

Books

Rem Koolhaas and OMA, *Content*
(Taschen, Cologne, 2004)

The traditional architectural monograph conveys its authority through high-quality photography, thick paper, minimal text, neat Modernist layout and page after page of full-bleed, colour-saturated photography. In the past decade a counter-movement has emerged, a swath of visual manifestos that signal revolution on every chaotic page. These publishing experiments can be traced back to Rem Koolhaas' 1978 *Delirious New York* and reached their apotheosis with his 1995 collaboration with Bruce Mau, *S, M, X, XL*, a deliberately provocative broadside against Modernism's apparent disdain for popular, globalized culture designed to accompany the unpredictable work coming out of Koolhaas' studio, the Rotterdam-based OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture).

OMA's latest publication is *Content*, a visual essay threaded with glossy adverts and printed on cheap, flimsy paper with hyperactive design by &&&, the duo responsible for the look of recently departed men's magazine *Jack*. *Content* follows the same attention-deficit layout as a contemporary lads' mag: all boxes, fragmented text and provocative illustrations providing a pure information fix. In among the diagrams, videocaps, interviews and maps are OMA's recent projects, including the Seattle Public Library and Prada Beverly Hills, architecture that attempts to respond to an information-saturated world.

Koolhaas has identified a paradigm shift; buildings are no longer 'portraits' of 'known entities' in the way that a Modernist skyscraper 'embodies' a corporation. Instead, they are 'devices', symbols that 'create a degree of wholeness from a permanently changing cluster of ingredients and latencies'. 'A building', writes Koolhaas, 'was no longer an issue of architecture, but of a strategy.' OMA's strategy is to engage directly with the creeping banality of everyday life – rampant consumption, globalization, anti-intellectualism and so on – that so many cultural commentators lament. At the heart of *Content* is Koolhaas' elegy for 'junkspace'. More a state of mind than a physical location, junkspace is 'essence, the main thing – the product of the encounter between escalator and air-conditioning, conceived in an incubator of sheetrock'. Critics say that Koolhaas' work is a cynical collusion with junkspace, simply perpetuating the confusion and not confronting the issues raised by this cornucopia of banality.

