

2 Architects 10 Questions on Program Rem Koolhaas + Bernard Tschumi

Questions written by Ana Miljacki, Amanda Reeser Lawrence,
and Ashley Schafer.

1. What role does program play in your current practice and how has it evolved since it first emerged in your thinking and design? Has the shift of your work from paper (both writing and design) to practice changed the way you conceptualize and/or use program?

KOOLHAAS: Would it be shocking if I claimed that it is no different than it used to be? It is straightforward. My work with program began as a desire to pursue different means of expression that were similar to writing screenplays. At an interesting moment my obsession with script writing almost randomly intersected the world of constructivism, and with that I discovered an exceptionally interesting hybrid, where any aspect of daily life could be imagined and enacted through the architect's imagination.

I think that there are underlying structures in the process of architectural creation and design that critics never recognize. For instance, the difference between a competition and a commission dictates your room to maneuver and has a decisive impact on the design. As the Seattle Library was presented to a Board of Trustees it had to be understood as a linear, logical process. Porto, on the other hand, was a competition so it could be a totally irrational, insane, and surprising project. Seattle had to be diagrammatic—in order to win the commission, we had to generate material that explained it step by step as an educational process. There is a dialectic dimension to this project, which was not my motivation, but became a tool for a certain explanation of the project.

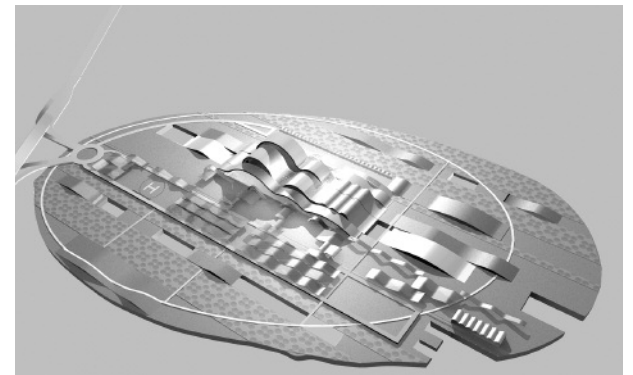
Program increasingly has another connotation for me, which is closer to agenda. I have been trying to find ways that we could circumvent or avoid the architect's passivity and by this I mean his or her dependence on the initiatives of others. However it is framed and pursued, our agenda/program is an important term for me, to the extent that—contrary to my longstanding reputation as a capitalist sell-out and cynical bystander in the process of globalization—I was actually very interested in selective participation. The key is being “selective” while also looking for strategies that would allow us to pursue (programmatically) our own interests. AMO has been an important part of that initiative, affording us a greater means to redefine the initial project brief, through the addition of political or cultural dimensions. We have just completed a competition in Dubai for a vast museum that includes components of the Hermitage, the Tate, and the Serpentine and that forms amalgamations in culture and politics. This kind of programming allows us to finally engage a practice that really interests me.

Brief is merely an architectural word, but for me program is a word that exceeds that sheer limitation. I am not suggesting that we are not interested in briefs—we are highly literal about briefs. In fact, in a certain way, we are earnest and innocent, maybe too earnest and innocent. In Porto, the Berlin Embassy, IIT, and Seattle we literally pushed the brief in a particular critical direction to produce specific effects. In that sense I wouldn't claim any sophistication or uniqueness in our approach.

TSCHUMI: My current practice explores a number of different issues and concepts. Program is only one of them. Envelopes, movement vectors, and, more recently, a new questioning of contexts are among our lines of research. The shift from paper to practice really happened with the shift from *The Manhattan Transcripts* of 1978-81 to La Villette in 1982-83, since I had consciously entered the La Villette competition in order to move from “invented” programs to a “real” program, from pure mathematics to applied mathematics.

What strikes me is that some of the theoretical themes from years past are still present in our work today, but now practice precedes theory as often as theory once preceded practice. It is a very fluid relationship. For example, the recent foreword on “Concepts, contexts, contents” in *Event-Cities 3* was my conscious attempt to post-theorize what I had learned from our practice.

In our recent projects, concepts often begin as much with a strategy about content or program as with a strategy about contexts. For example, in our conceptualization of Dubai, a “cultural island” with an opera house, we purposefully revisited an earlier programmatic concept (the strips of our opera house in Tokyo of 1986) by combining it with our recent research on double envelopes.



Born, Rotterdam;
The Netherlands

44

Born, Rotterdam;
The Netherlands

68

Enrolls at
Architectural
Association,
London

69

Graduates from
ETH, Zurich

70

Begins teaching
at the
Architectural
Association,
London

72

Graduates from
Architectural
Association,
London
Thesis: Exodus or the
Voluntary Prisoners
of Architecture
Studies at Cornell
with Ungers

73

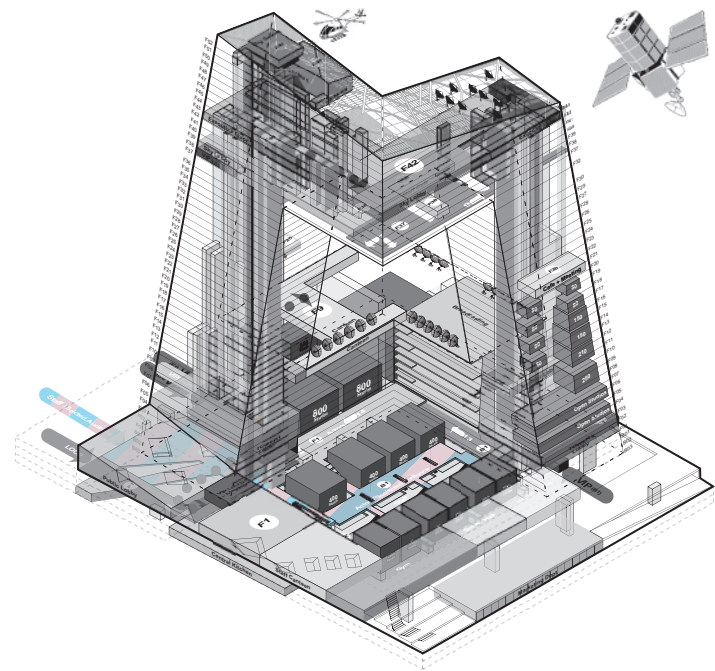
Visiting fellow at
the Institute for
Architecture and
Urban Studies
(IAUS),
New York

74

2. What is the relationship between program and form? And event? And politics? (Feel free to answer any one or all three of these questions)

We have learned that there is no given relationship between program and form. In the past three years we've engaged in radical experimentation that at times produced an extreme relationship between program and form while at others produced no relationship, which simply shows how unbelievably unstable, unspecific, and also inconsistent it can be. It is impossible to abstract from these projects a single direction for the office, but the relationship of form and program is always a large preoccupation. The fact that the users of these projects have appropriated them all with relish is incredibly significant to me. None of them suffers from the slightest dysfunction or offense to its users. The Dutch Embassy employees are unbelievably happy to use it the way it was intended to work, even though that was not obvious when it was designed.

Although form and politics is a tempting subject, I'll address your question about program and politics. Contrary to our official stance as cynical bystanders, we have been trying to find ways to create positions that enable us to address what interests us rather than being an extension of the market economy or developers' desires or individuals' desires, which intensely begs the question of politics. For instance there is a very strong connection to politics in the CCTV building. No other political system today would collect so many programs together in a single structure and create as many interconnections between different components in a single entity. In the West, the equivalent of the CCTV program would have been dismantled and distributed, while in China, the consolidation is relished. There is a direct correlation between centralization of program and the presence of the state. We are not so much flirting with authoritarian regimes as investigating the world and what systems enable what type of architecture.



The relationship between program and form can be one of reciprocity, indifference, or conflict. Let me explain. Reciprocity is when you shape the program so that it coincides with the form, or shape the form so that it reciprocates the configuration you gave to the program. Indifference is when a selected form can accommodate any program, often resulting in a deterministic form and an indeterminate program. And with conflict you let program and form purposefully clash—i.e., pole vaulting in the chapel or the running track through the library reading room—so as to generate unexpected events.

But you must decide which one to use. That's where architecture begins. There is no value judgment here. All three are fine, depending on your objectives for a given project.

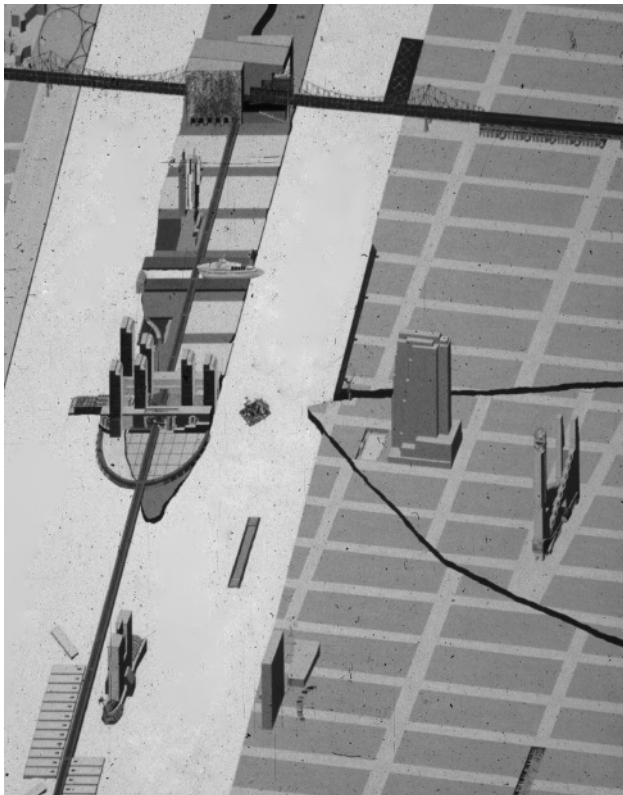
A program is never neutral. The people who draft it are full of preconceptions. The first thing an architect needs to do is to dismantle that program and redirect it. As an architect, you need to have an agenda. My agenda is often about generating public spaces or spaces of encounters, like the generators and the courtyard in the Miami School of Architecture or the central linear court in the Athletic Center in Cincinnati. Program is not the only issue to address, but it is often what you start with.

Events? Events are different from programs. A program relies on repetition and habit; it can be written down and be prescriptive. In contrast, an event occurs unexpectedly. Your design may contribute to conditions for some future, unknown event to occur, but you do not "design" the event. Programs and politics? Programmatic configurations are always political: a house with a corridor serving private rooms has different political implications than a house as a large loft space without doors.

3. How would you trace the genealogy of program?

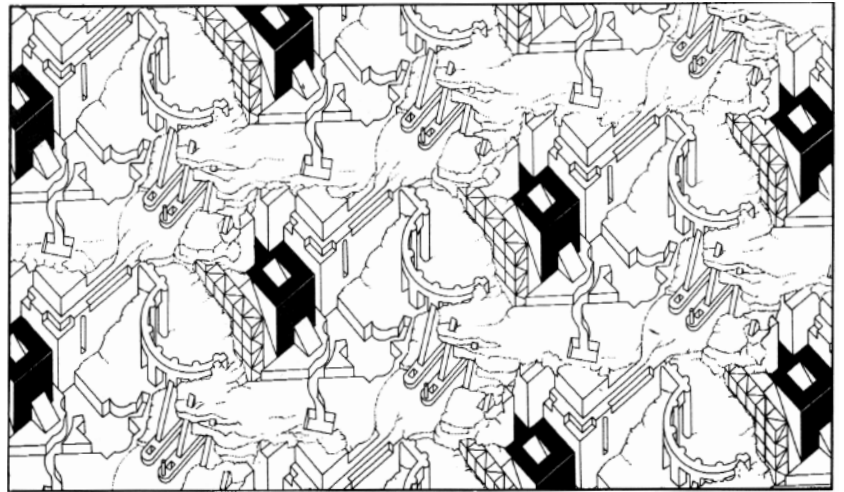
If you mean the genealogy of program in my work, I would trace it to my childhood. Even then, I was interested in organization; I was completely hypnotized by how urban systems were organized, or how different cultures imagined cities. I think that must be simply an unconscious preoccupation.

Everyone who uses the term organization immediately announces a space between rigor and default, or between conformity and independence. Organization is the background, and the tension that interests me is created between compliance and independence. When layered with script writing and constructivism, this tension lead me to a particular definition of program, borne out of a particular moment. This idea of program is very similar to the program of *Delirious New York*, rather than the generic term of program that could have any contents. During my time in New York, I was trying to assert that the city, or its architecture, did not just have a program but was in fact a program. That was the intention and ambition of the book.



Programs are as old as architecture. The first Greek temples began with program, not form. Most architects are blinded by form and ignore the potential of programs to generate forms. Think of department stores and railway stations in the 19th century: programs came first. It's the same with the merging of airports and shopping malls today.

What struck me early on was that most architects are unbelievably passive towards programs. They accept them in a completely uncritical way, dress them up with forms, and thereby miss major opportunities. I admit to having been very irritated vis-à-vis the prevalent ideologies of the seventies, whether the modernist "form follows form" dictum or the subsequent "form follows historical allusion" of architectural postmodernism. The programmatic dimension had become an abandoned territory since the days of the early 20th century avant-gardes, including constructivism and surrealism. In my case, I was also interested in theoretical issues of intertextuality—mixing spaces and uses in odd or unexpected configurations, intersecting spatial envelopes with movement vectors.



79

80

COMPETITION
Panopticon Prison,
Arnhem,
The Netherlands
"Modern architecture
is based on a deter-
ministic coincidence
between form and
program, its purpose
no longer an abstrac-
tion like moral
improvement' but a lit-
eral inventory of all
the details of daily
life."

81

82

COMPETITION
Parc de la Villette,
Paris, Winner
Completed, 1998
"At La Villette (or any-
where else for that
matter) there is no
longer any relation-
ship possible between
architecture and pro-
gram, architecture
and meaning"
Publishes
Spaces and
Events
"There is no space
without event, no
architecture without
program..."

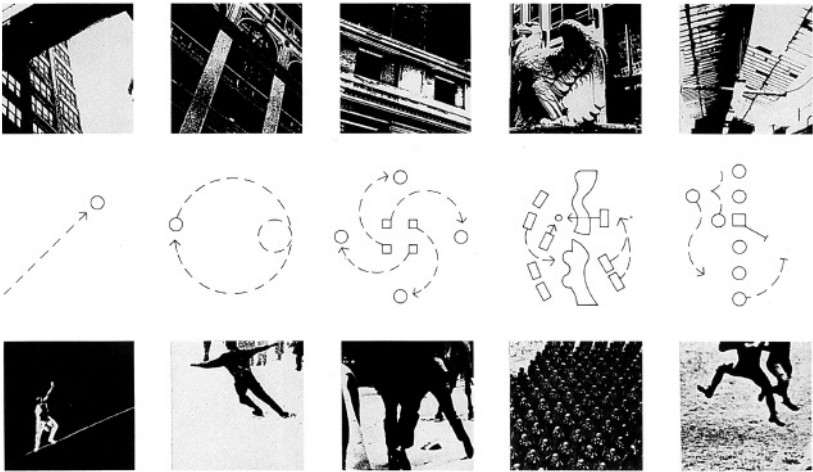
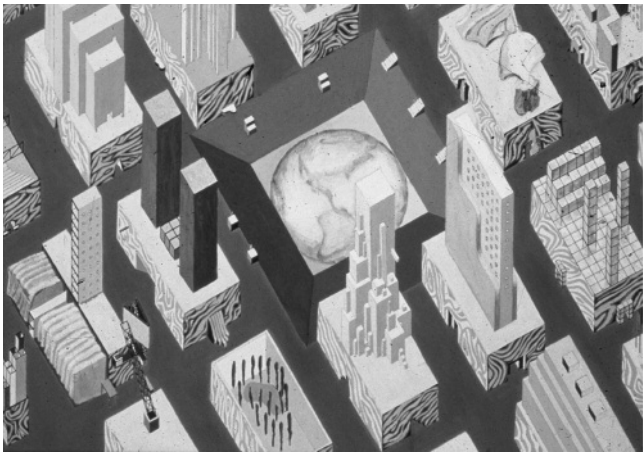
83

4. New York, 1976: You were pursuing research and developing theories of program that spawned what became for both of you seminal publications: Delirious New York and The Manhattan Transcripts. What was so urgent about the issue of program at this moment? What made New York such fertile ground—both as a working environment and as a subject—at that particular time?

Today there's a total banality of travel and intellectual traffic that didn't exist in the seventies. As a very technical European, I am deeply influenced by almost any of the "isms" that have comprised Europe's history. Therefore I was ambitious enough not so much to want my own "ism" but to look at the world in terms of "isms." On the one hand, I felt a real disenchantment with the slackening of modernity that was an outcome of 'flower-power' or the emergence of postmodernism. And yet I was simultaneously keenly aware of how manifestos themselves had introduced so many failures that the whole typology could not be rescued.

So I approached New York indirectly, with a manifesto that consisted of a volume or quantity of pre-existing evidence. I took a journalistic but also a personal approach, which I had to shield behind America. Bernard Tschumi's project seems much more clearly a manifesto, or at least it more openly uses the traditional methodology and appearance of a manifesto.

I came to New York from London because of an interest in the art scene, which seemed to be in extraordinarily creative flux at the time. Many artist friends, including Robert Longo, David Salle, Cindy Sherman, and Sarah Charlesworth, had come to New York about the same time. For me, architecture was a blank page: everything seemed to need to be invented. I became obsessed with New York City itself, a city in which everything seemed possible. I also watched a lot of black-and-white B-movies at the time. I was struck by how space and buildings could also be protagonists in the action. Performance art seemed a natural extension of conceptual art. These two forms of art practice echoed my definition of architecture: as concept and experience, or the definition of space and the movement of bodies within it.



Villa dall'Ava,
Paris, France
Completed, 1991
"He wanted a glass
house. She wanted a
swimming pool on the
roof. Theoretically, it
would be possible to
see the Eiffel Tower
while swimming."

COMPETITION
New National
Theater and
Opera House,
Tokyo, Japan
Second Prize
We abandoned tradi-
tional rules of compo-
sition and harmony,
replacing them with a
mode of organization
based not on "form
follows function,"
"form follows form" or
even "form follows
fiction" but rather on
breaking apart the
traditional compo-
nents of the theater
and opera house...No
more artful articula-
tions among the audi-
torium, the stage, the
foyer, the grand stair-
case; a new pleasure
lies in the parallel jux-
taposition of indeter-
minate cultural mean-
ings...
Appointed Dean,
Columbia
University, GSAPP

COMPETITION
The Hague City
Hall, The Hague,
The Netherlands
"Its unstable config-
uration allowed
us...after our project
for Parc de la Villette,
to reexperiment with
the relationship
between specificity
and indeterminacy,
this time in a building."

5. Tell us about your time at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies and how it influenced your development as an intellectual and as a designer? Who were your allies there?

It was a time when the Institute was probably much less rigorous and much less rigid in its alliances. There was not a single person in that period in New York that I was not at some point, or to some extent, sympathetic to or involved with, or who did not in some ways influence what I was doing.

The big unknown in this story is the influence of Matthias Ungers. I spent a year [1972] at Cornell prior to going to New York, which was significant. There were two phenomena that made it important. First, studying with Ungers exposed me to his way of thinking, particularly his conceptual abilities to think about cities. Michel Foucault also happened to be teaching there that year, as well as Herbert Damisch, another French intellectual with whom I became close friends. He introduced me to Foucault, so even before arriving in New York I spent a year in America immersed in French Intellectual culture, which reinforced my already considerable involvement with Roland Barthes' work.

Weirdly enough I think I was more intellectual than any of them, but I was working on a project that seemed less intellectual than any of their ideas. They were all outside architecture, and so that was a kind of double, an interesting stereo that was more literary than architectural. Maybe *Delirious New York* is about architecture, but it is more a literary creation—more writing than thinking.

The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, with its conjoined publications, was one of the only architectural settings at the time that grasped architecture as part of a rigorous intellectual discourse. But many of the interests of the Institute were quite distant from my own. Again, I felt closer to the New York art scene of the time. I was at the Institute for just one year, 1976. Perhaps being there sharpened my desire to challenge the formalized discourse on the primacy of form. I began *The Manhattan Transcripts* immediately after leaving the Institute. Allies? Ironically enough, the key people at the Institute really became my friends only after I left.

6. What was the status of program in this laboratory of Eisenman-inspired formalism?

I wrote *Delirious New York* when I returned to London. I did the research for it in New York, but I couldn't write there. Back in London, I gave a series of lectures at the AA that then became the basis of the book. And in terms of allies, Peter has a rare and unbelievable generosity to create and support a field in which other people flourish. Probably he is partially motivated out of a kind of perverse sense of curiosity of what will happen to them. It was simultaneously a stimulating field, a test bed, and an accelerated aging procedure. He was extremely skeptical, but also extremely supportive.

At that time I also had the luxury of being the only person in almost the entire New York scene—except the Greys—to be involved in American issues. So I had the great advantage of invisibility, as no one was interested in the material I was researching. I was an intelligent person dealing with the debased material that nobody could understand. I had the best of both worlds.

In the early Institute years, Eisenman wrote an editorial in *Oppositions* called "Postfunctionalism" which dismissed program and function as part of a 500 year old, pre-industrial humanist practice. So a redefinition of program was certainly not part of the Institute's agenda. Yet, as is often the case, what is hidden is as interesting as what is in full view. Anthony Vidler's texts and lectures on Boullée, Ledoux, and Lequeu were extraordinarily perceptive, for example, showing programmatic rituals and spatial sequences in the architecture of Lequeu's lodges. Far from being pre-industrial, his lectures suggested bridges to the most contemporary art practices, including modes of notation used in performance art. But the Institute's prevalent discourse then was autonomy. My inclinations were more towards intertextuality.

EXHIBITION
Deconstructivist
Architecture,
MoMA, New York

88

EXHIBITION
Deconstructivist
Architecture,
MoMA, New York

COMPETITION
Bibliothèque
Nationale de
France, Paris
"Transprogramming:
Combined two pro-
grams, regardless of
their incompatibili-
ties, together with
their respective spa-
tial configurations.
Reference: planetari-
um + roller-coaster"

89

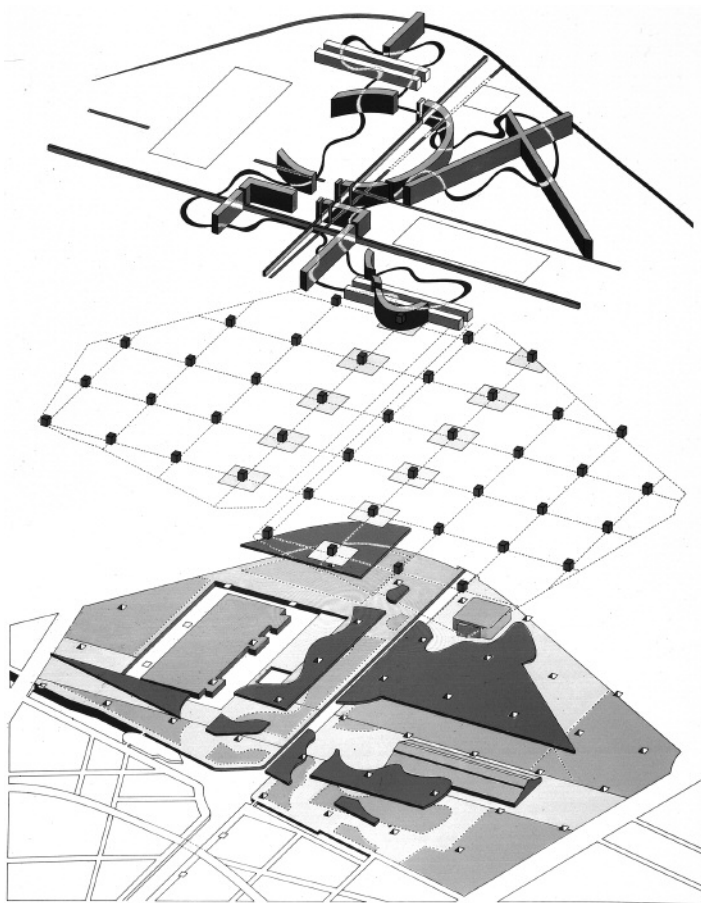
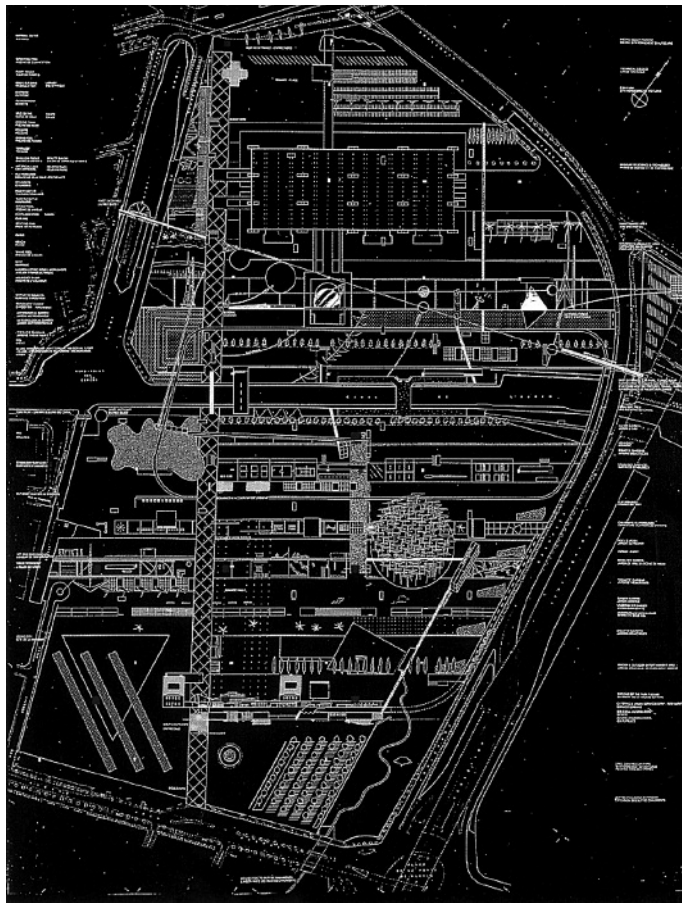
COMPETITION
Bibliothèque
Nationale de
France, Paris
Honorable Mention
"The ambition of this
project is to rid archi-
tecture of responsi-
bilities it can no
longer sustain and to
explore this new free-
dom aggressively. It
suggests that, liberat-
ed from its former
obligations, architec-
ture's last function
will be the creation of
the symbolic spaces
that accommodate
the persistent desire
for collectivity."

COMPETITION
Center for Art
and Media
Technology,
Karlsruhe
3rd Prize

Glass Video
Pavilion,
Groningen,
The Netherlands

90

Video Pavilion,
Groningen,
The Netherlands
Euraille, Lille,
France
Completed, 1994
"In this fin-de siècle,
'programs' have
become abstract in
the sense that they
are no longer con-
nected to a place or a
city, they float and
gravitate opportuni-
stically to that site-
which offers the high-
est number and quali-
ty of connection—
which seems nearest



7. What was the relationship between this early research and writing and the radical reconceptualization of program evidenced in your design for the Parc de la Villette?

There is a very direct relationship. I explained La Villette as a kind of horizontal skyscraper. The relationship to *Delirious New York* was so unbelievably literal that, as our practice evolved, it has inevitably become more indirect. At first those ideas worked as an example or prototype, but then it became simply an influence or area of attention. I still notice occasionally that the early research returns in an almost literal way, certainly in CCTV. So it's a source that we feel free to ignore, but there's always a pull. Except when there's a kind of anti-pull. Or when it has no relevance whatsoever. For instance when I work on a house, it's totally in abeyance.

But I also consider it as a historical given, and so in texts like "Generic City" and "Junkspace" it remains a reference, but a reference we constantly suppress or refine.

My work on *The Manhattan Transcripts* began with a tripartite definition of architecture as space, action, and movement. The resulting mode of notation was used throughout the *Transcripts* and led directly to the La Villette principle of superimposing points (of activities), lines (of movement), and spaces (of appropriation). The precedent for my point grid was interesting in its relationship to programs. In the mid-1970s, I used to give my students at the AA excerpts from Kafka, Poe, Borges, and Joyce as programs. In order to organize the complexity of Joyce's text with a number of students, I gave them a point grid that announced the one at La Villette. It proved a great way to explode the park's programmatic complexity and reorganize it around the points of intensity of the folies. Simultaneously, I was writing more theoretical texts—"Architecture and Limits" and "Violence of Architecture"—which addressed the issue of program directly.

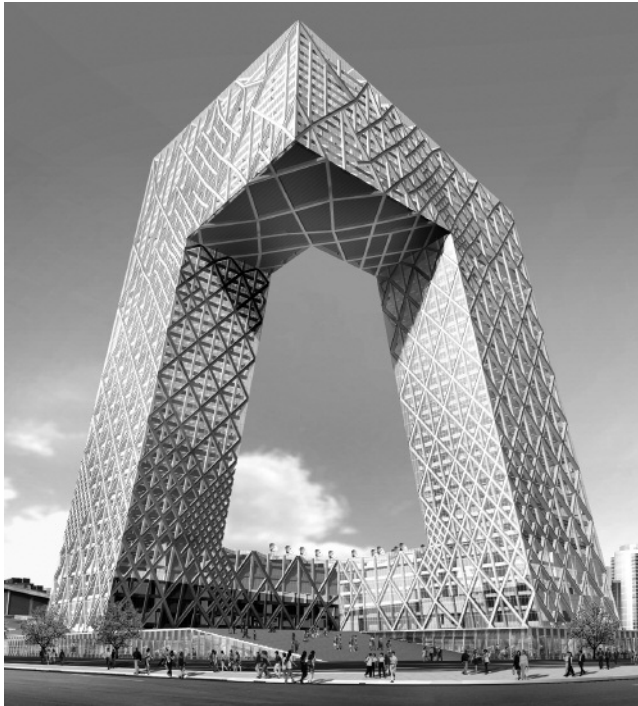
COMPETITION
JR Rail Station
Kyoto, Japan
"Disprogramming":
Combining two or
more programs,
whereby a required
spatial configuration
of program A con-
terminates program B
and B's possible con-
figuration. The new
program B may be
extracted from the
inherent contradic-
tions contained in
program A, and B's
required spatial con-
figuration may be
applied to A."

COMPETITION
Le Fresnoy,
Tourcoing,
France,
Winner
Completed, 1998

Event-Cities
(Praxis) published
"...the cause-and-
effect relationship
sanctified by mod-
ernism, by which
form follows function
(or vice versa) needs
to be abandoned in
favor of promiscuous
collisions of pro-
grams and spaces, in
which the terms
intermingle, combine,
and implicate on
another in the pro-
duction of a new
architectural reality."

8. Some critics have written about the return of the megastructure, not only in your practice but also in other architect's designs. Do you agree, and to what would you attribute the recuperation of this type? How is this 'new' megastructure different from its sixties predecessors?

There's a very seductive and potentially very naïve form of looking at the past fifteen years, whereby you begin by saying that architecture meets megalomania, and megalomania is debased. But fortunately the force of the market flushed it away with the unfortunate commitment to postmodernism. Then in the 90s the market seemed to parallel and even sponsor or support radical redefinitions of form. In the late 90s, together with the destruction of the World Trade Center, form was discredited, and perhaps also the possibility for architects' participation and complicity with the market economy. Now we're all looking for something which gives us not so much power—because I don't think many people are nostalgic for power, and it's still a very dirty word—but perhaps a larger scope of what architecture could do, or could say.



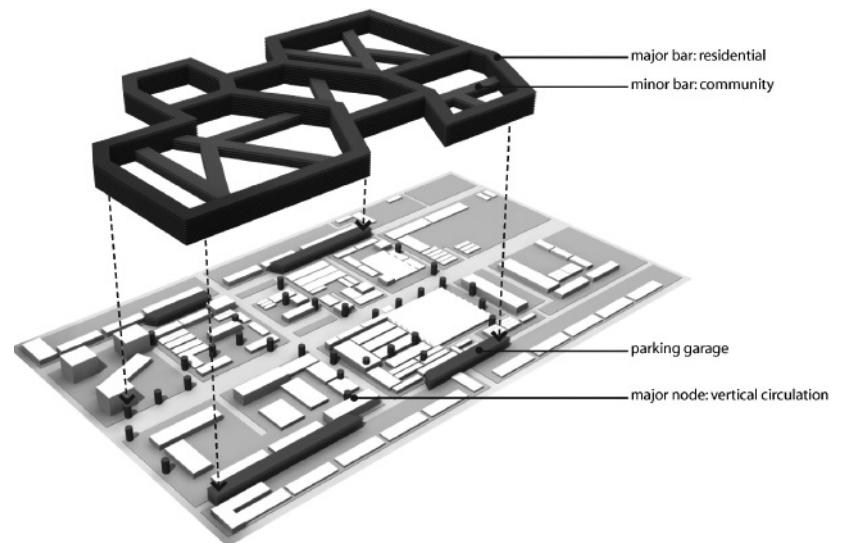
EXHIBITION
Light
Construction,
MoMA, New York

95

96

The recent Factory 798 project in Beijing started with our wish to save the liveliest cultural center in China from being razed to make way for ten million square feet of residential towers. After talking to the artists and gallerists there, we proposed to keep the art program below and put the housing program above, hovering over the existing art neighborhood. The vertical support points were located anywhere we could place them between the existing buildings on the ground, so that the resulting "random" grid became a lattice. The project generated an enormous amount of media coverage since people saw it as a way to keep the old while moving forward with the new. Maybe in part due to the response to our project, the government decided not to go ahead with demolition. So maybe we saved the neighborhood but ultimately lost a project.

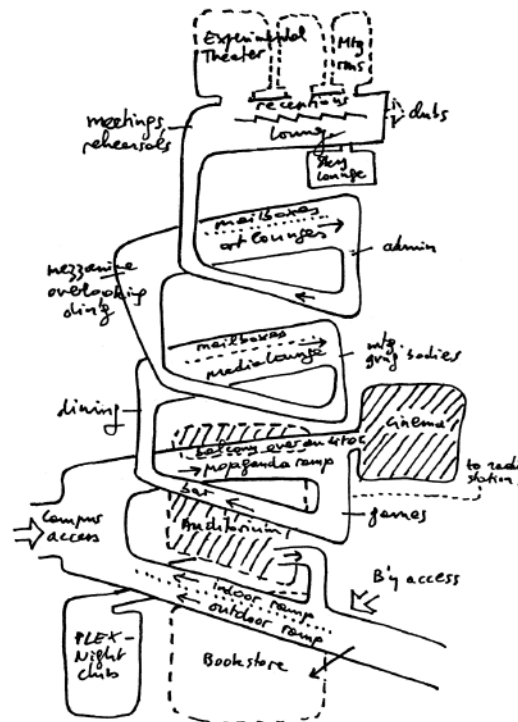
I do not think the project could have been done elsewhere but China. Free-market economy and megastructure are two terms that rarely go together. Who will pay for megastructures? Today's capital is transient, while megastructures are not. So maybe you can call the newest megastructures a resurgence of criticality. (What an ugly word!) Megastructures often act as manifestos. Our Factory 798 project was a buildable manifesto.



COMPETITION
MoMA Expansion,
New York
Finalist
"The Garden's!
Programmatic flexibility and social
space provides
places for activities
and art forms that
are not easily contained within conventional exhibition galleries. Our concept extends this quality throughout the Museum in the form of multiple courts."

97

98



ic elements react with each other to create new events—Bigness returns to a model of programmatic alchemy.”

10. Recently, various critics have argued that you are responsible for inspiring an entire body of work regarding program, both pedagogical projects and also trends in architectural production outside of academia. What is your reaction to this type of 'blame:' acknowledgment, or attribution?

I can't deny that I'm perversely interested in these 'attributions.' I have such a vast attention span that I can't deny that I follow them. But I think that at this point it is not attribution. The extent of media coverage has reached complete insanity. It is sad that the discipline is so dependant on one group of people to provide its subject.

I'm still totally dedicated to the discipline, in terms of working in it, but since 1995 I've effectively left the discipline. I have almost no friends left in architecture. My intimate friends used to be architects, but now they're all outside the discipline because I need nourishment and within the field there is an almost infernal circle of regurgitation. And that of course makes everyone who is regurgitated bitter. So that even if you produce something good, there is a cynical view of it from the beginning. So while I'm increasingly disenchanted with the practice of being interviewed, I hope this questionnaire produces something new or at least something less than totally predictable.

Look, I do not think that architecture must begin with form. It begins with a concept or an idea. Some of these concepts or ideas may be programmatic. Architecture is the materialization of a concept, and I feel no qualms about calling the program a material, much as concrete walls or glass enclosures are materials. You can also use programs the way Malevich or Mondrian transformed painting, or Joyce and Schönberg transformed writing and music. Most interesting, however, is to design new conditions for living, whether urban or otherwise.

03

Factory 978,
Beijing, China
"Acknowledging the
inevitable confronta-
tion of old and new,
the proposal is
intended as an alter-
native to the whole-
sale demolition of the
existing arts facili-
ty... The project, thus,
is about a strategy of
inbetweens."

04

S.M.L.XL
Programme (glossary
entry): "The slow real-
ization that the
excitement of a
scheme is not in its
outrageous compo-
nents, but is the most
modest programme."
—Peter Salter

05

Event-Cities 3
(Concept vs.
Context vs.
Content)
published

"There is no architec-
tural space without
something that hap-
pens in it, no space
without content.
Most architects
begin with a program,
that is, a list of users'
requirements
describing the
intended purpose of
the building. At vari-
ous moments in his-
tory, it has been
claimed that program
of function can be the
generator of form,
that "form follows
function", or perhaps
that "form follows
content." In order to
avoid engaging in a
discourse of form per
se or of form versus
content, the word
"form" is replaced
here with the word
"concept." Can one
therefore substitute
"form follows func-
tion" with an alterna-
tive formulation,
namely, "concept fol-
lows content"?

06

COMPETITION
MoMA Expansion,
New York
"Because an entirely
new building will con-
tain the entire
Museum program it
will have the advan-
tages of Bigness:
programmatic
hybridization, proxim-
ities/frictions/over-
laps/superpositions,
the entire apparatus
of montage invented
at the beginning of
the century to organ-
ize the relationships
between independent
parts..."