

OMA, REM KOOLHAAS & BRUCE MAU, "BIGNESS, OR THE PROBLEM OF LARGE"  
EXCERPT FROM *S, M, L, XL* (NEW YORK: MONACELLI PRESS, 1995)

The absence of a theory of Bigness – what is the maximum architecture can do? – is architecture's most debilitating weakness. Without a theory of Bigness, architects are in the position of Frankenstein's creators: instigators of a partly successful experiment whose results are running amok and are therefore discredited. Because there is no theory of Bigness, we don't know what to do with it, we don't know where to put it, we don't know when to use it, we don't know how to plan it. Big mistakes are our only connection to Bigness.

But in spite of its dumb name, Bigness is a theoretical domain at this *fin de siècle*: in a landscape of disarray, disassembly, dissociation, disclamation, the attraction of Bigness is its potential to reconstruct the Whole, resurrect the Real, reinvent the collective, reclaim maximum possibility.

Only through Bigness can architecture dissociate itself from the exhausted artistic/ideological movements of modernism and formalism to regain its instrumentality as vehicle of modernization.

Bigness recognizes that architecture as we know it is in difficulty, but it does not overcompensate through regurgitations of even more architecture. It proposes a new economy in which no longer "all is architecture," but in which a strategic position is regained through retreat and concentration, yielding the rest of a contested territory to enemy forces.

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### **Team**

Bigness is where architecture becomes both most and least architectural: most because of the enormity of the object; least through the loss of autonomy – it becomes instrument of other forces, *it depends*.

Bigness is impersonal: the architect is no longer condemned to stardom.

Even as Bigness enters the stratosphere of architectural ambition – the pure chill of megalomania – it can be achieved only at the price of giving up control, of transmogrification. It implies a web of umbilical cords to other disciplines whose performance is as critical as the architect's: like mountain climbers tied together by life-saving ropes, the makers of Bigness are a *team* (a word not mentioned the last 40 years of architectural polemic).

Beyond signature, Bigness means surrender to technologies; to engineers, contractors, manufactures; to politics; to others. It promises architecture a kind of post-heroic status – a realignment with neutrality.

### **Bastion**

If Bigness transforms architecture, its accumulation generates a new kind of city. The exterior of the city is no longer a collective theater where "it" happens; there's no collective "it" left. The street has become residue, organizational device, mere segment of the continuous metropolitan plane where the remnants of the past face the equipment of the new in an uneasy standoff. Bigness can exist *anywhere* on that plane. Not only is Bigness incapable of establishing relationships with the classical city – *at most, it coexists* – but in the quantity and complexity of the facilities it offers, it is itself urban.

Bigness no longer needs the city: it competes with the city; it represents the city; it preempts the city; or better still, *it is* the city. If urbanism generates potential and architecture exploits it, Bigness enlists the generosity of urbanism against the meanness of architecture.

Bigness = urbanism vs. architecture.