

Anyone

Campus Center

Author(s): Rem Koolhaas

Source: *ANY: Architecture New York*, No. 24, Design After Mies: BOXING THE LONG SHADOW AT IIT (1999), pp. 44-51

Published by: Anyone Corporation

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856298>

Accessed: 14-08-2017 09:23 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Anyone Corporation is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *ANY: Architecture New York*



24.44

Michael Speaks

The Singularity of OMA

Drawing heavily on Gilles Deleuze's studies of the cinema, Bernard Cache proposes in his book *Earth Moves* that architecture is the art of constructing literal frames and frames of probability, each of which, in its own way, creates the conditions for the emergence of new life. He writes:

One must delimit an interval in which a form of life that doesn't fit a priori in its milieu will occur. For life naturally transpires in the intervals of matter. Life is that intercalary phenomena that causes alone can never produce; at best, we can try to circumscribe frames of probability. The causes of life always escape us, which is why we can only provide niches in which it can take place.¹

Cache argues that in creating these niches, architecture first separates what will become its creation from its external milieu and then reconnects it in such a way as to trigger the emergence of new life. Architecture first isolates, then selects an interval from its exterior, then arranges this interval in such a way as to increase the probability of an intended effect. As life cannot be directly caused, only directed, framing thus

entails calculated cuttings and intercuttings which cannot insure but can make more probable the emergence of "the new." Again, Cache writes:

One never knows how the interval will be filled; otherwise, everything that is known about the interval would cross over to the side of the cause, and all one would have done is to define a more restricted frame of probability. And if, by any chance, no indeterminacy remained in the interval, the cause would become identical to the effect and nothing new could happen at all.²

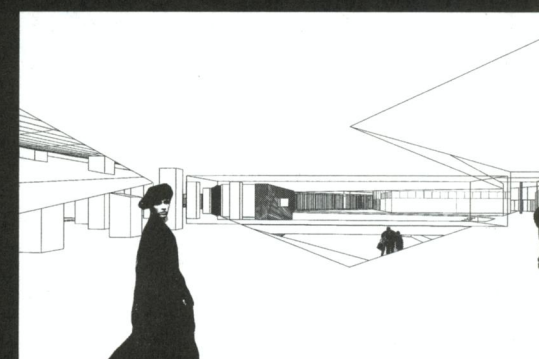
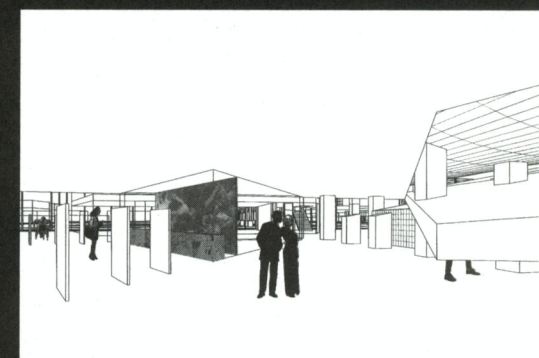
The greater the interval, gap, or hollow, the less control one has over the final outcome but the greater the probability of creating the new. Architecture, Cache suggests, thus introduces the new by creating frames within which unpredictable urban life forms emerge.

Now it is just such a practice that has guided Rem Koolhaas and the Office for Metropolitan Architecture in their development of an entirely singular, postformalist approach to

the historical dead ends of modernism and postmodernism. And it is precisely this approach – and not any single design – that makes OMA so important to those in search of a global, yet singular architecture whose performative range extends from the affective to the scientific, from, as it were, the sensual pleasures of *Living* to the analytical rigor evinced in recent urban projects for Hanoi, Seoul, Los Angeles, and Schiphol. What must be said from the outset is that OMA's disposition or approach to the practice of architecture is concerned not so much with forms or objects but with shaping the conditions under which forms or objects emerge; concerned not with the application of philosophical concepts or with purely affective formal qualities, but with the discovery and production of concepts, affects, and analyses which may in turn be used to direct the form of OMA's practice of architecture. OMA thus develops and makes use of what Koolhaas in *Delirious New York* calls "a

position, to which I shall turn momentarily, and "Bigness," their most important conceptual product, thus always exceed even the XL-scale and float over all their projects, shaping and influencing their means of production while never descending to the level of architectural form.

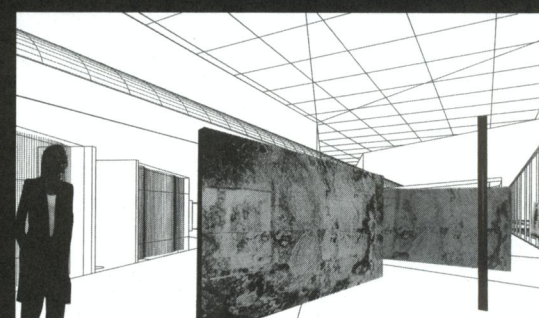
OMA's cinematic disposition is illustrated very precisely in one of Koolhaas's diary entries in *S, M, L, XL*, where he writes ostensibly about the first formal drawing made of the Très Grande Bibliothèque in Paris, but which is really a comment on the entire OMA apparatus itself: "Astonishingly absurd, astonishingly beautiful. Beyond all exploitation, there is also altruism at work: OMA – machine to fabricate fantasy – is structured for others to have the eureka."⁴ OMA's carnivalesque bureaucracy is framed so as to create the conditions under which others make the discoveries. A relatively large institutional interval is isolated and selected, insuring both less control over the actual eureka but also a greater probability of the production of that eureka. And it is this practice of creating conceptual and literal frames that makes Koolhaas one of the most influential architectural thinkers and OMA one of the most important firms of the late 20th century (it is also, I hasten to add, what makes their work inimitable). Indeed, in spite of his attempts to develop an account of what he calls the more properly architectural



24.45

mutated architecture no longer obsessively committed to form making but to the creation of conditions, the fabrication of content – script writing by tectonic means."³ OMA was chosen the winner of the IIT competition for the design of its new campus center in Chicago, for example, not necessarily because they had the best design (which they arguably did) but because their architectural disposition was best suited to intervene in a situation which required (and still requires) a singular design approach, not a singular design (which is arguably the hallmark of Peter Eisenman's stunning entry). What is always on display in an OMA design is the approach, not the solution, which, in any case, is subject to change over time. OMA's practice of framing, their general cinematic dis-

importance of the work of OMA, Jeffrey Kipnis, in an article on their recent work, comes to the same conclusion. His reading of OMA's use of site, program, form, construction, and materials leads him to concur with them in asking, "What is a university library today but a surface on which to locate books and computers and a path to bring the public to them? What is an art museum but a version of the same organization, a surface to display the art and a path for the public to reach it?"⁵ Thus, as Kipnis argues, OMA reduces architecture to an infrastructural practice of framing planar surfaces into recognizably generic forms – such as parking ramps – but it does so in such a way as to encourage the event-structure (those unexpected, unprogrammable occurrences) to exceed both programmatic and formal requirements. But for Kipnis, this reduction of architecture to framing – Kipnis calls it "disestablishment" – sometimes goes too far, as in the Extension of the Tate Gallery in London, about which he offers the unfavorable observation that "the OMA scheme has as little to do with architecture as it does with the Museum. It is a work of urban infrastructure whose core strategy is organization, whose techniques belong to engineering and whose fundamental measure is not aesthetic quality, but performance over time at maximum use." Of course Kipnis is right. But it all depends on what is meant by



1. Bernard Cache, *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories*, trans. Anne Boyman, ed. Michael Speaks (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995), 24.
2. *Ibid.*, 23.
3. Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S, M, L, XL* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1995), 665.
4. *Ibid.*, 644.
5. Jeffrey Kipnis, "Recent Koolhaas" in OMA/Rem Koolhaas 1992–1996, *El Croquis* (1996), 79: 26–37.

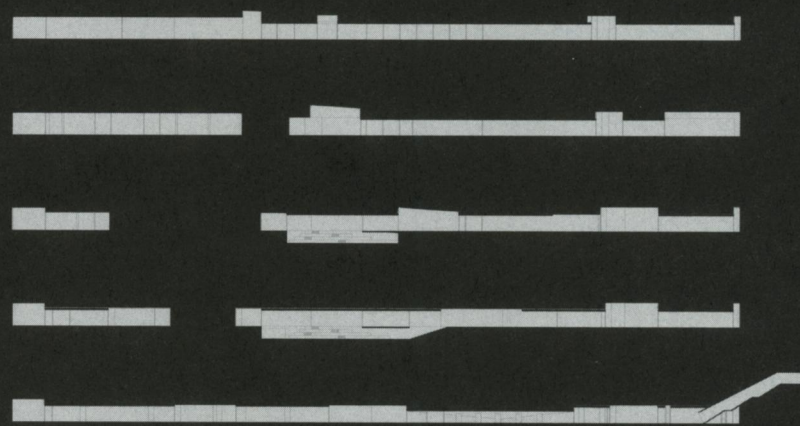
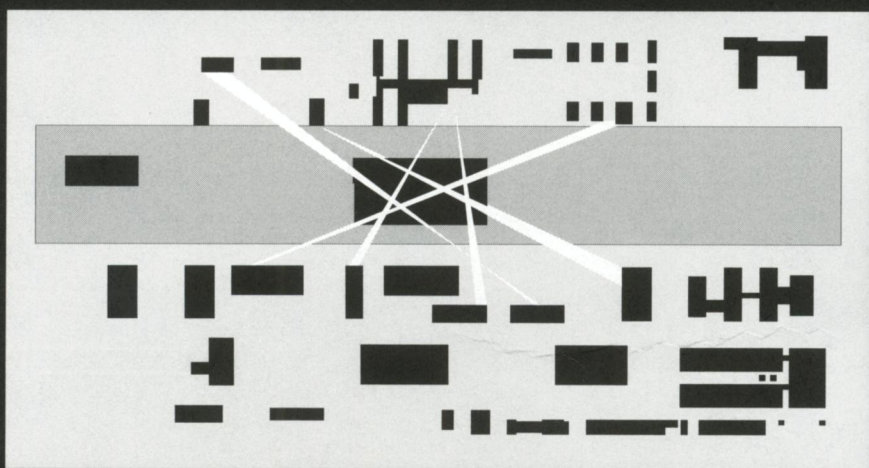
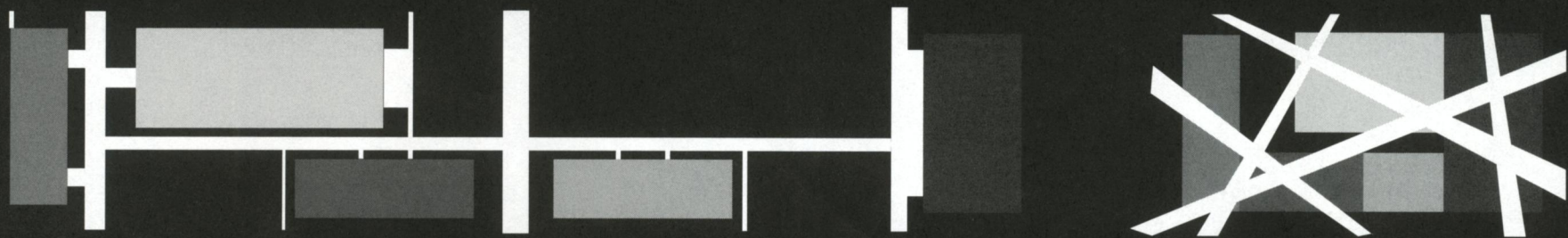
performance, for the aesthetic itself can always be said to have a performative dimension. OMA was thus not so much concerned with form, aesthetics, or technique, except to the extent that these contributed to creating the conditions under which art is freed from the nostalgic, auratic constraints imposed by traditional museum architecture, and treated as if it were itself part of the urban infrastructure. Continuing a process begun at the Kunsthal, in Rotterdam, and refined in the Tate competition, OMA's design for the Museum of Modern Art expansion competition goes even further to democratize the consumption of art by making its affective flows more accessible – via escalators, ramps, and other means of conveyance – to those with shallow pockets and short, if not altogether nonexistent, art-historical attention spans. Koolhaas's recent shopping research conducted at Harvard will no doubt result in designs which push this logic to an even more extreme state of affairs.

And yet, architectural freedom is not attained so freely. Koolhaas discovers in the frame the potential for creating freedom through limitation. As Deleuze reminds us about the cinema, framing is necessarily limitation; it partitions, selects, and subtracts all that is extraneous to the production of an intended effect, all that is "out-of-field," as it were. Deleuze also reminds us that there are two kinds of framing: one the limits of which are determined by the frame itself, and the other which is open to an exterior, to what Deleuze calls an open totality. There is perhaps no better example than Koolhaas's comparison of the houses of Mies van der Rohe and the Schroeder House by Rietveld, that paragon of Dutch modernism. Koolhaas argues that while the Schroeder House appears to offer liberation with its almost infinity of movements and combinations, its ostensible richness and lack of restraint overstimulates and stifles, leaving us with a claustrophobic freedom that is not freedom at all. Like all Dutch modernism, the Schroeder House is unwilling or unable to leave vacant, to allow emptiness to act as a condition for freedom. As Koolhaas writes, "The Schroeder House is filled up . . . full of meaning and intentions, desires, things, full of color, or at least paint." Mies's houses, on the other hand, offer a kind of freedom which is attained precisely by a combination of limitation and restraint, of omnipotence and impotence, where nothingness is placed in relation to something substantial, where heaviness is paired with what floats in the air." Koolhaas sums up the differences with the following question: "Does there exist a freedom that is binding and in con-

"The issue of the IIT Campus is how to inhabit a given territory with half the population that animated it in the 70s. To us the conundrum implies a building that is able to (re)urbanize the largest possible area with the least amount of (built) substance. . . . By not stacking activities, but by positioning each programmatic particle as part of a dense mosaic, our building contains the urban condition itself. . . . Without fragmenting the building itself, each of the constituent parts can be articulated according to its specific needs, positioned to respond precisely to contextual influence, placed for maximum exposure and impact, creating neighborhoods – 24 hour, commercial, entertainment, academic, utilitarian – parks and other urban elements in miniature."

trast something that fixes in order to liberate?" Koolhaas's answer, as is often the case, is affirmative: Mies fixes in order to open up avenues of freedom while Rietveld stifles by offering what appears to be infinite choice. Something of the same could be said about Koolhaas's own houses, especially the recently completed villa in Bordeaux, conceptually centered, as it is, on the freedom of movement offered its wheelchair-bound occupant. Victim of a near fatal car crash, the client required a paradox: home with an easily accessed, near metropolitan quotient of freedom and movement. "I do not want a simple house, I want a complex house, because the house will define my world."⁶ It was to be, as might have been remarked during discussions between client and architect, a true machine for living. Koolhaas provided this mixture of freedom and fixity by stacking three houses one on top of another and puncturing the stack with an elevator fitted with a vertical office whose pistonlike movement within the shaft exponentially expanded the chair-bound client's avenues of freedom. The heavy stack and all its sensual pleasures are thus made available to the client, whose own heaviness and horizontal movement is transformed by the lift into a condition of lightness and mobility. Horizontal and vertical possibilities are multiplied when one crosses the other. Movement induced by fixity with a machine at its heart. A niche of contemporary urban life created on a mountaintop overlooking a medieval city.

Deleuze also reminds us that framing always entails a deframing. Framing, at least the dynamical kind Deleuze supports, always faces two ways: it is oriented toward its own framed enclosure, but it is also oriented toward the open totality of the urban itself. And this is where framing differs from the formal design strategies of postmodernism, deconstructivism, and folding, which only rearrange a fixed set of preexistent forms. Unlike framing, which creates niches, these communication-based formalist techniques "fill-in" all the hollows of matter within which new life emerges. Deconstructivism, postmodernism, and folding inhabit a closed totality, while framing hovers on the frontier between its framed composition and its chaotic exterior, allowing in just enough of a fresh breeze to sustain life but not enough that it reduces the planar house to a pile of rubble. But what opens framing to the exterior? What adds life to the frame? With each architect it is different. For Koolhaas it is the torsion of Bigness. For Bigness is the active expression of the relation between architecture and urbanism, of the micro and the molar, the interior



and the exterior, as philosopher Alain Badiou reminds us. Bigness is the event-condition under which architecture rubs against its urban exterior, shaping, and in turn being shaped by, the incalculable flux of the city. On one side of Bigness's abstract membrane there is the composed chaos of ultimate architecture, and on the other the wild chaos of market-driven hypermodernization, which chews up conventional architecture with reckless abandon.

But where did Bigness come from? Koolhaas made what appears to be an amazing discovery in Bigness, though, he admits, Bigness was not so much a discovery as a dumb, empirical fact that once served as the unwritten ideology of Manhattanism and that reemerged, like an iceberg on the surface of the new reality of the new Europe, in the mid-1980s. Suddenly, Bigness was just there, like America, and Mt. Everest. As brute, quantitative force, Bigness lay dormant in the American architectural psyche, its power as a virtual shaper of urban reality undiminished. Surely this is what Deleuze means when he says that the virtual is real though inexpressible in form. Bigness was there, it was real, but needed new conditions and a new friend before it could become a catalyst for the emergence of a new species of architecture. That was Koolhaas's discovery in *Delirious New York*, made during the semiology dominated '70s and '80s, a climate in which only an architectural innocent such as Koolhaas could take Bigness seriously. While everyone was clamoring to understand how French theory could be used to write a new manifesto, a set of principals about what architecture could be, Koolhaas was content to ghostwrite the story of what American architecture had *already done*.

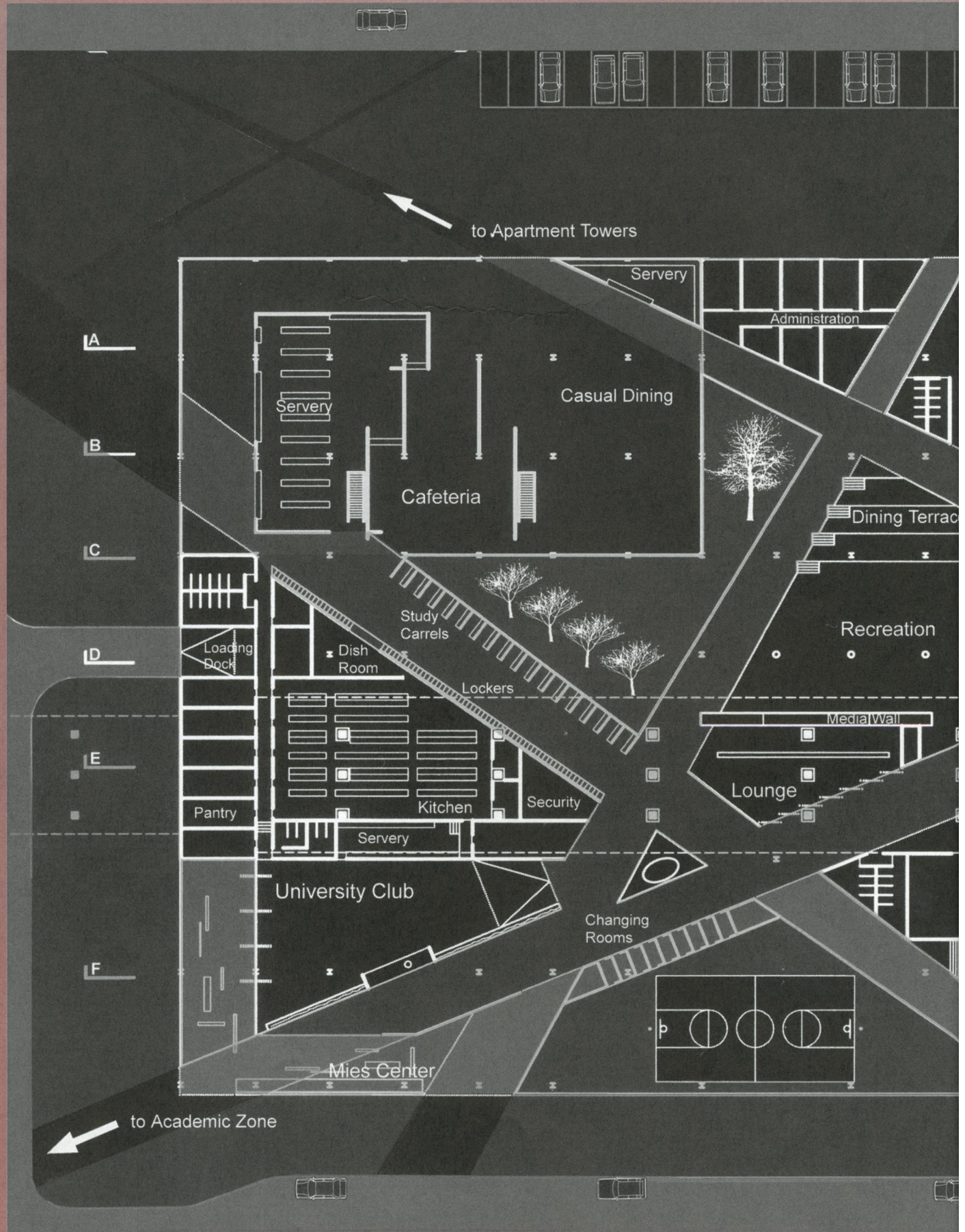
By rigorous analysis, Koolhaas thus extracts from its American milieu the conceptual frame of Bigness – the unwritten ideology of *Delirious New York* – which he employs to direct and make probable the emergence of new urban life in the new Europe, Asia, and now, on a return trip to Chicago and Los Angeles, in America. Bigness is thus not represented in or by any single OMA project, but is implicated in the hollows of all of their projects, in the zones free of architecture as we know it. Bigness offers architecture the chance to make architectural interventions without littering the urbanscape with ever more architecture. We observe this in the absence of conventional architectural intervention in projects such as OMA's urban plan for Melun-Senart, about which Koolhaas writes, "A system of bands – linear voids – is inscribed on the site like an enormous Chinese figure. We propose to invest most of the energies needed for the development of Melun-Senart in the protection of these bands,

in maintaining their emptiness." Having refused the schizophrenic directives of urban planning history to fill in all the space on the urban canvas, Koolhaas affirmatively shapes urban form and the form of its incalculable interactions by creating bands, voids, islands, and other framing devices which give emergent life forms a chance to breathe. Absence of architecture thus gives all of OMA's urban schemes what Deleuze calls "a body, a life, a universe," which may be peopled by architectures of all varieties.

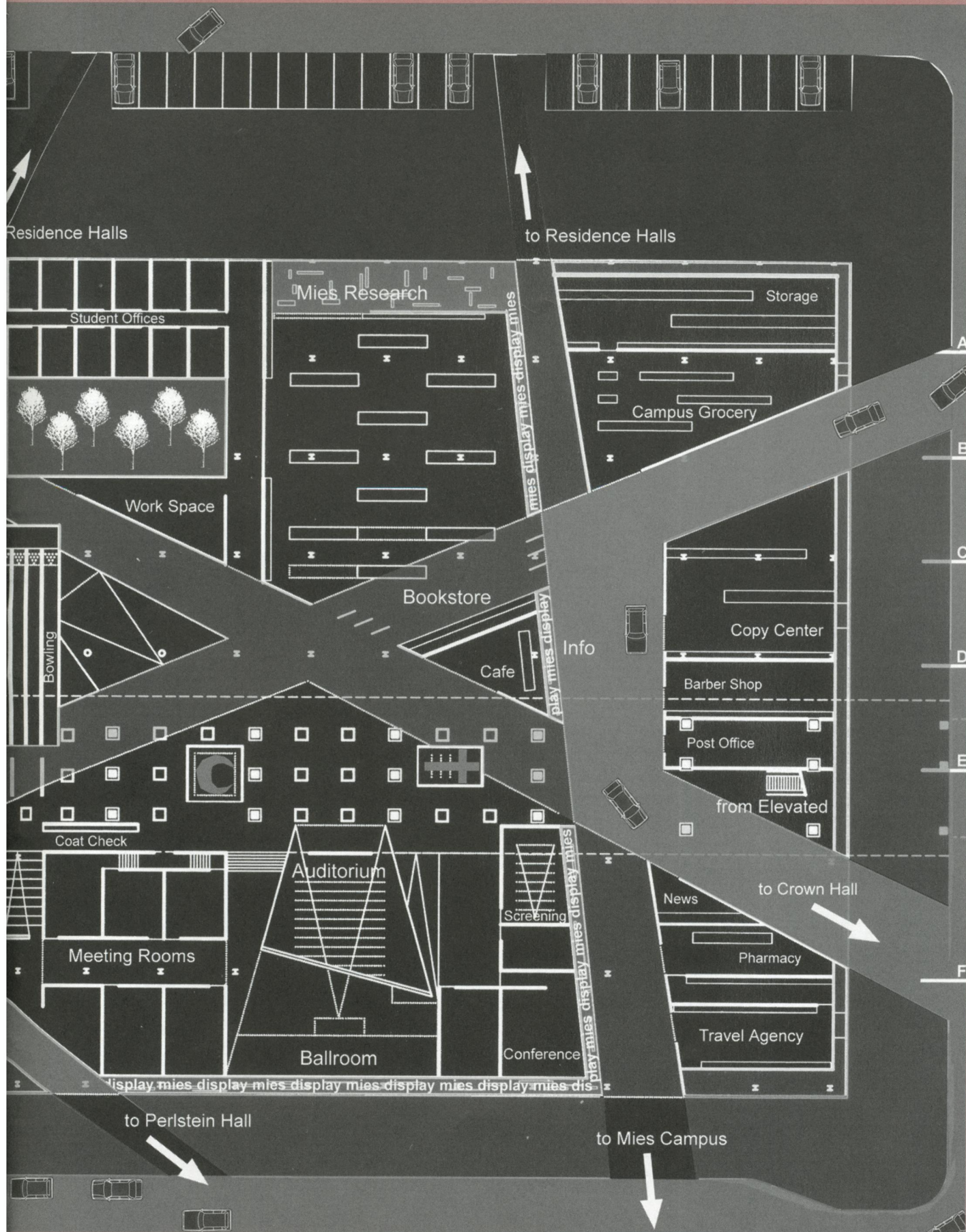
Koolhaas continues the hyperrationalist analytical tradition of surrealism, especially its "paranoid-critical" method, which frames and then deframes a controlled disorder within OMA's projects and forms the basis for their "metropolitan architecture." Complementing this, Koolhaas and OMA have developed the "Big Building" as a way to frame and deframe chaotic order in urban chaos. OMA combines this rigorous analytical method with a logic of breaking and binding what Manuel Castells calls "the space of flows" to construct large-scale urban ensembles, fluid and immersed life forms which intervene in and reconfigure those flows. Recent projects such as the Educatorium in Utrecht, the Netherlands, or the Dutch Embassy in Berlin, are as concerned with shaping fluid urban and posturban movements as were earlier projects, such as the now famous unbuilt Zebrugge Maritime Terminal, which proposed to gather and redistribute the flow of sea and land traffic across the Channel, or the Kunsthal in Rotterdam, whose undulatory system of ramps dissolves the clear distinctions between art and nature, commercial and leisure, creating an artificial world that is carried outward into its surrounds by its pedestrian traffic flows. OMA thus captures or frames the hidden order that informs an existent urban condition, creating in the process autonomous, artificial urban ecologies.

OMA's practice of framing is ultimately not about form but about the form and shape of architectural practice in a world that demands complexly configured order of a kind that proliferates into autonomous worlds of unknown freedom. It is also a political matter, but one which insists that we recognize it is the absolute and unprejudiced fluidity of global capital which courses through the capillaries of all living matter, and not a lack of vision, will, or critical distance, that today makes architectural politics such a complex matter. Intervening in this global space of flow will produce the only architectures worthy of the name political, global, or modern.

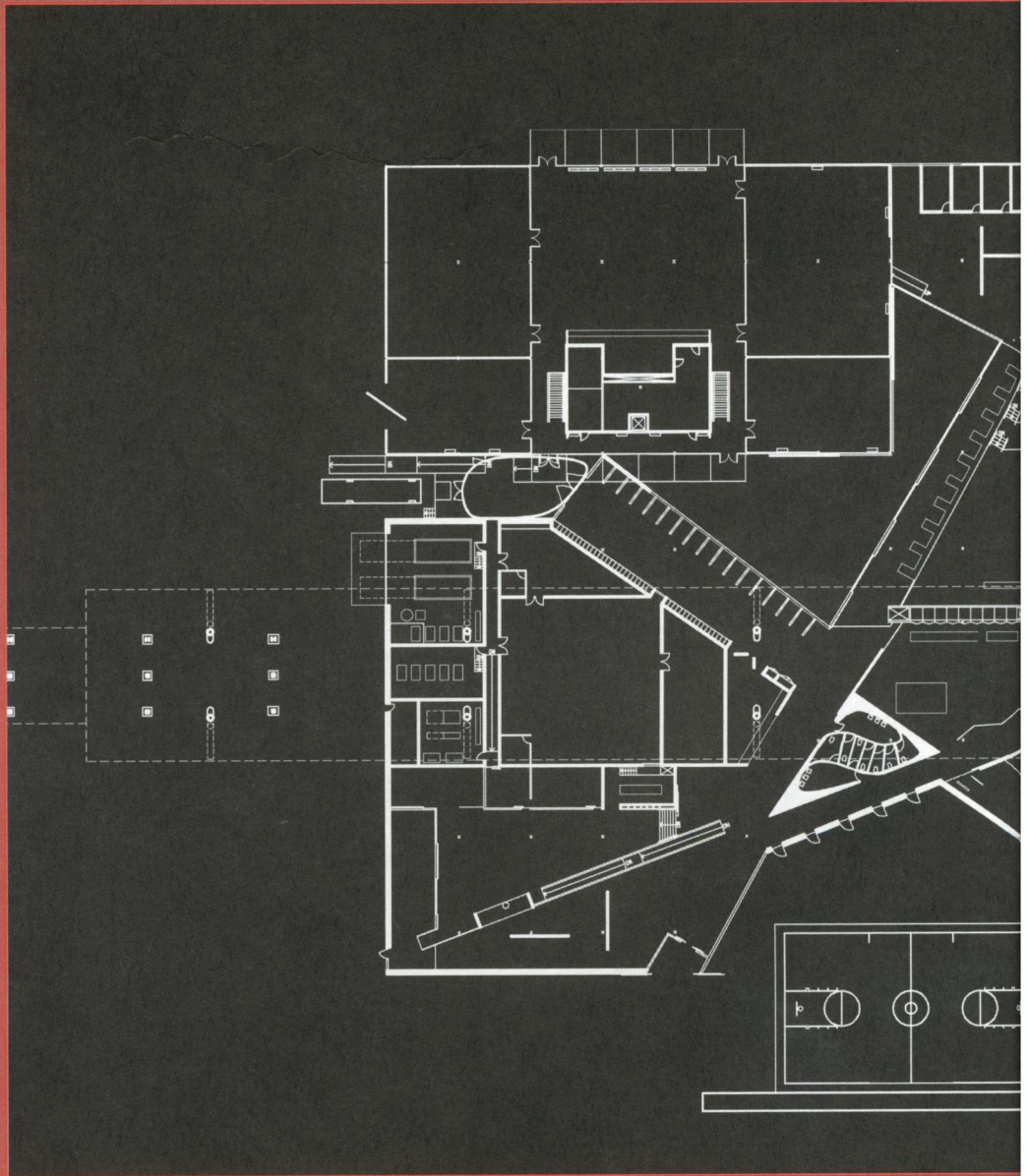
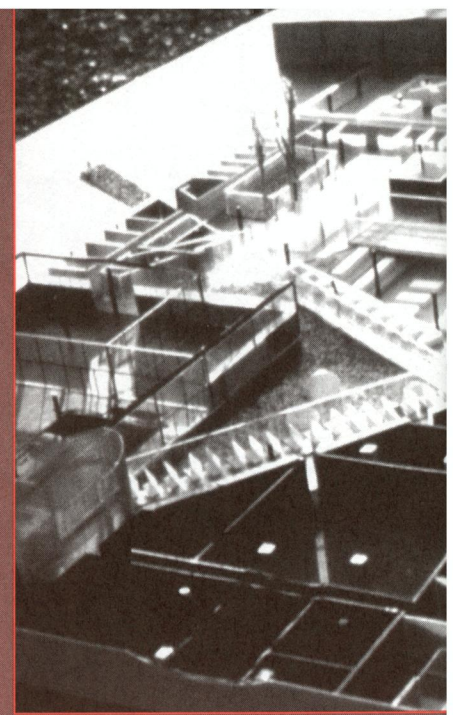
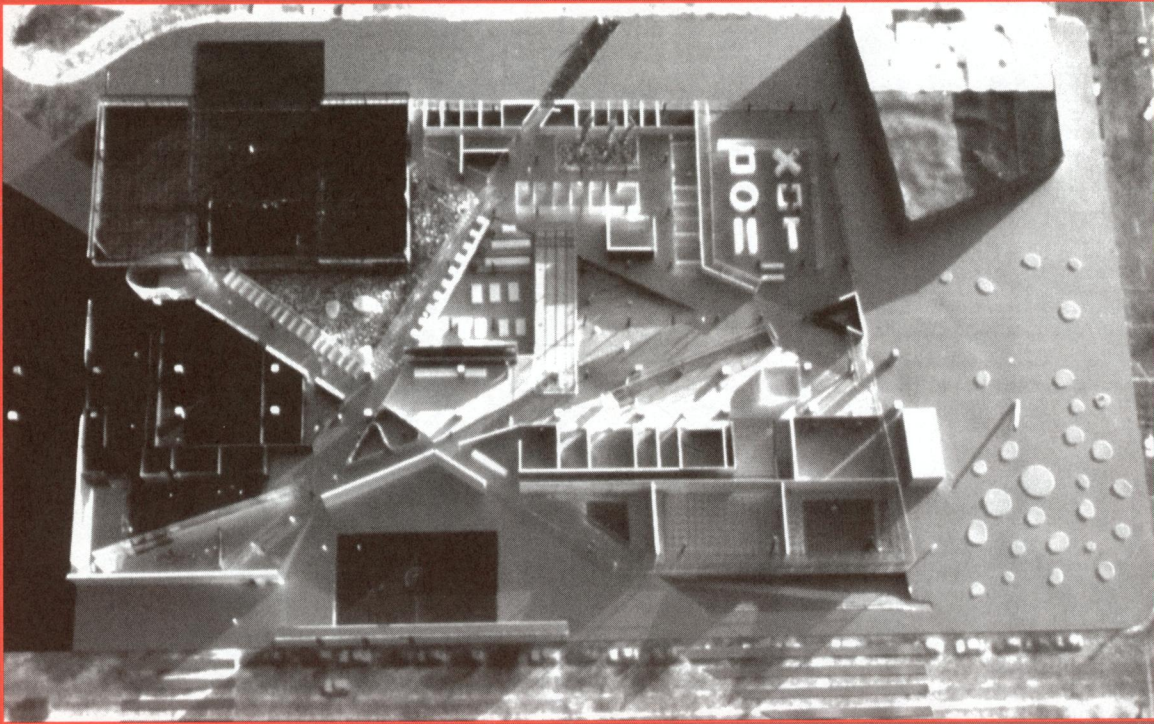
6. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, *Living* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1998), 62.

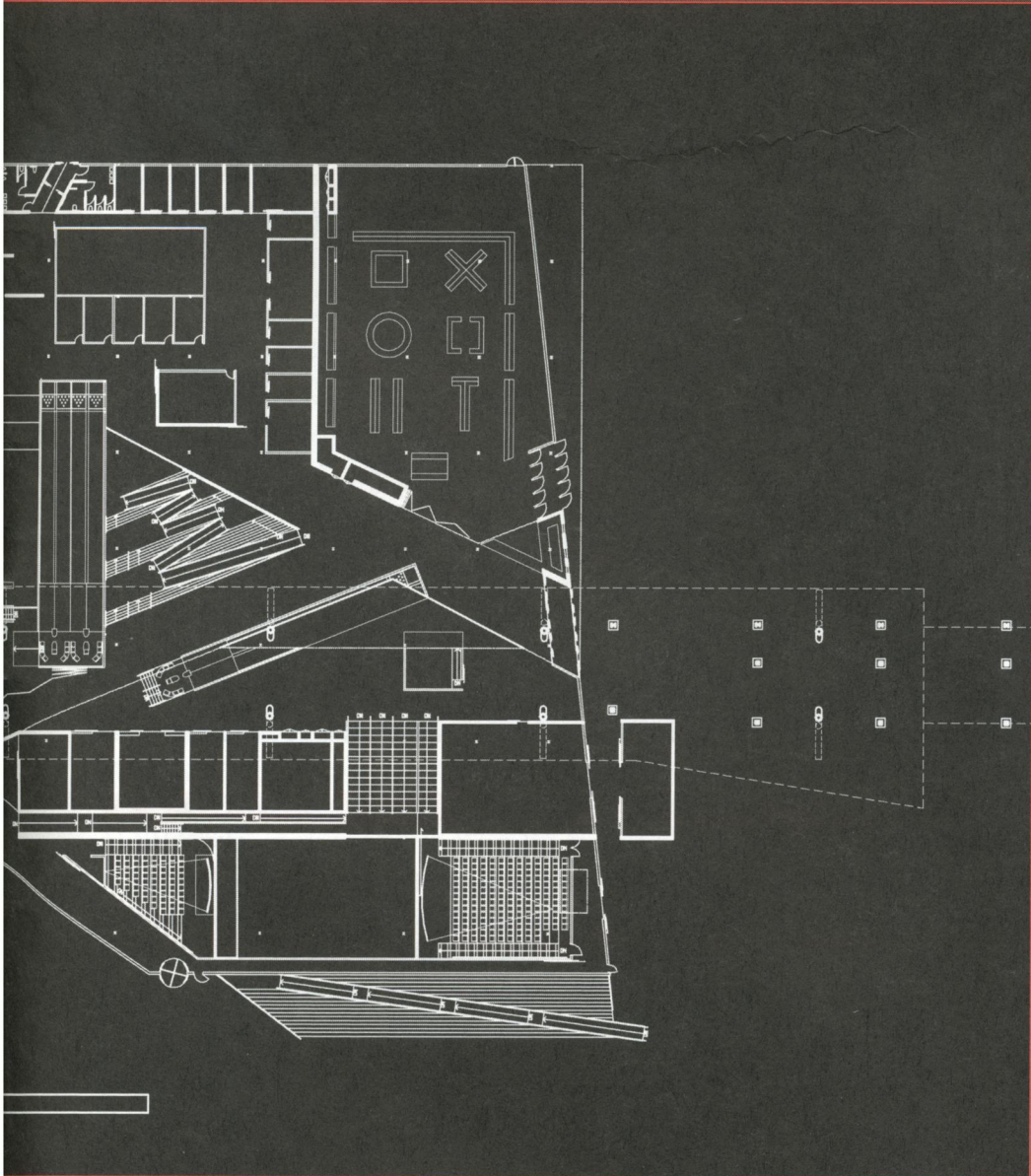
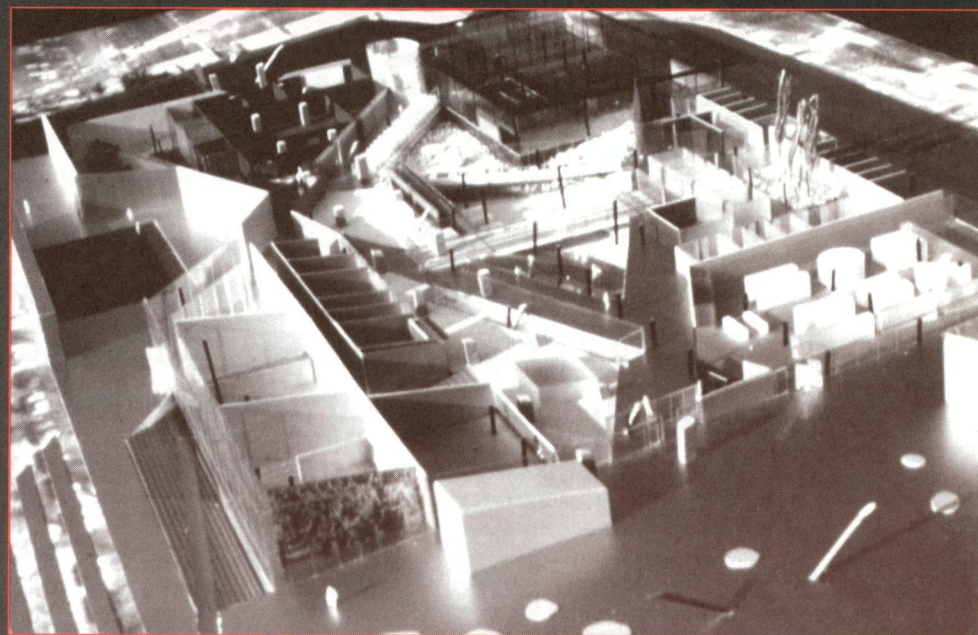


"In a flat, Pompeian carpet of program only the ballroom, auditorium, and meeting room complex is layered; its roof is tilted to create a single exceptional condition in the building envelope that corresponds diagonally to Crown Hall."



24.49





24.51

The plan and model shots on this page are of OMA's developed scheme for the campus center as of February, 1999. The flaring of the tube on one end and the elimination of a significant part of the plan as proposed are among the differences between the competition entry and the project seen here.

