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I'm not sure when it became unfashionable to look intelligent. From Plato to Popper, intellectuals were a breed elevated above the chaff of everyday life, not unlike royalty or aristocracy. Today, this invented class structure that pits ideas and opinions against things and facts has an antiquated, redundant feel. Thinkers are no longer afraid to admit that they watch Keanu movies. Indeed, they might even rate themselves according to how many they've seen. They relish interpreting that according to undeniably intellectual systems of thought. Philosophical anthologies have recently tackled such vexed subjects as *Buffy*, *The Sopranos* and *Seinfeld*. The floodgates are open, it's all up for grabs. Warhol's faux naiveté is replaced with swaggering knowingness. That whole I'm-above-all-this, detached thing is dead. Aesthetic privation is passé; superficiality, stupidity and being sexed-up rules.

It was in 1995 that the 1,400-page *S.M.L.X.L* broke out of the safe, inverted confines of architectural publishing and became a bona-fide, loved-by-all hit. It pushed the traditional architectural book and its clichés – clear modernist grid layouts, fetishistic photos of empty buildings and hard-line construction drawings – off a symbolic cliff. In its place, *S.M.L.X.L* and its authors, Rem Koolhaas' architectural group OMA, erected a monument to the process of being crystal clear in intent, but looking slack in the process. Adverts for Y-fronts sat next to images of buildings: finally, someone dared to admit the profanity of the everyday world into the sacred world of architecture.

Eight years on, *S.M.L.X.L* has not aged well. Fortunately, Koolhaas himself has moved on, as *S.M.L.X.L*'s sequel, *Content*, illustrates. The Dutch architect upgrades his attitudes as frequently as David Bowie, and is likewise existentially programmed to try to suss out what constitutes the world picture today. It wasn't by accident that Bowie publicly killed Ziggy Stardust. Death is the very foundation of evolution.

*Content* accompanies a touring exhibition of the same name. Both chart the work between 1996 and the present, which, notably, includes the birth of OMA's sibling outfit, AMO, dedicated solely to media and branding projects. That leaves OMA to get on with the more conventional business of making world-class buildings. A manifesto for this branching out, *Content* aims to show how the role of an architect can and must mutate in accordance with a world that no longer relies on architects to design its buildings.



With the exact dimensions of *Glamour* (surely not a coincidence since AMO worked with Condé Nast stablemates *Lucky* and *Wired*). *Content* plays with the idea of being a magazine. Early on, two cartoon characters are debating, "I'm not sure if this is a book or a magazine," says one. "I find the tension between the two super-interesting," the other replies. What follows are projects, manifestos, essays, interviews and trivia illustrated with the visual language of inconsistency, jokiness, crudity and saturated slumming-it chic. With

the cut-and-paste teen subversion aesthetic of a fanzine, the first few pages are telling. Fake graffiti drips are rampant. An image showing a street vendor (in Africa?) and his fake designer handbags is an advert for Prada. Then there's a customarily slick Gucci ad, followed by pseudo-ads – one welcomes new EU states on behalf of the Dutch government; another promotes Lagos as a "Centre for Excellence."

*Content* takes and gives it both ways. Stylistically, it cocks a snoot and flings a saliva-smears middle finger to minimalist taste-mongering. But although it assumes the format and some of the content of a delinquent magazine, *Content* still fulfills the grown-up analytical ambitions of a book.

Structured as a plane journey beginning on the West Coast of the US, we head east, eventually arriving at the present beacon of hope for the future of capitalism, China. On the way, Martha Stewart speaks about the future of the house, and claims that "Americans are hated; but mostly for our politics, not for our lifestyle." Her bright and breezy confidence is all the more poignant against the backdrop of her possible impending imprisonment. And even New York's Prada shop gets a visual makeover. Instead of the usual interior shots, we get scenes from the now iconic *Sex and the City* episode when Carrie took (loser) boyfriend Burger on his first "meeting with the Prada." Burger is predictably disturbed when he arrives: "Holy shit! You know, on my planet, the clothing stores have clothes." Yes, the message is loud and clear: this is architecture good enough to appear as background to Sarah Jessica Parker.

Running throughout the book/magazine are several essays penned by Koolhaas himself. He has lost none of his acerbic wit, but one of the key texts of the last five years, "Junkspace," is published in a lazy hard-to-read layout. This is either a clever metatextual device or a last-minute blunder. I fear the latter. And that's both the joy and limitation of *Content*. It is excitably open about its instant redundancy exactly in the manner that most architects and buildings never dare to admit. That bit is new and now. But superficiality comes with its own built-in deficiencies: if you spend too much time trying to look more stupid than you actually are, you might accidentally forget when to behave intelligently.

*Content* by Rem Koolhaas/AMO/AMOMA/5&5, edited by Brendan McGettrick, is published by Taschen (£6.99).