

## Koolhaas, Constant and Dutch Culture in the 1960's

By Bart Lootsma on *Architecturaltheory.eu*, September 04 2007

*En Indonesie, nous habitons les écuries d'une très grande maison, entourée par un mur. Et, de l'autre côté du mur, il y était un lavoir avec une série de bassins très longs et parallèles. Il y avait là de très belles femmes qui lavaient les draps de façon très lente, très érotique.... A un moment une sonnerie a retenti; c'était l'heure du déjeuner, les femmes sont parties. Des hommes sont arrivés, ils se sont déshabillés, ont pissé dans l'eau et ont commencé à nager entre les draps. C'était une grande expérience..... 2)*

Rem Koolhaas

It is an intriguing photograph in itself. On the far left, we see the artist/architect Constant Nieuwenhuys in his atelier in Amsterdam. He points towards a complex construction in the background. Two figures stand next to him, but the ink on the pink paper has faded to the point that they are nearly unrecognizable. The image originally accompanied an interview with Constant published in a 1966 issue of the *Haagse Post*, a leading Dutch weekly magazine, on the occasion of the presentation of his work in the Dutch pavilion at the Venice Biennale. 3) The interviewers are art critic Betty van Garrel and -on the far right of the picture, 22 years old and with a Beatles-hairdo - Rem Koolhaas. At first, it may not seem strange to see Koolhaas pictured with Constant; given Koolhaas' place in the architectural world today, it seems logical that he would have been attentive to Constant's work in the sixties. But at the time, Koolhaas was a journalist for the *Haagse Post*; nothing indicated that he was particularly interested in architecture. According to his former colleagues, he was mainly occupied filling the magazine's gossip page called *People, Animals and Things*, in which capacity he excelled in making up the most improbable details. 4) His other, more important job, was the definitive layout of the magazine, which was printed like a newspaper -with lead type. He worked in the composing room at the printing office of the daily newspaper *De Telegraaf*. 5)

But Koolhaas was also responsible for a series of larger articles and interviews on subjects ranging from the most kitschy displays of Dutch schlager-culture (the Song Festival in Knokke); to literature, film and motorsports (the 24 Hours of Le Mans); to politics (the PROVO-movement) to sex. He wrote only two articles on architecture: one on Le Corbusier and another on H.Th.Wijdeveld. The interview with Constant thus seems to have been a rare exception. What would have provoked Koolhaas' interest in Constant at the time? What is its importance today? In recent years, academics in Europe, and particularly in the United States, have taken a renewed interest in the Situationists, the group of activists that radicalized cultural and political criticism between 1957 and 1972. As a result, several fundamental Situationist texts such as Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* have recently been translated into English or reprinted. Recently, the contribution of Constant Nieuwenhuys, another former-situationist, has also been made available in Mark Wigley's *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire*, published on the occasion of a major exhibition on the project at the Witte de With center for contemporary art in Rotterdam. 5) Not surprisingly, several critics have begun to speculate on the possible influence of situationist thought on Rem Koolhaas. 6) But they remain puzzled that Koolhaas thinking refrains from the radical criticism of the spectacle and of capitalism that is so central to situationism, or at least that he presents this criticism in a different way, for instance by coining the term *Junkspace (TM)* to describe the artificial labyrinthine, kitschy ambiances that fester inside modernist containers like airports and shopping malls, to accommodate shops, bars, restaurants, casino's..... 7) Indeed, the article in the *Haagse Post* proves that Koolhaas was aware of Constant's ideas in the sixties, but it doesn't openly reveal what he thought of them. Since Constant has become canonized, no one seems to consider any more that Koolhaas could have been influenced by Constant in a negative or more ambivalent way, or that this influence might have been coloured by or mixed with others. Koolhaas himself provides these critics with few clues as to his possible links with the Situationists and instead cultivates the myth about himself that he produced with his autobiographical 'novel' *S,M,L,XL*. 8).

That myth begins with his architectural training at the AA School in London and the writing of *Delirious New York*, as if nothing had happened before. In fact, Koolhaas already had two interesting careers behind him when he decided to become an architect - one in journalism, the other in filmmaking. To better understand Koolhaas position towards Constant, it is important to have more insight into the particular Dutch cultural context of the 1960's, where the activities of these two figures intersected.

### **Constant**

Constant was an influential voice in the Netherlands in the sixties a kind of conscience for progressive architects and regarded as a guru by the PROVO movement. 10) *New Babylon* the project he spent 20 years developing through drawings, paintings, maps, texts, and most strikingly, through models of soldered metal, wire, and plexiglass was presented, at various phases of its evolution, in museums, in art magazines, in lectures, and even on television. *New Babylon* is the model of a possible future city: completely covered, artificially climatized and lit, and raised high above the ground on huge columns. Inhabitants are given access to powerful, ambience-creating resources to construct their own spaces whenever and wherever they desire. Light, acoustics, color, ventilation, texture, temperature, and moisture are infinitely variable. Movable floors, partitions, ramps, ladders, bridges, and stairs are used to construct veritable labyrinths of the most heterogeneous forms in which desires continuously interact. *New Babylonians* play a game of their own designing, against a backdrop they have designed themselves. 11) The city itself consists of chains of these multileveled structures that are strung across the landscape. Underneath them are fully automated factories, cars, and trains. Above fly helicopters. These means of transportation allow the inhabitants to dwell in this city in a radical derive: they do not want to live in a fixed place, but drift and roam through the vast urban landscape with its multiple changing ambiances. Since technology has made work obsolete, energy is channeled into collective creativity. According to Constant, it is not the laborer but the player, not *homo faber* but *homo ludens* to whom the future belongs. 12) And *New Babylon* is the playground for this ludic society. Often, Constant presented his vision of the future through cinematically conceived slide shows, accompanied by sound-collages, that even today produce an eerily believable effect: Only a few human figures are visible, perched on the edge of a vast space, but the soundtrack fills the auditorium with a metropolitan jumble of voices, traffic noises, machines, animals, and strange music. We hear the sounds of a life we cannot see, a life we are forced to imagine. 13)

### **Architect or artist**

Mark Wigley calls Constant a hyper-architect: Indeed, he took on and exaggerated so many traits of the architect's typical behavior that he became more architect than any architect. 14) But however central the tools and methods of the architectural profession were to his work, how spatial his proposals, however much he lectured and theorized, how intensively he engaged with architects like Aldo van Eyck, how far he went in his personification of the architect –lecturing, theorizing and so on; Constant came from art and was seen as an artist in the 1950s and 1960s. That he was taken so seriously by architects at the time was a result of the CIAM-debates in the 1940s and 1950s, in which modern artists –with their supposed ability to provide the city with new monumental symbols of communality- were considered crucial to the urban design process. After the Second World War there was a feeling that modern architecture had lost terrain in the thirties and forties, because the neoclassical revival in that period, which involved large scale employment of artists, had been much more successful in providing exactly such symbols – albeit reactionary ones. Believing that they had completely overlooked and underestimated these issues in their drive for functionality and sobriety, 15) Dutch CIAM-members introduced Constant –still a member of CoBra at the time –to their meetings. Some of the Dutch CIAM groups were -apart from Le Corbusier- more open to collaboration with artists than others. This may have a historical background, because De Stijl originated in painting, but after the war also CoBra painters like Karel Appel were regularly invited to realize important works in buildings by J.J.P. Oud, H.A. Maaskant and others. Aldo van Eyck was even in close contact with COBRA. For Constant, his contacts with architects may

have been impetus to rethink communality in a more drastic way, resulting after his first contacts with the situationists in whole urbanistic proposals. At the peak of the successful realization of the postwar reconstruction of The Netherlands, Constant provided not only a critical reading of modern architecture and urbanism, but also a much further-reaching vision of the future, that was visionary, optimistic, idealistic, and artistic in nature.

### The Haagse Post

When Rem Koolhaas started working for the Haagse Post in 1963, he was 19 years old. It was then a rightwing liberal magazine –especially by Dutch standards – whose editor in chief, Mr. G.B.J. Hilterman, is still notorious today for the bronze voice he uses to deliver his Sunday radio-column, *The Situation In The World*, in which he polemically defends capitalism and the free market. But even more than conservatism, Hilterman valued independence, both for himself and for the magazine. His wife, Sylvia Brandts Buys, personified this independence but was more adventurous. Seeking a younger audience, she wanted to model the “HP” –as it is generally known– on *L Express* and *Time*, and recruited a series of non conformist younger journalists, a strange mix of intellectuals and ragamuffins, that were all to become part of the sixties avant-garde. In general, HP was a strange and often schizophrenic mix of conservatism and eccentricity. It happened that one editor refused to work at a certain desk, because another had made love on it the night before. 17) Many editors and journalists at the Haagse Post had second careers in art, literature and film. 18) In fact, the magazine was almost a cover organization for the Nulbeweging ( Zero Movement, the Dutch variant of the German ZERO movement and the French Nouveaux Réalistes), and *De Nieuwe Stijl* (The New Style), the corresponding literary movement. Armando, head of the magazine’s cultural section, was already a known painter and writer, but also a boxer who played the violin in gypsy bands. At the time, he was painting with industrial paints on sheet-metal in place of canvas, to produce minimalist monochrome surfaces. He would wrap these surfaces with barbed wire, or carefully screw a few bolts to make simple geometric patterns. His sculptures consisted of simple stackings of car tires. Other members of the Nulbeweging and *De Nieuwe Stijl* who also wrote for HP included Hans Sleutelaar and Hans Verhagen, both poets with a sharp eye for everyday life and culture. Nul and *De Nieuwe Stijl* were clear reactions to the emotive style of CoBrA and to the corresponding Dutch literary movement, the *Vijftigers*, with their strong emphasis on individual expression and childlike innocence. 19) The Nul-members at HP were known as *de Heertjes* (the Gentlemen), because they refused the alternative style common to artists and journalists, and instead wore elegant suits, like Koolhaas does in the vague photograph illustrating the interview with Constant. Armando’s manifesto, *Een internationale primeur*, summed up what the Nulbeweging stood for: Not moralizing or interpreting (artificing) the reality, but intensifying it. Starting point:

an uncompromising acceptance of reality.(...) Working method: isolating, annexing. Thus: authenticity. Not of the maker, but of the information. The artist who is no longer an artist, but a cold, rational eye. 20)

The meaning of Nul and *De Nieuwe Stijl* was, in other words, to work with no style, to use an expression Koolhaas later applied in architectural terms. 21) The new style of journalism that was introduced in the Haagse Post tried to do something similar. Write it all down in a deadpan manner, with the amazement of someone who has just arrived from Mars, Armando instructed Betty van Garrel. 22) In the manifesto *Instructions for the press*, written with Sleutelaar for *De Nieuwe Stijl*, he went even further: Facts are more interesting than commentaries and guesses. Historical conscience is the only reliable guidance; Information remains necessary: not by means of opinions, but by means of facts; It has to become evident as soon as possible that most critics are the bastards of journalism; These bastards have to leave the stage. 23) So, the journalists of HP did not so much give their opinions, but tried to describe, with precision and neutrality, what happened. The tape recorder became an indispensable tool: in interviews, they wrote down as literally as possible and with a minimum of editing what their subjects said. In fact, Trino Flothuis developed a method of interviewing in which he stopped asking questions altogether and just waited with the microphone on for whatever his victims might say.

Another rule for the Nul-journalist was that the official order of facts was arbitrary and therefore could be

almost completely neglected: the waitress at the press conference of the prime minister was just as relevant as the prime minister himself. 24) In the cultural section, there was no distinction between high and low art: both were treated in the same way. Indeed, Koolhaas first ever published larger article in 1964, on Le Corbusier, consists largely of his observations of a restless audience that has to wait because the architect's flight is delayed. Than a portrait of the architect: Le Corbusier, 76, with a dry, snappish appearance, a face in which only the under lip moves and pale blue eyes, makes an embittered impression. The largest part of his life he has worked on revolutionary plans that, when they were worked out, were mostly ridiculized, but have a great influence today. And after that an original but adequate resume of Le Corbusier's works and ideas. 25)

### Writing With No Style

In this new kind of journalism, the choice of the subjects became crucial: what was isolated? What was annexed? Armando considered poetry as the result of a (personal) selection from Reality. 26) In the mid-sixties there was hardly a difference between the journalistic and the literary work of some of the contributors to the HP; it became far removed from a news magazine. At a time when tape recorders were still uncommon, this method of journalism could not only work as a tool, but also as a weapon, allowing for a certain amount of manipulation. Koolhaas, for instance, was a master at coloring the facts -and probably invented a few too. His detailed descriptions of the clothes worn by his subjects revealed much about what he thought about them. But most important in Nul-journalism was the act of putting a topic on the agenda rather than reacting to what was already on it. To call attention to what was otherwise neglected or considered trivial or unpopular became a new critical act. It exactly is this kind of critical act that distinguishes Koolhaas today when he puts topics like the Pearl River Delta, Africa, or shopping on the architectural agenda. 27) The most impressive result of the symbiosis between the Haagse Post and Nul is undoubtedly the book *De SS-ers* (The SS-members) by Armando and Sleutelaar, first published in 1967. It consists of a series of interviews with Dutch volunteers in the German army during the Second World War. The interviews are hardly edited; the words of the subjects have been written down exactly as spoken. In their foreword, Armando and Sleutelaar write that the book was conceived out of curiosity; until than only the victims and the resistance had been heard. They also point out a similarity between the volunteers that fought on the right side and the ones that fought on the wrong side: both hoped that their country would come out better off than it had been before. 28) Even before it was printed, the book caused an immense upheaval; many considered its approach dangerous and morally wrong. At the time, the Dutch were just trying to forget that a considerable segment of the population had actually voted for the Dutch National Socialist party before the Second World War and that many collaborated, or had simply looked the other way. In fact, because the Dutch were generally obedient and efficient, providing the Germans with perfect registers, they ultimately deported a higher percentage of the Jewish population to concentration camps than any other European country. But the Dutch had gone on to create a myth about a small but heroic people that had stood up against a more powerful diabolic suppressor, and in which it seemed that everyone had been active in the resistance or at least in hiding Jews. This myth was even taught in history classes at school and associated with the resistance to the Spanish in the sixteenth century, after which The Netherlands had become an independent state. In the 1960's, the Provos exploited this myth when they accused the right wing establishment of being a secret continuation of fascism. This led to one of their most notorious actions - setting fire, in 1966, to the headquarters of *De Telegraaf*, a newspaper that had appeared throughout the war and was critical of PROVO, unlike other newspapers and magazines, which, having originated in the resistance, were more sympathetic towards the movement. The riots were instigated by a report in *De Telegraaf* on the killing of a worker during a demonstration: the report attributed the death to a stone throw by one of the demonstrators, when in fact the man had been killed by the police. But mostly, the incident stood out for its raw violence and destruction in the name of good intentions. Cynically, the Provo's actions could be read as the mirror image of similar activities carried out by the Nazis.

From their offices, the editors of HP had an excellent view of the riots; Koolhaas, who happened to be working in the printing office in the *Telegraaf* building at the time, found himself trapped in the middle of them, and

climbing over roofs and through a barbershop to escape. Hiltermann and Brandts Buys regarded the riots as the culmination of a series of incidents in which the establishment, the royal family and the church were tarnished. Though some articles in HP sided with that campaign, Hiltermann himself, in his weekly columns, had criticized it in the most reactionary way. Brandts Buys ordered Hans Sleutelaar to write a very critical story on the riots, but he refused and was fired. 29) Instead, Koolhaas did the job, together with his colleagues Flothuis and Van Wansbeek. It was the Provo's use of violence, in particular, that led Koolhaas to attack them in the most cynical and sarcastical way. Entitled "Boredom and Leisure" and placed under the special new heading "Sociology/Politics", the interview portrays the Provos as a bunch of spoiled adolescents who have taken Constant's ideas about homo ludens a bit too literally. Appearing confused about their own motives, the Provos paradoxically come across as reactionary, rather than progressive. By recording their answers literally, the interviewers enhance this effect: HP:

No wonder sociologists call you reactionary: you resemble the people that lamented when in 1825 the first train rode between Stockton en Darlington in England.

Tuynman: No, individual man is definitely threatened by civilization. Sorry, I drop cigarette-ashes in the microphone of the tape-recorder. Man is threatened in his individuality by the developments in communication and in the sciences. And on this threat of the individuality our feeling of collectivity is founded. I admit, it sounds like a paradox. 30)

In the photograph that accompanies the interview, we see an elegantly dressed Rem Koolhaas in the center, suspiciously eyeing a group of long-haired, dirty, bearded and smoking Provos. From this article onwards, Koolhaas became much more prominent in HP, notably with a series of articles that criticized Provo, Hippies and people that inspired them -like Constant- or sympathized with them -like writer Harry Mulisch. 31)

### **1, 2, 3, enz.**

Like many of his colleagues at HP, Rem Koolhaas had a second career: he was in film, as a member of the group called 1, 2, 3 enz. . 1,2,3 enz. ( 1,2,3 etc. ) was a bratpack including Rene Daalder, Rem's friend since high school, and a group of his friends from the Amsterdam Film Academy. Rem's father, Anton Koolhaas a Dutch writer and novelist famous for his stories featuring animals was director of the Amsterdam Film Academy at the time. The composition and size of the group changed (hence the enz. ), but the most notorious other members were Frans Bromet -a cameraman who became nationally famous as the maker of innovative TV-documentaries-; Kees (now: Samuel) Meyering, who became rich as the inventor of the Rolykit, a special folding toolbox; and Jan de Bont - now known as the cameraman of Black Rain, and the maker of Hollywood blockbusters like Speed, Twister, and, most recently, The Haunting. Director Pim de la Parra and cameraman Robbie Muller -now known for his work with, among others, Wim Wenders and Jim Jarmusch- were also transient members.

1, 2, 3 enz. mocked anything considered fashionable in the sixties -especially anything that was personal, artistic, idealistic, or intellectual, like the art house cinema and notably the Cinema d'Auteur. For a film to have only one author seemed to them a nineteenthcentury idea. In three manifestoes, that were printed parallel above each other on the pages of the Dutch film magazine Skoop (as a reaction to earlier, negative critiques of Jack Clayton's 1965 film The Pumpkin Eater), Kees Meyering, Rene Daalder and Rem Koolhaas argued that films should be judged as teamwork – that actors, director, cameramen, screenplay writers and so on made equally important contributions to the final result. 32) They saw all of these roles as specializations in the filmmaking process, and believed that one person could combine several roles, or people could even switch from one role to another. That made it possible to adapt a crew to a budget and, as in a jazz band, to spontaneously start improvising and working. In their first film, 1, 2, 3 Rhapsodie from 1965, each participant shifted from cameraman, to actor, to director. But it was not all play and anarchy; on the contrary: the group was quite ambitious, believing that a film industry in Europe, similar to that of the US, could emerge.

### **The filmcombo**

1, 2, 3 enz. saw a chain of evidence that filmmaking was a collective effort. In the three interwoven

manifestoes in *Skoop*, Kees Meyering spoke of a new type of director – one who was not necessarily interested in making personal films, as Michelangelo Antonioni would be 33); Rene Daalder emphasized the creative role of individual actors and how the director could get the most out of them 34); and Koolhaas emphasized the importance of the screenplay writer. He thought that Dutch film had more in common with British film than with the French *Nouvelle Vague* and talked mainly about Harold Pinter. 35) A few years later, Jan de Bont analyzed the organization, the camerawork and the special effects on the set of Guy Hamilton's *The Battle of Britain* and published his findings in an extensive article in *Skoop*. 36) With their interest in teamwork and a professionalism, it is no coincidence that photographers like Jan de Bont and Frans Bromet developed into complete filmmakers, and director Rene Daalder became one of Hollywood's pioneers in digital technology. Also in 1965, Rem Koolhaas published one of his longest articles in HP, on Federico Fellini - one of the directors Kees Meyering had mentioned as the representative of a new type. The occasion of the article was Fellini's latest film, *Giulietta and the Spirits*, around his wife Giulietta Masina, who had appeared earlier in *La Strada*. Koolhaas' piece is one of the finest examples of sixties HP-journalism. It had to be, because, as it is revealed in the course of the article, Fellini did not really want to talk with Koolhaas at all. Koolhaas therefore puts all his energy into extensive and bizarre descriptions of Fellini's appearance, his office, the way in which he corrects an interview in *Playboy*, and his manner of dealing with other people-notably his barber, a lawyer and Koolhaas himself, who is sent out while the master is doing apparently senseless things in his room. Mystery, probably Fellini's most loved attribute, comes into play..... Because Fellini himself is not willing to speak, Koolhaas interviews Masina, adding plenty of malicious gossip, and Fellini's master decorator Piero Gherardi, who also appears to be completely filled with the most false gossip and apart from that celebrates his honeymoon with his false teeth, so that his lisping gives him something even more vicious. 37) All in all, Fellini is portrayed as an enigmatic, obstinate genius, surrounded by idiots and parasites, who strangely enough seem to have a great influence on his work –for better or for worse.

### **A sadistic universe**

Apart from the group's ideas about film as a collaborative effort, there was most certainly one other important influence on Koolhaas' thinking: the works of the Dutch writer Willem Frederik Hermans. Considered as the most important postwar Dutch writer, has built up a body of work in which the human existence is characterized by uncertainty: a chaotic, Sadistic Universe 38), as one of his most provocative collection of essays is titled, where man cannot distinguish his friends from his enemies, and where his enemy today could become his friend tomorrow. Heroes are people who have been reckless without being punished; idealism is a gamble - and it could very well be a wrong bet. It's no wonder, that Hermans was one of the few to praise Armando and Sleutelaar's *De SS -ers*: he himself had been the first to question the myth of Dutch heroism during the Second World War in many of his novels, short stories and plays. In the fifties and sixties, several Dutch filmmakers chose to base their screenplays on novels by Hermans. Generally very critical about those attempts, Hermans was prompted to write a series of polemical articles on Dutch film that were greatly enjoyed and admired by 1, 2, 3, enz.. Apart from Wittgenstein, whose *Tractatus* he would translate into Dutch in 1975, Hermans was influenced by Freud's discovery of the existence of the subconscious and its role in human behaviour. 39) According to Hermans, we could be hypnotized by the commercial media, but even our resistance to this posthypnotic influence is compulsory as a superficial investigation of alcoholics, vegetarians, abstinent, idealists, criminals and artists learns. Not one eccentric could come up with something completely new and by the way, who would appreciate that? Resistance is accepted within the framework of the docile whole. The traditional society carries the artist's society like some skyscrapers bear a baroque tower or a Morish villa on their roof. 40)

Hermans' novel *De Donkere Kamer van Damocles* (*The Dark Room of Damocles*) from 1958 is about the weak adolescent Henri Osewoudt, who, during the German occupation, gets to know a character called Dorbeck. 41) Dorbeck is Osewoudt's counterpart in everything; they look similar like a negative of a photograph looks like a positive, according to Osewoudt's wife. Because of him Osewoudt becomes a hero of the resistance -or at least



he thinks he does. Because, as it is typical in the work of Hermans, in the end the plot contains a crucial reversal or twist: immediately after the war, Osewoudt is imprisoned on accusation of betrayal. Only Dorbeck can prove his innocence, but he is not to be found. Osewoudt's last resort is a photograph that he had taken of Dorbeck and himself in front of a mirror. But when the film is found and he is finally allowed to develop it, the only picture on it is one of himself and an SS-Obersturmführer. When he runs away in disbelief and despair, shouting that his prosecutors should try to find Dorbeck, he is shot by the prison guards. The prosecutors laugh, the SS –prisoners yell murder! and the only a priest will believe Osewoudt and come to his aid. We are left to wonder whether Osewoudt has been a hero, a collaborator or has done it all for his own reasons. All evidence –even though it is circumstantial- is against him. In fact, the book never actually explains why Osewoudt follows Dorbeck's orders without question; indeed the Dutch reader –conditioned by the myth of Dutch heroism takes it for granted that Osewoudt's actions are intended as an act of resistance to the Germans. In the end, the novel tests the reader's stand on this myth; is he a pessimist or an optimist? De Donkere Kamer van Damocles opens with a story told by a school teacher to a class about a shipwrecked man, who has saved himself on a raft, but without anything to drink. The man resents the salt water that surrounds him, because he can't drink it. But when lightning strikes his mast and catches fire, he doesn't know how quickly to use the hated water to extinguish it. The teacher and the class laugh with the understanding that whether or not he succeeds in putting out the fire, he is doomed to die anyway. It is a parable that returns only a little bit different as Koolhaas' decadent plastic version, the Raft of Medusa, which plays such an enigmatic and crucial role in the fictional conclusion of Delirious New York. This time, Koolhaas explains in a foto caption, the shipwrecked soldiers only had wine to drink and in a premature and drunken panic started to cannibalize each other already on the second day of their journey. Saved on the 7th day of the shipwreck, they could easily have survived without eating anything at all. 42) In Delirious New York, The Raft of Medusa finally collides with the Pool of the constructivists. Optimism vs. pessimism. The steel of the pool slices through the plastic of the sculpture like a knife through butter, Koolhaas concludes. 43)

Rem Koolhaas greatly admired Hermans in the nineteen sixties and the influence Hermans had on his thinking can hardly be overestimated. In his manifesto *Een Delftsblauwe Toekomst in Skoop*, Koolhaas already suggested that one of Hermans novels should be made into a film. 44) When Hermans novel *Nooit meer slapen* (Never Sleep Again), came out in 1966, Koolhaas visited the author in Groningen and praised the book in a review in the *Haagse Post* where he applies the same twists in plot that are so characteristic of Hermans' plots. 43) Not long after that, in 1967, Hermans became a regular columnist of the *Haagse Post*; his first contributions were mainly about film, which could hardly have been a coincidence.

### **Rene Daalder**

Driving force behind 1, 2, 3, enz. was Koolhaas' youth friend Rene Daalder. His first short films were widely praised, both in the press and at festivals; in fact he and cameraman Jan de Bont were widely considered the greatest talents Dutch cinema had ever known. Daalder's first short movie, *Body and Soul* (1966), is set at a party given by a group of intellectuals, who ridicule one of the guests, a bodybuilder, because of his obsession with the corporal. They force him to undress or better, they rip off his clothes and make him pose as Atlas, bearing a study-globe on his shoulders. But when the party gets out of hand and their bantering becomes violent, it is the bodybuilder that saves the globe from being destroyed. The film has no dialogue, but a voice over that comments on the events. The film won several prizes at Dutch film festivals at the time and as such paved the way for the financing of larger projects. *Body and Soul 2* (1967), about a woman and her younger lover, won even more praise. In the reviews of the film, critics mentioned the work of W.F.Hermans, not only in reference to the film's use of melodrama, but also because of the reversals in the plot, that in the end save the movie from being a parody, and instead make it into a satire of a satire. What intellectuals would consider to be kitsch and clichés thus appear as people's deepest and most real desires, which are hence beyond mockery. Daalder's most ambitious project, *The White Slave*, became the most expensive Dutch film produced to that day.

The scenario was written by Daalder and Koolhaas together; director of photography was Oliver Wood, who worked more recently on films such as *Face Off*; and cameraman was again Jan de Bont. It premiered in 1969 at Amsterdam's Tuchinsky Theater (the producer rented a camel as a stunt), but Daalder and Koolhaas were not allowed to take their seats in the front row, because the security attendants thought they looked way too young to be the real director and scriptwriter. The protagonist of *The White Slave* is a good German with the unlikely name Günther Unrat (=danger), played by the then well-known German actor with the similarly unlikely name Günther Ungeheuer (=monster). Unrat, who had gone into hiding in the Netherlands during the war, returns, at the beginning of the film, to his former underground address. He is a sort of Simon Wiesenthal, searching not for more war criminals, but for other good Germans. This proves not to be easy, but Unrat is determined to compensate for all the bad things the Germans had done during the war. A drama develops or better a melodrama with a plot reminiscent of novels by W.F.Hermans, especially in the reversals. Unrat is persuaded by a mysterious Easterner (who claims to be a former assistant to Albert Schweizer and is played by the Israeli actor Issy Abrahami) to help him select girls who will be sent to an African brothel, where they will work as white slaves. Unrat and the girls are of course ignorant of their fate: they think the girls will be trained as nurses to work in overseas aid projects a wonderful ideal. After a short training session in Berlage's hunting lodge at the Hoge Veluwe, that involves what is for Unrat a confusing course in naturism, the girls are taken away by Abrahami and brought to an Arab brothel in the desert, where they perform belly-dances to the score of Antoine duHamel, known from ao. the films of François Truffaut. The film also features sex between people older than fifty a provocation and a gun in a drawer that is never used a mortal sin in scriptwriting according to Hitchcock, but also an inside joke referring to an essay W.F.Hermans wrote on Dutch film. 46) In fact, everything ultimately turns out differently than one would expect, but it comes as no surprise that all Unrat's ideals are shattered, and at the end of the film, his hair turns gray in one night. Although there is a general consensus today that *The White Slave* marked the moment Dutch cinema became mature, and Jan de Bont's camerawork was widely praised, it was an enormous flop commercially. In a way, the film's failure itself was the ironical proof of its underlying idea that ideals can always result in the opposite effect one might have hoped, because it is impossible to know the real motives on which people act.

### Architecture

So nothing indicated in 1966 that Koolhaas was interested in becoming an architect when he went to interview Constant. But only one year later, when the *Haagse Post* hired a new editor-in-chief, Koolhaas resigned after his series of four large articles on Sex in The Netherlands, based on intensive research, was heavily criticized. 47) He found new inspiration in a seminar on film and architecture at the university in Delft. One of the tutors there, Gerrit Oorthuys, had invited the 1,2,3, enz. group to participate, confessing that he was jealous of the work they did and of their as he presumed wild lifestyle. Koolhaas tried to convince him that filmmaking was actually an even more difficult, painstaking, and boring process than architecture and that architecture was in fact a more important occupation. Perhaps he went so far that he started to believe this himself; shortly after, he went to London to study at the AA School. As a student at the AA, Koolhaas would still occasionally write scripts with Rene Daalder. In an interview with AMC Koolhaas once stated that they collaborated, during this period, on projects with Russ Meyer, the King of Soft-Porn (in Koolhaas' own words), but this was more myth than reality. 48) Meyer made a series of films that play with the genres of pornographic, detective and exploitation movies, but in which everything turns out the other way one would expect: women with gigantic breasts appear as a kind of Nietzschean superwomen: absolute heroes, that are in complete control of the situation, both physically and mentally. Meyer often was not only the director, but also the cameraman and screenplay writer of his own movies. So in many ways, for Daalder and Koolhaas, he was almost the personification of the ideal filmmaker in the 1960's and 70's. Daalder collaborated with Meyer for several years and definitively settled in Hollywood. Occasionally Koolhaas would visit him in there and in the beginning of that period; Daalder and Koolhaas collaborated on a treatment for a film to be called *Hollywood Tower*. In that film Russ Meyer was supposed to play the last movie mogul. According to Rene Daalder, who even talked to



Chet Baker about doing the music, the story dealt with a pivotal moment in the future of Hollywood when real actors were going to be made obsolete by life like computer generated performers. Along, of course with digital studio back lots, lighting, etc. all of which would become artificial. Russ Meyer the King of the Nudies himself represented humanity's last stance. Edy Williams, his super busty sex goddess girlfriend at the time, and Tippi Hedren (of Hitchcock's *The Birds* and *Marnie*) were going to be the last human movie stars in Russ' film within the film. 49) From then on, Koolhaas and Daalder more and more went in increasingly separate directions. Koolhaas was not particularly fond of Los Angeles and Hollywood. He wrote his *Delirious New York*, established his name in architecture and finally returned to The Netherlands. Daalder decided to stay in Hollywood, where he collaborated with people like for example Malcolm McLaren and the Sex Pistols, but also made several films that gained a cult status and pioneered in music and digital technology.

### **A novelist**

Although Koolhaas rarely mentions this part of his personal history since producing his autobiographical novel *S,M,L,XL*, the cultural climate of the *Haagse Post*, filmmaking and the writings of W.F.Hermans made a lasting impression on his work and thinking, that is essentially journalistic and literary in nature. For Hermans, by the way, the only difference between 'journalistic' and 'literary' is that the journalist writes what the masses think and that the writer disputes what the masses think and brings to light what the masses do not dare to think. This does not mean he stands above the masses, but that there is a deeply hidden solidarity between them; a writer despises the masses as much as he despises himself: The reader hates himself in the writer, the writer hates himself in his protagonists. 50) In that sense Koolhaas is more a novelist than a journalist. The echo of Armando's manifesto can be heard when Koolhaas speaks about the method of OMA as a systematic idealization a systematic overestimation of what exists. 51) One of Koolhaas' earliest descriptions of the city as a plane of tarmac with some hot spots of intensity on it 52) is almost a description of a gigantic Armando painting; in his laudatory text "Typical Plan in *S,M,L,XL* he even hints at the hidden affinities between this kind of plan, that was so characteristic for the anonymous American skyscraper typical of the 1960's, with other contemporary movements in the arts: It is zero-degree architecture, architecture stripped of all traces of uniqueness and specificity. 53) About Koolhaas background in filmmaking a lot has been said, but here it is maybe good to emphasize that the most important contribution to architecture that originates from that field is the scenario. This scenario not only organizes the program of a building in a story with a plot, but the building itself is also part of a larger plot. A plot is a story that grows organically through what the protagonists of a novel or a film do. A plot is a literary rather than a visual influence – a story that grows organically through the actions and reactions of protagonists of a novel or a film. 54) It gives a possible, mythological order to reality - but it is never reality itself, which is essentially chaotic. The awareness of this unreal literary order is expressed in Koolhaas' preference for the paradox and the oxymoron that both connect seemingly different or even opposite phenomena.

### **Research**

The impression made on Koolhaas by Constant and the Situationists was filtered through his experiences prior to becoming an architect. So, however tempting it may be to speak about the influence Constant and the Situationists may have had on Koolhaas thinking as an architect through the obvious visual correspondences between some of the work of OMA and the models and drawings of *New Babylon*: the continuous folding floor planes, the use of constructions to define spaces instead of walls and the appearance of existing city-plans in collages of designs for other cities; though one could also point out the sculptural qualities of many OMA models that in their handcrafted detailing, their use of materials, and their scale come close to some models of *New Babylon*; however important it may seem to mention that many of OMA's models were built to be shown as photographs, rather than as objects, like those of Constant which were carefully constructed to reinforce the sense of the transitory 55); and despite the fact that they share(d) an interest in the rise of mega cities, a development that Constant already foresaw in the sixties; these parallels are all superficial.

Though these correspondences exist, they are caught up in completely different plots, in different readings of similar realities. Constant's New Babylon is an idealistic and artistic proposal for an architecture and urbanism for a future society, based on a reading and extrapolation of aspects of the present and an optimistic belief in the basic goodness of mankind - even if in some of his texts he does refer to criminality. His aim is to set free man's individual creativity - the ultimate proof of his goodness -, which was suppressed by a contemporary society that focuses on work and was reinforced by modern architecture and urbanism as promoted by the CIAM charters. He believed that his proposals could make a difference for the better. Koolhaas' architecture and urbanism consist of a reading and extrapolation of tendencies he reads in the present reality, but he is much more concerned about the subconscious forces that are at work than about good intentions and ideal orders. His criticism consists of putting these forces on the agenda in the way a journalist or a writer would do it with a forgotten war or the cover-up of a political scandal: by going there, doing research and reporting his findings. More and more, this research is becoming his most crucial contribution to architectural thinking, rather than the concrete architectural and urbanistic proposals and buildings of OMA - however interesting they may sometimes be. Of course these projects contain research just as well, but this research is hidden by the final result: the design proposal or the building. And it is difficult to say how that building will function in reality. Because of the many ungraspable and uncontrollable forces that are at work - forces largely related to sociology and psychology - and even a skepticism towards his own personal motives (which could very well be influenced by the same forces), Koolhaas realizes that it is meaningless and impossible to predict or control the future - which paradoxically is exactly what architecture tries to do. Reality can only be given a possible explanation in retrospect; Delirious New York is a retroactive manifesto and the conclusion is a fictional, literary proposal; S,M,L,XL is a novel, that concludes with a film scenario and a P.S. in the form of a project - the Jussieu Library - that was never built. 56)

## Constant 2

In a short introduction to the Haagse Post article of 1966, Koolhaas portrays Constant - with a deadly overdose of irrelevant details, as was so characteristic for his style of writing at the time - as a hilarious caricature of the prototypical artist the Heertjes loved to hate. We learn that Constant drives a Duck (from Ugly Duck, the Dutch name for a Citroen 2CV, the stereotypical car for people with an alternative lifestyle in the sixties); that he is an enthusiastic, dark-haired, beer-drinking erudite who lives with his wife and daughter in an apartment on the ground floor in a petty bourgeois neighborhood in Amsterdam; that they share this apartment with a German Shepard named Hertha, a big hairy monkey that unfortunately became lifethreateningly dangerous, some parrots, and three cats; that he plays harp, violin, dulcimer, balalaika, and especially guitar in his spare time; that there is no television in the house; that this son of a civil servant who sometimes quotes Marx, that he went to a Jesuit high school and believes that in New Babylon people will not space out on drugs, because it will be a kind of paradise in itself. 57) The style of this portrait is similar to the one Koolhaas' former brother-in-arms, the cameraman Frans Bromet, would use in later years when shooting interviews for the VPRO television: not filming the talking head, but focusing on silly movements of his hands or stupid details in the interior and by doing so completely undermining the speaker's authority. This also means that Koolhaas clearly envisaged Constant as such an authority. The only remarkable thing we learn about New Babylon in Koolhaas' introduction in the Haagse Post is that Constant is building his giant model to make a film, which according to him is the ideal way to get near the reality of New Babylon. 58) The interview itself opens with cynical questions like What would be the use of a world in which everyone could play and be creative if people wouldn't want that? and: We can imagine that if you can and may go everywhere, in the long run it wouldn't be a challenge to move anymore. Especially if the differences in nature disappear. Wouldn't traveling become so senseless then, that nobody would have the spunk for it anymore? In this sense, the interview with Constant foreshadows the critique of sixties radical architecture that Koolhaas would present in Exodus, his final project at the AA. In fact, Exodus can be seen more as a critique of New Babylon than of Archigram: a series of sectors projected over London, each with a strong, artificially created ambience, where happenings could take place.

Exodus is caught in a literary plot that pays tribute to both W.F.Hermans and Superstudios' The Twelve Ideal Cities in the way it puts both itself and the expectations and presumptions of the reader into question. 59) But then a shift occurs in the interview. As the conversation develops, Constant brilliantly manages to turn their sarcastic questions around: New Babylon, he explains, is not designed to change the world, but is an answer to, or an outcome of, how the world and lifestyles would actually evolve. During the course of the interview, New Babylon becomes less a Utopian project and more an inevitable reality something that is already happening, even without a design. Suddenly, it comes close to the acceptance and intensification of reality that Armando demanded in his manifesto. It also comes close to what Koolhaas would write 30 years later about the Generic City: that it is sociology, happening. 60)

### Now reverse the film

But, "The Generic City" can also be read as a remake - in movie terms - of Society of the Spectacle, written by Constant's former situationist brother-in-arms Guy Debord and first published in 1967. 61) Even the way the aphorisms and pieces of text are numbered is similar, though it is void of Debord's moralistic interpretation and criticism. In 1973 Debord made a film with the same name that was based on this text, and at the end of "The Generic City" Koolhaas asks us to "imagine a Hollywood movie about the Bible" set in "a city somewhere in the Holy Land". 62) As in a scenario-concept he paints us a hilariously lively and chaotic market scene, laden with minutiae (hairpieces dripping with glue) and couleur locale, that can be understood as a metaphor for Debord's film. And just as in many Hollywood remakes of European films, the moral of Generic City is quite different than of the original, although it deals with the same issues. At the end, Koolhaas asks us to switch off the sound and to reverse the film. The now mute but still visibly agitated men and women stumble backward; the viewer no longer registers only humans but begins to note spaces between them. The center empties; the last shadows evacuate the rectangle of the picture frame, probably complaining, but fortunately we don't hear them. Silence is now reinforced by emptiness: the image shows empty stalls, some debris that was trampled underfoot. Relief.... it's over. That is the story of the city. The city is no longer. We can leave the theater now.... 63) This is no longer a Hollywood movie about the city as seen by Debord, but a Hollywood movie about a city as seen by a kind of contemporary Alexis de Tocqueville. Didn't Tocqueville ask us to turn down the picture he paints of a mediocre American literature in Democracy in America and consider the other side of it, that its authors spring from the bosom of the heterogeneous and agitated mass of the new democracy? And didn't he suggest that if the Romans had been better acquainted with the laws of nature, they wouldn't have produced their monumental cities? A people that left no other vestige than a few leaden pipes in the earth and a few iron rods on its surface might have been more the master of nature than the Romans, he even says in his defense of American architecture. 64) The Generic City will leave almost nothing behind for archeologists. Koolhaas already warns us in the first chapter: It is superficial - like a Hollywood studio lot, it can produce a new identity every Monday morning. 65) In the Generic City, Debord's Society of the Spectacle has become reality (without anyone complaining). But Constant's New Babylon has become reality as well, only the artificially created ambiances and collective creativity have resulted in commercial junkspace (TM), and the overall sculptural design is lost. This must be the zero degree of urbanism: Nietzsche lost out to Sociology 101. 66)

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### Footnotes

- 1) Rem Koolhaas, The Terrifying Beauty of the Twentieth Century, in: O.M.A., Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, S,M,L,XL, Rotterdam, 1995.
- 2) Rem Koolhaas in an interview with Patrice Noviant and Bruno Vayssière, AMC 6, december 1984.
- 3) Rem Koolhaas and Betty van Garrel, De stad van de toekomst. HP-gesprek met Constant over New Babylon, Haagse Post, 6 August, pp.14-15.
- 4) Cherry Duyns als geciteerd door Annejet van der Zijl in: Rem Koolhaas, HP/De Tijd, 23-10-1992, pp.30-41.

- 5) In a conversation with the author, Rem Koolhaas described this experience as important for his career as an architect, as he had to deal very quickly with the material different composers would bring to a table. Decisions for one page would have direct consequences for another.
- 6) ao. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York, 1994; Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, London, 1994; Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon, The Hyper-Architecture of Desire*, Rotterdam, 1998.
- 7) Mark Wigley, see note 5; Sandford Kwinter, question after a lecture of Rem Koolhaas, *Architectural Association*, London, 26-01-1999; Dirk van den Heuvel, *Occupation of desires, Concerning the sudden topicality of the Situationists*, ARCHIS1999/2 pp72-78; Domeniek Ruyters, *Playstation, Constant's New Babylon, MetropolisM* 1999/1, pp.28-33.
- 8) Rem Koolhaas, *Junkspace (TM)*, .....
- 9) See note 1.
- 10) PROVO was an ungraspable movement, something between a series of "happenings" inspired by Fluxus and the situationsits, and a spontaneous mass movement of mainly young people. In the course of time, stimulated by the repressive forces of the authorities before "repressive tolerance" was invented, it had an important impact on local politics in Amsterdam. On a national level, it greatly influenced the mentality of a whole generation.
- 11) See Wigley, note 6.
- 12) Idem.
- 13) Idem.
- 14) Idem.
- 15) See ao. Bart Lootsma, *Kunst onder de vleugels van de architectuur*, ARCHIS 12, 1987.
- 16) John Jansen van Galen & Hendrik Spiering, *Rare Jaren, Nederland en de Haagse Post 1914-1990*, Amsterdam, 1993
- 17) Idem.
- 18) For example Jan Cremer is now a known bestseller writer and painter, Jan Vrijman is a filmmaker, Trino Flothuis and Cherry Duyns became famous as makers of unconventional documentaries and the latter of absurdist programmes for VPRO-television, together with Armando.
- 19) Armando and Sleutelaar themselves deny by the way that *De Nieuwe Stijl* is a reaction to Cobra en De Vijftigers is. See: Armando and Sleutelaar, *Aanwijzingen voor de pers, 1965/66*, published again in: Sjoerd van Faassen en Hans Sleutelaar (ed.), *de nieuwe stijl*, Amsterdam, 1989.
- 20) Armando, *Een internationale primeur, 1964*, published again in: *de nieuwe stijl*, see note 17.
- 21) Rem Koolhaas was one of the initiators and judges of a competition for a "House With No Style", organized by Japan Architect magazine in the early 1990s.
- 22) See note 14.
- 23) Armando, *Aanwijzingen voor de pers*, see note 17.
- 24) Jan Kuitenbrouwer, as quoted in *Rare Jaren*, see note 14.
- 25) Rem Koolhaas, *Architectuur/Een woonmachine, Le Corbusier kreeg f 5000,-*, *Haagse Post* 3 October 1964, pp.24.
- 26) See note 17.
- 27) Bart Lootsma, Rem Koolhaas, *In search of the new modernity*, *DOMUS* 800, January 1998.
- 28) Armando & Sleutelaar, *de SS-ers*, Amsterdam, 1967.
- 29) See note 14.
- 30) Rem Koolhaas, Trino Flothuis, Van Wansbeek, *Sociologie/Politiek Verveling & Vrijtijtsbesteding*. HP-gesprek door Flothuis, Van Wansbeek en Koolhaas met de Provo Actie-groep, *Haagse Post* July 9, 1966, pp.6/7.
- 31) See ao.: Rem Koolhaas, see note 28; Rem Koolhaas, see note 3; Rem Koolhaas, Trino Flothuis, *Politiek/Literatuur, Honingbijen & Horzels*, HP-gesprek met Harry Mulisch, September 24, 1966, pp.8; Rem Koolhaas, *Amsterdamse Hippies: Liefde voor iedereen*, *Haagse Post* 54/30, July 29, pp.8/9.
- 32) Kees Meyering, *Naar een Vérité*; Rene Daalder, *Naar een kompromisloze bioskoopfilm-avantgarde*; Rem

- Koolhaas, Een Delftsblauwe toekomst; all three in: Skoop, III-1, May 1965, pp. 14-21; See also: Rene Daalder, Rond een misverstand: Greta Garbo, Skoop III-2, June 1965, pp.32-33.
- 33) Idem.
- 34) Idem
- 35) Idem
- 36) Jan de Bont, The Battle of Britain, Skoop V-9, March 1969, pp.24-37.
- 37) Rem Koolhaas en Lili Veenman, Film. Een dag Fellini. Hij doet altijd dingen die men niet verwacht , Haagse Post 24, December 31, 1965, pp.39/41. The article has some similarities in approach with Koolhaas later portrait of John Portman in: Atlanta, Journalism, 1987/1994, in S,M,L,XL, see note 1.
- 38) W.F.Hermans, Het Sadistische Universum, Amsterdam, 1964.
- 39) W.F.Hermans, Antipathieke romanpersonages, see note 36.
- 40) Idem.
- 41) W.F.Hermans, De Donkere Kamer van Damocles, Amsterdam, 1958.
- 42) Rem Koolhaas, fotocaption The Raft of Medusa, in: Welfare Palace Hotel (1976), Delirious New York, London/New York, 1978, pp.252.
- 43) Rem Koolhaas, The Story of the Pool, see note 40.
- 44) See note 30.
- 45) Rem Koolhaas, Ik ben heel zielig. W.F.Hermans en zijn Nooit Meer Slapen , Haagse Post, March 12, 1966, pp.22.
- 46) W.F.Hermans, De filmmakers en de over Witte Paters, see note 36.
- 47) Zie noot 14; Rem Koolhaas and Henk Meulman, Sex in Nederland, Deel 1, Haagse Post 54/3, August 5, 1967, pp. 6/8; Sex in Nederland Deel 2, De Adviseurs. Straks voorlichting via tv, Haagse Post 54/32, August 12, 1967, pp.14/15; Sex in Nederland Deel 3, de Afwijkingen, Haagse Post 54/33, August 19, 1967, pp.16/17; Sex in Nederland Deel 4, De Meisjes, Haagse Post 54/34, August 26, 1967.
- 48) Zie noot 2.
- 49) Rene Daalder in an E-mail to the author 07-08-1999.
- 50) W.F.Hermans, see note 37.
- 51) See note 1.
- 52) Rem Koolhaas in an unpublished paper for the Architectural Association School of Architecture, London, 1969, as presented in a lecture by Elia Zenghelis in a lecture at the Architectural Association School on the occasion of AA 150, London, 1996.
- 53) Rem Koolhaas, Typical Plan, see note 1.
- 54) W.F.Hermans, Een Nederlandse detectivefilm, see note 36.
- 55) Mark Wigley, see note 5.
- 56) Rem Koolhaas, see note 8 and note 40.
- 57) See note 3
- 58) Idem
- 59) Rem Koolhaas, Exodus, see note 8; Superstudio Gli Dodici Città Ideali, Casabella 361, 1972.
- 60) Rem Koolhaas, Generic City, see note 8.
- 61) See note 5.
- 62) See note 58.
- 63) Idem.
- 64) Alexis de Tocqueville, Literary Characteristics of Democratic Times and Why the Americans Raise Some Insignificant Monuments and Others That Are Very Grand, in: Democracy in America, Volume 2, New York, 1990.
- 65) See note 58.
- 66) Idem.