at the large scale, seems doubtful.

On a more urban scale Sorkin offers up informal settlements and self-build cities as a possible options for an architecture free of capitalism. Phenomena such as the Favelas in Brazil could be interpreted as a critique to capitalist top 1% architecture.

Favelas refered to as "Slums of hope" by the United Nations are described by Lance Hosey in his book *The Shape of Green,* as having compact footprints, high density, low impact or zero grading, low energy use, recleimed mateirlas, humane scale, variety, affordability, vibrant social interaction, and a tangible sense of community (Hosey, 2012).

Image: 8

INFORMAL SETTLEMENT SEF-BUILT

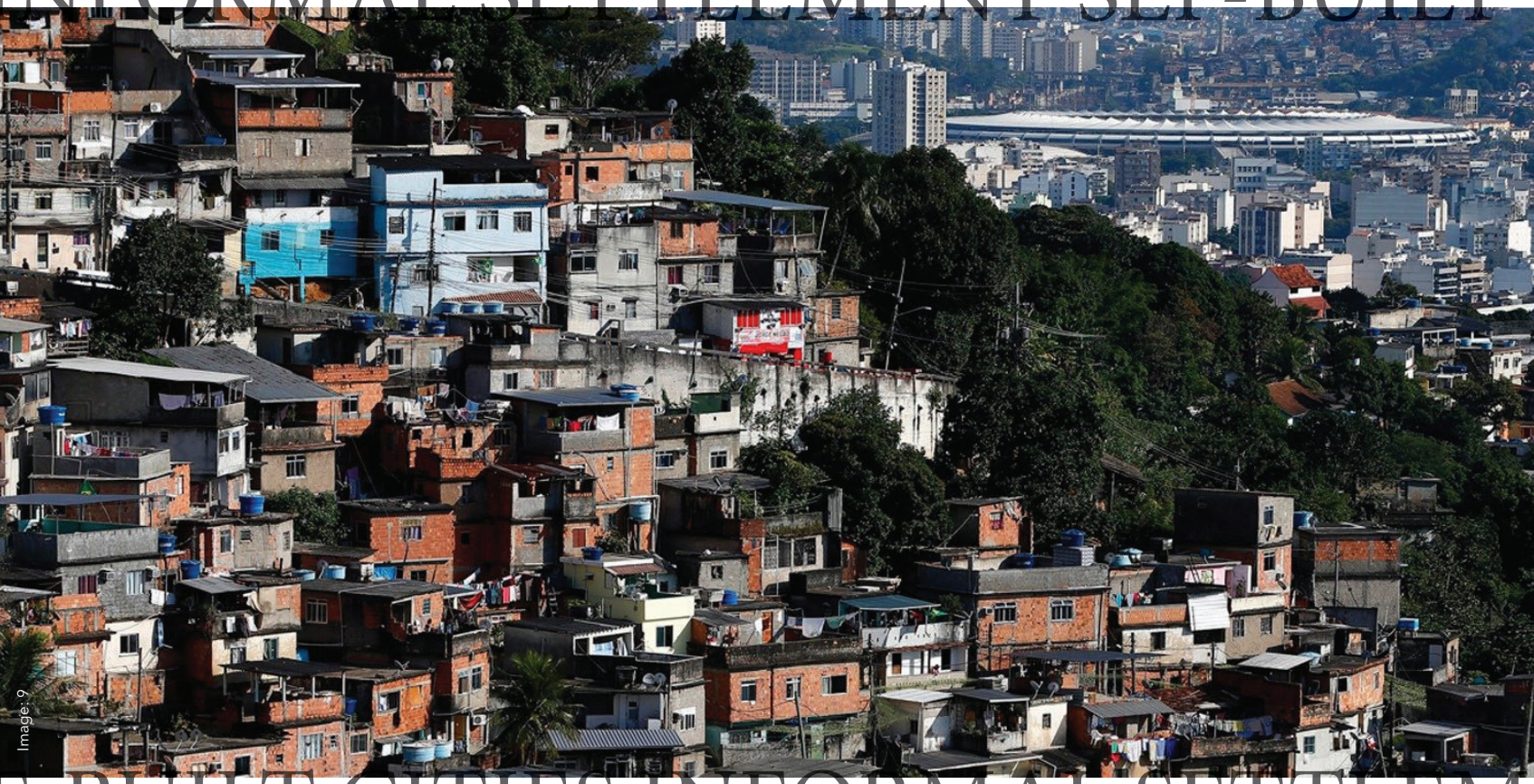


Image: 9

F-BUILT CITIES INFORMAL SETTLEM

William McDonough

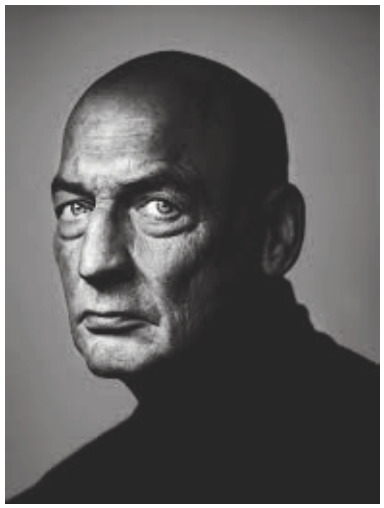
McDonough is a forerunner for what is possibly one of the only forces able to influence the architecture of 'Bigness', environmentalism, the other being regulations.

In his book, co-written with Michael Braungart, Cradle to Cradle McDonough speaks of an Industrial Re-Evolution begging that we re-think our attitudes towards nature:

> *"... most cutting-edge envorinmental approaches are still based on the idea that human beings are inevitable destructive toward nature and must be curbed and contained. Even the idea of "natural capital" characterizes nature as a tool to be used for our benefit. This approach might have been valid two nedred years ago... but now cries rethinking."*
> (McDonough, 2014, p. 598)

While environmentalism and regulation may help limit the dustructive forces of building, especially XL building, and the capitalist climate driving them these approaches won't change the fact that to build a building involves stripping resources - elsewhere. A building goes up here, a void is created elswhere. In countries such as Brazil where the political climate scoffs at environmentalism and sustainability it leaves entire ecosystems, including the people living in them, at risk.

Even cutting edge green buildings such as the Manitoba Hydro below with it's passive design including a solar chimney and 'winter gardens' create what I call *voids in the landscape*. 'Elswhere' is a major problem for an ethically built environment. One which only a form of environmentalism / regionalism might curb...



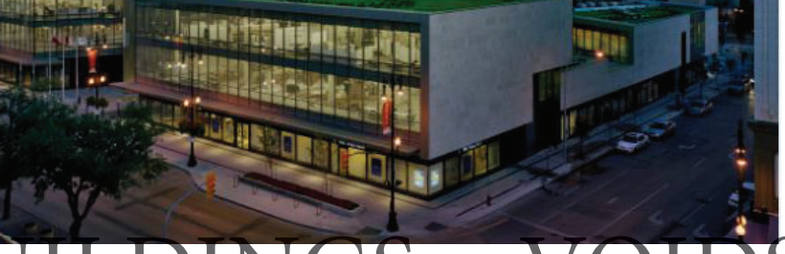
In 2011 Koolhaas was quoted as saying that "…neoliberalism has turned architecture into a 'cherry on the cake' affair…" (Speigel Online, 2011). This implies that architects/architecture has no theoretical backbone, it bends to the whims of money. Of course, it always does, yet money (or lack of) didn't stop countless architectural theorists from advancing architecture and the built environment.

But is that the role of the avant-guarde? To be as free of restrictions as possible? Even if it means alienating the very people using the building, or devastating the environment? Is isn't environmentalism viewed as avant-guard?

What is the balance between the freedom avant-guardism brings and the responsibility we have towards eachother and the earth?

Image: 10

Image: 11



UILDINGS = VOIDS = BUILDINGS = VO

My purpose behind this graphically driven offering was to extract ideas and theories with visual aid. The moment I put **Koolhaas**' portrait opposite mine I found a state of 'flow' in which the contrasts between us highlights what is important to me. I love Koolhaas as a thinker, and once in a while as an architect. But I have an equally passionate aversion to how he applies his theory to his built projects.

Although I've found multiple theories that have meaning for me, and in spite of these theories providing great counter arguments and criticism of some of Koolhaas' (and similar architects') theories I can't say I have one unifying theory for myself.

My collection of theories has both merit and limits, especially when the concern is inequality in the world. It seems, theoretically at least, I can't escape what Koolhaas refers to as **'Bigness'**. It seems too that there is a problem of scale that applies to theory.

For instance, the theory of XL buildings and urbanism seem to require implementation of regulations in order to succeed. The current trend is **de-regulation** which is detrimental to architecture and the humanities.

On the other hand, regulation may be over constraining or even detrimental at the smaller scale, such as residential projects. Regionalism and traditionalism offer elegant solutions to problems of 'Big' capitalism. Here of course I mean to explore theory as disruptor of the capitalist status quo.

Other things to consider are the social underpinnings of each scale. At the very large there is **neoliberalism**, while at the individual level self-determinism. The latter is heavily influenced by **capitalist** media.

ARCH 420 is proving to be an incredible journey for me, one that seemingly has no end. This exercise brings me closer to having an informed opinion about architecture today and its place in our lives. I also feel close to the frontier of theory which is exiting! With these assignments I feel much better prepared to tackle a thesis proposal.

Onward!

IMAGES

1 - The Umubano Primary School | MASS Design Group: Photograph by Iwan Baan

2 - Tabula Rasa: NYPL

3 - Brillhart House: Photograph by Brillhart Architecture

4 - Work by Studio Mumbai in: Studio Mumbai. El Croquis 157: Photographs: Hélène Binet, Studio Mumbai

5 - SEZs: Google maps

6 - Gurgaon SEZ, India: Google sreet view

7 - Vancouver: Google street view

8 - CCTV Building: Photograph by DuKai - Getty Images/Moment RF

9 - A hillside favela with Maracana Stadium in the background: Photograph by Eddie Keog/Reuters

10 - Manitoba Hydro Place: Source image from web: rediscoverconcrete.com/assets/images/Real-World-Examples/MHP.JPG

11 - Clearcutting: Source image from web: http://www.stopclearcuttingca.org/about-clearcutting/is-someone-clearcutting-in-your-county/

12 - Open pit mine: Source image from web: https://www.miningglobal.com/top-10/photos-top-10-largest-open-pit-mines-world

PORTRAITS

1 - Author

2 - Rem Koolhaas

3 - Stanford Kwinter

4 - Rem Koolhaas

5 - Ellen Dunam-Jones

6 - Frank Gehry

7 - Norman Foster

8 - Santiago Calatrava

9 - Peggy Deamer

10 - Rem Koolhaas

11 - Juhani Pallasmaa

12 - Jacob and Melissa Brillhart

13 - Rem Koolhaas

14 - Bijoy Jain

15 - Nathan Rich

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16 - Reinier de Graaf

17 - Michael Sorkin

18 - William McDonough

19 - Rem Koolhaas

20 - Author

All portraits from the wib, excluding mine.

Rich, N. (2014). *The Extraordinary Development of Gurgaon, India.* In P. Dreamer, *Architecture and Capitalism 1845 to the Present* (pp. 172-186). New York: Routledge.

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