

Simpósio Temático:

Da arte de construir à inteligência arquitetônica

**Megaestructura e Metrópole: Uma arqueologia do programa de Rem
Koolhaas**

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Resumo

Termos como fragmentação, heterogeneidade, descontinuidade e imaterialidade têm sido constantemente usados para descrever a metrópole contemporânea. A tecnologia da informação e a justaposição de fluxos e realidades parecem enfraquecer uma tradição arquitetônica consolidada, baseada na tríade *venustas, commoditas e utilitas*. No entanto, estas mesmas características podem também estimular uma nova forma de pensar e fazer arquitetura. Nesse contexto, Rem Koolhaas é um dos arquitetos que mais tem explorado a metrópole como estratégia projetual, expondo a instabilidade da condição urbana atual.

Originalmente jornalista e cineasta, Koolhaas publicou *Delirious New York*, um dos mais importantes manifestos da arquitetura contemporânea. Ele aceita a submissão da arquitetura à aparente falta ordem, fragmentação e heterogeneidade da metrópole contemporânea. Segundo ele, a metrópole é estruturada pela concentração e superposição de vários sistemas urbanos. Sua dinâmica é mantida pela congestão de atividades, espaços e programas que devem ser articulados por *bigness*: mecanismo arquitetônico capaz de sustentar uma proliferação de eventos em um único edifício. Para Koolhaas, a tarefa da arquitetura não é mais organizar o espaço com elementos permanentes, mas expor o caos da cidade no próprio edifício.

O objetivo deste trabalho é oferecer uma arqueologia da obra de Koolhaas, estabelecendo conexões entre o pensamento arquitetônico e urbanístico das décadas de 1960 e 1970 suas idéias e entre estas e seus projetos construídos. Para tal, buscamos apoio no estudo (1) das mega-estruturas, que emergiram nos anos 1960, como uma tentativa de articular a vida urbana em grandes edifícios, com geometrias complexas e múltiplos níveis de trânsito, redes e unidades habitacionais e (2) dos primeiros autores que se debruçaram sobre a metrópole moderna, particularmente Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin e Sigfried Kracauer, já que foi uma grande metrópole, como Nova York, que forneceu a Koolhaas os princípios que parecem guiar a sua prática projetual.

Depois de explorar suas principais idéias, analisaremos duas de suas obras construídas: a Biblioteca Central de Seattle e o *McCormick Tribune Center* no Instituto de Tecnologia de Illinois, em Chicago.

Palavras-chave: Metrôpoles, Mega-estruturas, Rem Koolhaas

Abstract

Terms such as fragmentation, heterogeneity, discontinuity and imateriality has been constantly used in order to describe the contemporary metropolis. Apparently, the technology of information and the juxtaposition of fluxes and realities are weakening a once solid architectural tradition, based on the triad *venustas*, *commoditas*, and *utilitas*. However, they can also be able to stimulate a new architectural thought and design. In this context, Rem Koolhaas is one of the architects exploring the metropolis as a design strategy.

Originally a journalist and movie-maker, Koolhaas published *Delirious New York*, one of the most important manifestoes of contemporary architecture. He admits a sort of surrender of the architectural order to the metropolis apparent lack of principles, fragmentation and heterogeneity. Koolhaas' metropolis is functionally and spatially structured by concentration and superposition of a number of urban systems. Its dynamics are maintained by congestion of activities, spaces and programs, characterizing bigness: capacity of the mega-structures for supporting the proliferation of events in one single building. For Koolhaas, the architectural task is no longer a matter of organizing the space with permanent elements but exposing the chaos of the present.

This paper traces an archeology of Koolhaas' theoretical background establishing connections between the architectural and urban thinking of the 1960's and his ideas, and between his ideas and his aforementioned built projects, whose analyses focuses particularly in the relationship between these buildings with the urban space, considering two main sources: (1) the concept of mega-structure, which emerged in the 1960's as exploratory designs attempting to redefine urban experience by reuniting buildings and cities in complex geometries, multiple levels of traffic, networks and living units; (2) the works of first authors who studied the modern metropolis, such as George Simmel, Walter Benjamin and Sigfried Kracauer, já que foi uma grande metrópole como New York, que forneceu a Koolhaas os princípios que parecem guiar a sua prática projetual.

After exploring his major ideas, we will focus on two of his architectural works: the Seattle Public Library and the McCormick Tribune Campus Center at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago.

Key-words: Metropolis, Megastructures, Rem Koolhaas

Megastructure and Metropolis: An Archeology of Rem Koolhaas'

Program

In the contemporary metropolis, the multiplicity and superposition of urban flows and systems, the supremacy of the program and technological devices over the concerns with form defines a new spectacle in which man seems to be confused. Apparently, this new reality marked by fragmentation, instability, connectivity and immateriality is weakening a once solid architectural tradition, based on the triad *venustas*, *commoditas*, and *utilitas*. However, they can also be able to stimulate a new architectural thought and design. At the same time, it seems that the super modernity is recreating the mega-structures of the 60's, which were originally an attempt to articulate the urban life within complex geometries, multiple levels of traffic, networks and living units.

In this context, the work of Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas is one of the most representative of the contemporary architectural scene, since he employs the very characteristics contemporary metropolis, recovering aspects of mega-structures thinking, as a design strategy. A former journalist and film-maker, Koolhaas studied at AA and founded the OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) in 1975. New York city provided him with the scenario he needed to formulate his principles about the architecture in the contemporary metropolis, which were published in the manifesto *Delirious New York*, in 78. In 1995, he published *SMLXL*, condensing his major writings and projects. Through an archeology of Rem Koolhaas' thinking, this paper tries to demonstrate how his ideas were reflected in his projects, and eventually contribute to the contemporary architectural thought, particularly on the dialogue between architecture and city.

The concepts of both the metropolis and the mega-structure were confronted with Koolhaas' ideas and translated into analytical tools applied to four built projects:

Seattle Public Library, the McCormick Tribune Campus Center at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, and the urban complex and the Grand Palais of Euralille.

Despite the critique addressed to Koolhaas' buildings that they disregard urban configuration, generate 'non-places' or simply express the author's ego, experiencing these buildings may generate a rich exchange between man, architectural, and urban space. The analyses may contribute to the understanding of the new level of relationship emerging between this 'big' architecture of our days and the city, and how it can change the design practice.

1 Mega-structure and Metropolis

The mega-structures of the 1960s, attempted to replicate the metropolis' complexity by articulating different activities within one single package or organisms that could grow indefinitely across an existing urban fabric or rural areas. Initially, they were conceived as large frames in which smaller units could be inserted or removed (BANHAM, 1976, p.8). Besides the usual big scale of the mega-structure, its concept includes other aspects such as playfulness, theatricality and spectacularism.

Among the authors that adopted the mega-structural ideal, Archigram, Superstudio, Situationists and Cedric Price are strong influences on contemporary architecture and particularly on Rem Koolhaas. The work of Archigram, marked by irony and humor, celebrated the mass media culture, the visual arts, consumerism of industrial products, science fiction and technology which was becoming part of the routine in the big metropolises. They designed mobile towns with retractable supports such as the Walking City by Ron Herron (1964) or the Instant City, an airship that brings events to a provincial town (COOK, 1972, p.86-100, SADLER, 2005).

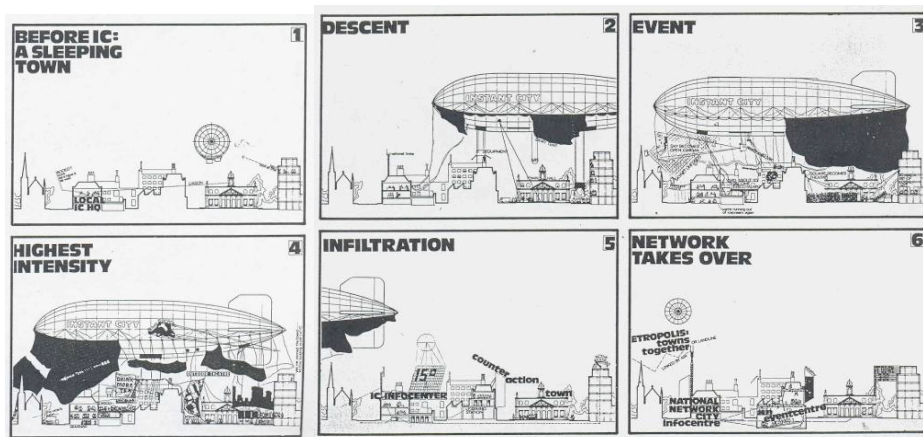


Fig. 1. Archigram Instant City. Fonte: Peter Cook, ed. *Archigram*. London: Studio Vista, 1972, p.98-99

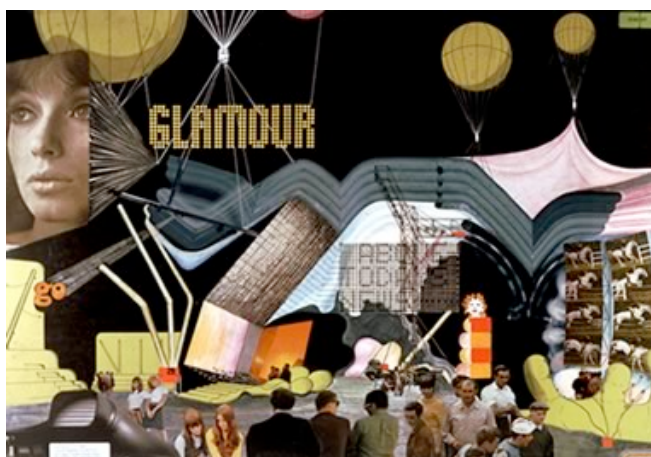


Fig. 2. Archigram. Instant City. Fonte: Peter Cook, ed. *Archigram*. London: Studio Vista, 1972, p.88

Rather than just creating luxurious objects, or introducing people into the world of consumerism, the members of Superstudio believed that architects should worry about political issues, such as the concept of architecture itself. The *Continuous Monument* project, which results from the endless extension of a grid across the earth's surface, was a series of photomontages that show Manhattan, the Taj Mahal and other memorable sites wrapped in the grid. This would allow for a truly democratic human experience because every point on the grid is identical.

The Situationists proposed the construction of situations using methods drawn from the arts. They developed a series of experiments based on the drift, or passive movement through space. Due to technological advance, men would be liberated from work, become nomads, and engage the drift which presupposed a substitution of the

efficiency of the modern city for mobility, disorientation, freedom, and social interaction (WIGLEY, 1998).

There was no Situationist space but a situationist appropriation of the existing urban space by means of psycho geographic maps. The Idea of a permanent space contradicts the ideal of improvisation, surprise and ephemeral situations which were much valued by the Situationists. However, Constant Nieuwenhuis, previously a member of the group, created New Babylon (1956 - 1974), a mega-structural city based on a spontaneous relationship between men and the urban/architecture fabric which would in turn also be constructed through this relationship (NIEUWENHUIJS, 1998, p.160-165).

In this respect, these ideas are similar to the concepts used by the architect Cedric Price and the theater producer Joan Littlewood in their design for the Fun Palace, a building which emphasized the interaction between men and activities with the support of technological devices distributed throughout it. Although not built, its flexible space played a major influence in contemporary architecture, as it can be observed in projects such as the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris designed by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano.

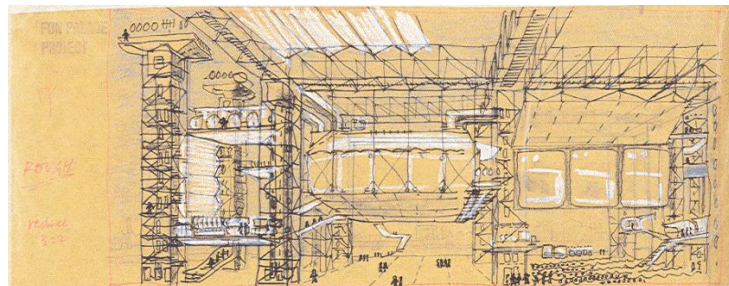


Fig. 3. Cedric Price, Fun Palace, Fonte: Terry Riley, ed. *The Changing of the Avant-Garde, Visionary Architectural Drawings from the Howard Gilman Collection*. New York: The MoMA, 2002, p. 106

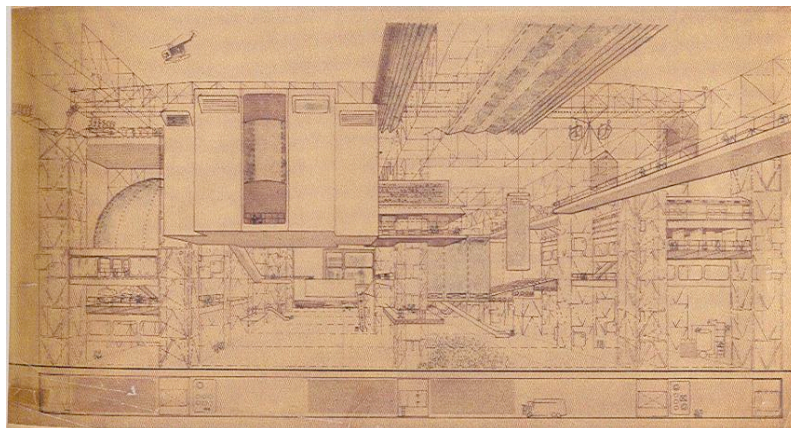


Fig. 4. Cedric Price, Fun Palace, Fonte: Terry Riley, ed. *The Changing of the Avant-Garde*, p. 108

The Fun Palace was conceived as an entertainment laboratory where multiple activities, such as dance, music, theater and contemplation, could occur simultaneously. The building could be accessed by train, monorail, hovercraft, car, subway or foot. It was an open structure and could be entered through many points of its façade (PRICE, 2000).

At the entrance, screens informed what is happening within the building (ISOZAKI, 2003, p.30-31). Then ramps, elevators and escalators guided the user according to his particular interests. Its steel structure was articulated with cranes which moved on rail tracks, prefabricated walls, platforms, floors, staircases and roof modules which could be removed and assembled by cranes.

Littlewood was against the formalism of the existing theater and the entertainment institutions. Her intention was to incorporate them into the everyday social life through mechanical installations placed within the community context. The Fun Palace represented an opportunity to introduce film making, theater, circus, television and computers as mechanisms of entertainment and education.

Nowadays, the mega-structures are represented by the airport, hotel and shopping mall complexes: the non places of the contemporary metropolis (AUGÉ, 2007). Lacking identity or history, they fit in an urban experience whose essence is heterogeneity, discontinuity and immateriality. For Ibelings (1998, p.10, 62), the postmodern notions of place, context and identity are no longer important. He suggests that the new spaces are neutral, dynamic and unlimited like containers whose flexibility keeps them open to different events.

A multiplicity of changes are reconfiguring the face of the *supermodern* metropolis (AUGÉ, 2007). Since the 1990's, the advent of globalization has been placing an emphasis on mobility, the new media, and the telecommunications. This generated a series of transformations throughout the space of the metropolis which seems to be redefining not only a new architectural theory and practice but also a new relationship between man and space (IBELINGS, 1998, p. 10, 64).

The emphasis on mobility resulted in the celebration of passage ways, by means of the proliferation of ramps, escalators and others circulation devices. It can be implied from this that the form of the buildings no longer matter, it should blend into the system. What counts is the way buildings and urban spaces interact with the flows and apply the latest technological devices. In this context, the glass became a key material as it contributes to the building neutrality, like a delicate transparent skin that allows light and local scene to enter the building.

In addition to megastructure ideal, some attention to the first authors who first experienced the phenomenon of the metropolis at the beginning of the 20th century can also provide important insights to understand Koolhaas' theory and practice. The changes in the both the architectural and the urban space of the metropolis were studied by Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and Sigfried Kracauer.

According to Simmel, the 19th century metropolis gathered different people, activities, movements and interests (Simmel, 1950). The individual developed a sort of loneliness to cope with the psychological intrusion provoked by the physical transformation. Exposed to great variety and number of stimulus, the person is no longer able to respond to all of them. Everything became repetitive and indistinguishable. Therefore, he or she adopts a *blasée* attitude, characterized by the lack of interest and enthusiasm. The big city provides many opportunities for contact among people, but they are brief and superficial. Nevertheless, the agitation of the modern metropolis frees the man.

From the point of view of this free modern man, Walter Benjamin analyzed the way of life in the modern city: his individual dimension, desires, anxieties were studied through the figure of the *flâneur*. A creation of the modern metropolis, the *flâneur*, "The man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets.." wanders in the labyrinth city collecting facts, memories, and impressions, like a curious detective following the crowd through the metropolis, attempting to identify their individualities (BENJAMIN,

1999, p.16-17). He has the illusion of not belonging to the crowd, to maintain its individuality, to understand the modern metropolis, but “he is no longer a man, he is the public, he is the crowd” (BENJAMIN, 1972, p.51, p38). The *flâneur* is absorbed by the phantasmagoria of the space.

Benjamin dedicated much of his study to some spaces in the metropolis: the galleries and passages, department stores, cafés and universal exhibitions. The dynamism and complexity of the life in the big cities became evident in the sophisticated programs of the buildings and their articulation with the urban flows. The architecture was urbanized and the limits between urban and architectural spaces became blurry. Dazzling galleries and train stations with escalators and mirrors offered a new territory to be explored by the *flâneur*. These spaces accommodated different lifestyles, fluxes and interests, which coexisted without interfering in each other. The individual dimensions were kept and articulated by great structures, open to different possibilities.

What are the possibilities of the *flanerie* in the contemporary urban context? Perhaps the *flâneur* of the supermodernity is the guy who passes through the duty free express ways, garage buildings, train stations, and hotel lobbies, among other ephemeral spaces that are part of the spectacle established through images, loss of consciousness and movement (AUGÉ, 2007, 74, p.85-86).

Both metropolises are marked by the loss of identity, superficiality, ephemerality, spatial fluidity, instability and spectacularism. These characteristics can be identified physically and define design motifs that can be used to analyze Koolhaas' work.

2 Bigness, Generic City, Junk Space, Light Urbanism and so on

Since the beginning of his career, Koolhaas has demonstrated interest in the issues concerning the contemporary metropolis and its architecture, as *Delirious New York* showed. For Koolhaas, the Manhattan of the 1940's was the evidence of a new metropolitan culture, which celebrated artificiality, hyper-density and congestion. Manhattanism granted a high level of consistency to the fragmented episodes of the metropolis. From the modern metropolis, he extracted the first concepts that seem to guide his professional practice with OMA.

Koolhaas identified an architectural and urban element intrinsic to Manhattanism: the skyscraper, a utopian mechanism capable of producing an unlimited number of virgin lots in one single metropolitan location (1994, p.82-108). Architecture surrenders to the needs of the metropolis by accommodating its differences. In each elevator stop, a different ideology or life style can be reached. The skyscraper reproduces the metropolis programmatic instability, through simultaneous coexistence and individuality.

In the metropolitan scale, this programmatic instability is translated into the concentration and superposition of a number of urban systems. This generates the congestion of activities, spaces and programs which are maintained by bigness: mechanism capable of supporting the autonomy of the parts while they are simultaneously compromised with the whole (KOOLHAAS, MAU, 1995, p.495-516). For Koolhaas, the architectural task is no longer organizing the space with permanent elements but exposing the turmoil of the current urban situation. He has advocated for *bigness* and *generic city* within the horizon of *junk space* (KOOLHAAS, 2003, p.162-171).

Junk space results from the impossibility of controlling chaos. It is fake, fuzzy, repetitive, quantitative, overlapping and disorienting. It is what was left by modern urbanism: airports, shopping malls, satellite cities, new cities, freeways, skyscrapers, infra-structure and others in which passageways are celebrated as opposed to the permanent spaces. Junk space is the submission of urbanism to architecture. It is Koolhaas' version of non-place. According to Koolhaas, there has to be a *Lite Urbanism*, that infiltrates as *Programmatic Lava* without any pretension of permanence and stability (KOOLHAAS, MAU, 1995, p. 1210 - 1225). *Generic City* also results from the mistakes of modernity (KOOLHAAS, MAU, 1995, p. 1248-1264). It is an urban spot without history and identity. It is superficial, shapeless, incoherent, congested, and resistant to planning.

Koolhaas' ideas and projects seem to replicate some concepts related to the contemporary metropolis and the mega-structure. Therefore, concepts such as mobility, connectivity, playfulness, theatricality, spectacularism, instability and transgression were used to analyze his work.

Mobility refers to the continuity of the flows in many scales: within the building, between its interior and exterior and the urban flows. Connectivity refers to the

relationship between the physical qualities of the building and its urban context, namely: neighborhood buildings' shape, building limits, visibility and accessibility within the building and between its interior and exterior. Playfulness refers to the ability that a building, its spaces and components have to stimulate and intensify the interaction with its users, allowing its adaptation and the use of imagination in experiencing its physical structure. Similarly to playfulness, theatricality focus on the building as a part of the local urban scene, as 'social incubator', in Koolhaas terms, or generator of urban life. Spectacularism is reinforced by the image of the building, its materials, technological apparatus, installations, and so on. Instability refers to the orientation or disorientation as one moves within the building. Finally, transgression is a celebrated practice in the contemporary metropolis as the insertions made within the urban scenario provoke a distortion of a previously established order.

3 Seattle Public Library

The Seattle Public Library, inaugurated in 2004, occupies an entire block in downtown Seattle. It is surrounded by modern skyscrapers with offices, hotels, shopping malls, hotels and so on. The combination of uses and the efficient transportation system contribute to make the area intensely urban and adequate for pedestrians. As a result, the library was destined to be an extension of the public spaces that surrounds it.



Fig. 5. Seattle Public Library. Foto: Adriana Veras

The building is one example of Koolhaas attempt to provide platforms for events. It contains five platforms of programmatic stability that “move” horizontally, creating open spaces of programmatic instability among them. Each different platform performs a use or houses a sort of collection. Later he attemps to link these platforms by vertical circulation, and by doing that he also created voids. This strategy led to the exacerbation and celebration of the vertical circulation elements, elevators and other staircases, combined with the high level of visibility and accessibility among the different floors. This intercommunication among levels of the building and its surroundings was primarily generated by the sliding of the platforms that constitute the building floors. This move created spaces that are shared by two or even more levels of the building. While the Manhattan skyscraper provided autonomy among the floors with the elevator being the only link between them, Koolhaas went beyond to propose free vertical fluidity within the building, in addition to providing fluidity between the building interior and the public spaces around it. All the levels of the building become part of a single trajectory that exposes and connects all the programmatic components (KOOLHAAS, MAU, 1995, p.1316-1317 ,1320-1325). This is another characteristic of Koolhaas’ work also found in the Manhattan skyscraper (KOOLHAAS, 1994) and in the metropolis: constant confrontation between indetermination and specificity .

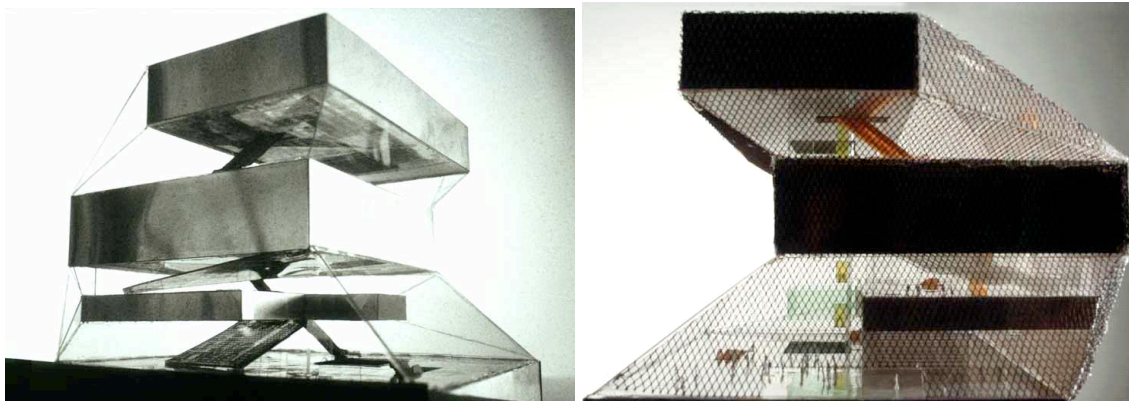


Fig. 6 e 7. Rem Koolhaas, Seattle Public Library, Design concept, www.arcspace.com/architects/koolhaas/Seattle/ © Office for Metropolitan Architecture

In this way, the Seattle Library is also a recreation of the urban complexity itself. The building is very permeable in relationship with the street flow of pedestrians. It is possible to go from 4th to 5th Avenue and vice-versa through the library. The entrance on 4th Avenue is covered by an overhang originating from the horizontal sliding of a platform that constitutes one of the building floors. From the small square which is also located under this overhang, one can access the first floor and take the bright yellow escalator up to the 3rd floor where an enormous living room with a restaurant and a store is located. Another yellow escalator connects the 3rd and the 5th floors. Two red staircases connect these floors to the 4th floor. The bright yellow escalators constitute the main vertical circulation that connects the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th floors. Like the red staircases they are more than vertical circulations, working as installations that provide a unique experience for those who are willing to engage in a journey through the library. Actually, the whole building in relationship with its surroundings, the main components of its program also can be seen as installations, which sometimes exhibit other installations, intensifying the interaction between the visitor and the architectural space.

The transparency of the glass reinforces the visibility between the different spaces of the building and its site, including its topography, Elliot Bay and Mont Rainier. The glass also allows the reflection of the building immediate surroundings on its facades, enhancing the relationship between the two.

The irregular shape of building, generated by the horizontal movement of the platforms, reflects the programmatic instability in its interior and gives the impression

that the building is also moving. The library looks odd when compared to the other buildings of the area, however, it can also be seen as the reinterpretation of the modern skyscrapers that surround it. A reinterpretation realized through the distortion of an architectural order based on clarity, regularity and pure geometry.



Fig. 8. Seattle Public Library. Fonte

<http://massengale.typepad.com/photos/thetruthisoutthereko/index.html> (©Seattle Times Company)

Fig.9. Seattle Public Library. Foto: Adriana Veras

The relationship between the architecture and the declivity of the terrain is evident in the building interior because of the transparency of the glass and the visibility among the floors of the building. This relationship is enhanced with the inclination of the columns and walls, and the horizontal movement of the platforms. The programmatic instability and the physical structure that supports it generate instability in those who experience the building.

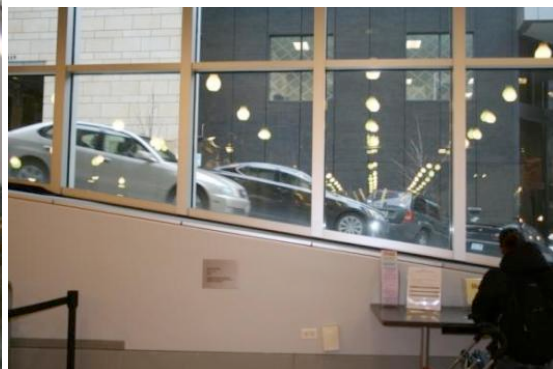


Fig. 10 e 11. Seattle Public Library. Foto: Adriana Veras

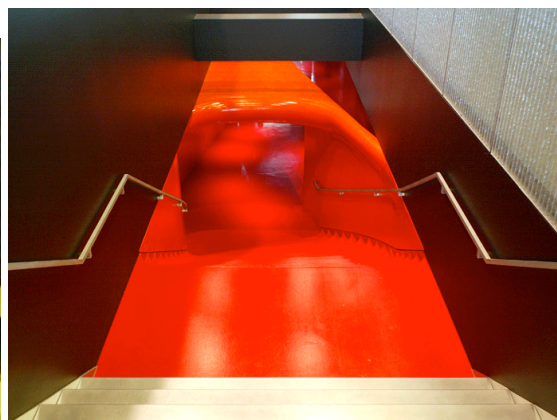


Fig 12 e 13. Seattle Public Library. Foto: Adriana Veras

Besides, the extravagance of the escalators reminds the spaces of the shopping malls, and other temples of consumerism, not exactly a characteristic of a public library. The use of optical effects, contemporary materials, high technology, transparency reinforces the spectacular character of the building, seducing the visitors as it happened with the flaneur in the great magazines and galleries of the 19th century. It is possible to remain anonymous and disoriented in the library, participating in the unstable game of forms and moves. How to distinguish the 1st floor from the 3rd? How to distinguish an escalator from the other? During the day, the library's odd volume attracts people attention and offers a shelter for the public interaction. The library is both an installation and a social incubator. At night, when the library closes, the lit glass volume remains and the spectacle goes on.

4 The McCormick Tribune Center

The McCormick Tribune Center, opened for public use in 2003, is located in the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology. It is the new student social center in a campus planned by Mies van der Rohe,. In this context, Rem Koolhaas/OMA was challenged at least in two levels. First, they had to reinterpret Mies within the perspective of their supermodern or even global architecture. Secondly, they had to generate reurbanization and reintegration, occupying the minimum possible area in an area in which the population has been decreasing since the 70's (NEVILE, 2005, p.93-95).

The site was a parking lot situated below the elevated train track, between the residential side of the campus to the east and the educational, to the west. It was

constantly crossed by the students that walked from one side of the campus to the other, describing diagonal paths throughout the site. Adjacent to the site is the Commons, originally the town center for the campus also designed by Mies (NEVILE, 2005, p.93-95).

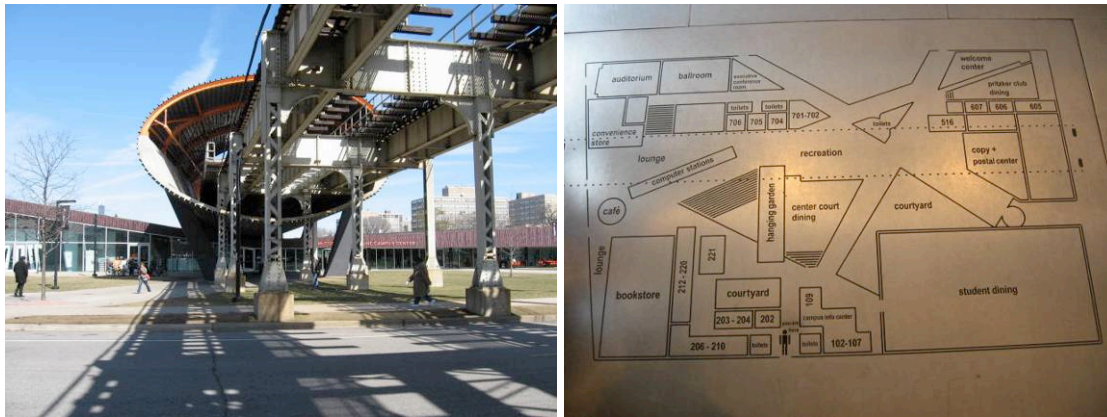


Fig. 14. Rem Koolhaas, McCormick Tribune Center, Foto: Fernando Moreira

Fig. 15. Rem Koolhaas, McCormick Tribune Center, Foto: Fernando Moreira

The building is a single storey building that retained the original grid defined by Mies, the Commons, the diagonal student paths and the elevated train track. It surrenders to the existing flows, described by the students and by the train. By doing that, the building represents a celebration of the flows that constitute one of the main aspects of the metropolitan life. The flows are marked in the design of the roof and on the floor. They are not simple passage ways as they become seats and encompass other adjacent spaces such as gardens and living rooms.

Programmatic islands, laid out adjacent to the diagonal paths, seem to float as they occupy different heights within one single building level. The paths continue outside of the MTC and connect with the paths and entrances to the other buildings in the campus. This design choice made the building extremely permeable, offering many options of entrances and flows even to those who do not wish to stay. The density was achieved horizontally.

At first, the building's interior looks confusing, probably because of its flows, floating platforms (programmatic islands), images and activities that make walls and partitions disappear, increasing visibility throughout the spaces. The structure and the diversity of materials and colors also contribute to this confusion. There are three types of columns. The concrete columns are part of the original support of the elevated train

track, the metal columns follow the Miesian grid and the concrete slanted columns support the tube. The project displays cheap imitations of natural materials, such as wall papers and laminates that contrast with the ideal of truth advocated by Mies and puzzle the users.

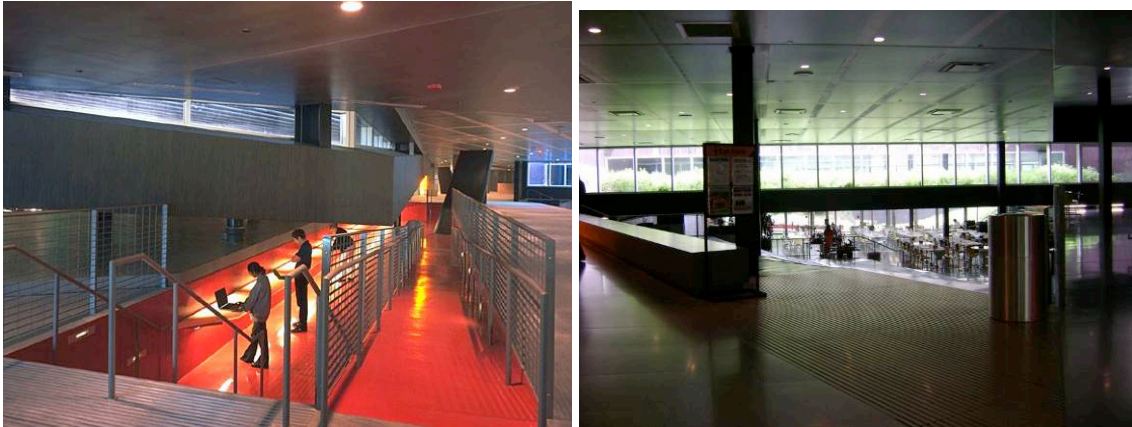


Fig. 16. Rem Koolhaas, McCormick Tribune Center, Foto: Adriana Veras
Fig.17. Rem Koolhaas, McCormick Tribune Center, Foto: Fernando Moreira

The transparency is explored mainly between the interior and exterior of the building, serving as a way to identify one's location within the campus. Besides glass, a cheaper material called panelite made of polycarbonate is used. Its bright orange color on the west façade allows a playful light in the building, highlighting a vulgar aspect mostly found in commercial buildings. Depending on the proximity and the angle at which the panel is viewed, it can be opaque or transparent, providing privacy and visibility, covering and revealing the other buildings designed by Mies. The distribution of light was articulated through the transparency and the translucence of the façades and patios in the interior of the building. The building provides different degrees of illumination, varying from light to darkness. Therefore it is able to create different settings for intimacy or social engagement.



Fig.18 Rem Koolhaas, McCormick Tribune Center, Foto: Adriana Veras
Fig.19 Rem Koolhaas, McCormick Tribune Center, Foto: Fernando Moreira

The elevated train track which is involved in a concrete tube dominates the image of the building, but it also can be noticed in the lower parts of the roof and the texture of its corrugated metal cladding can be felt in a whole on the roof. When the train passes above, one can sense the building's vibration. The complexity of the building project, both in terms of density and program, is best noticed inside, where, as a response to the restraints imposed by the historic campus, there is some space for self expression. Can architecture surprise (or dazzle) if it is sympathetic to the site?

Throughout the building, installations become partitions, doors and patios of the building. Actually, both the building itself and parts of it may act as installations, depending on the conditions of light, distances and angles of observation.

Conclusion

Both buildings are very successful in terms of attracting the public, functioning as 'social incubators', as Koolhaas mentioned. For him, "Bigness no longer needs the city: it competes with the city; it represents the city; ...or better still, it is the city" (SMLXL, 1995, p. 515). Although their images are different from the context, it can be said that they relate to the context as they transgress an established consolidated order. The MTC surrenders to the context imposition as it is smashed by the tube which symbolizes the velocity and fluidity of the contemporary metropolis, while the library seems to distort the surrounding skyscrapers. As Neal leach has noted, Koolhaas buildings act as chameleons as they strive to stand out and at the same time mix within the environment

These buildings place themselves between the ego of the architect and his 'design' concepts and the integration in the urban activities, stimulating events and collective participation. They provide a variety of spatial experiences and possibilities of interaction with the user. They also attempt to reproduce some vitality of the metropolis

The author does not emphasize the material aspect of architecture, but favors the visual appeal. He focuses on the images as a way to seduce the user that becomes a flâneur (Koolhaas, MAU, 1995, p.1322-1323). However they can be considered "chatty buildings", in other words, they have so many things, so many images that there is little space for intimacy. The use of materials in these buildings does not make them organic entities within the environment, they contribute mostly to highlight the image of the building and distinguish it from the rest of the place.

Despite the critique that Koolhaas' buildings disregard urban configuration, generate 'non-places' or simply materialize the author's ego, approaching these buildings and experiencing their spaces may instead provide a rich exchange between men, architectural, and urban space. A new level of relationship can be emerging from this 'big' architecture of today.

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