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After scribbling hectically in my notebook, I stare at the big poster of the Astor building¹ hanging on a wall in Rem's office in Rotterdam; my hand pauses for a while, my eyes carefully inspect all the objects around me. Then I hide behind the notes again. We discuss the non-modernist approach to the façade of the building, other ongoing projects and approaches to design;² my hand again scribbles excited notes on the page; my eyes stray around the office to identify other images of OMA³ buildings and traces of design. Whenever my hand stops, my eyes start strolling again, inspecting the office. It is an ordinary office, but it has two doors and two glass walls. One door, to the left of Rem, connects him with the secretaries' office; another larger glass door and a glass wall are facing him, separating yet simultaneously visually connecting up with the studio open-plan and the small-scale scenery of the designing architects at the OMA. The second glass wall behind Rem opens his office to the vast urban scenery of Rotterdam. Like two transparent membranes, these walls separate him from and help him immerse in two different rhythms – the slow Dutch cadence of urban life out there seen through the glass wall behind Rem, and the busy office rhythm seen through the glass wall facing him. Whenever he looks at the splendid scenery outside, Holland is out there for him – all the places where he lived, all the people for whom he designed and built. Whenever he stares at the office inside, the entire world is in here – Seattle, Cordoba, New York, Porto, Beijing, Saint Petersburg – placed on different tables of models,⁴ sharing the same flat office space regardless

1 Astor Place Hotel, New York, USA, 1999; Boutique Ian Schrager hotel in Manhattan in collaboration with Herzog and de Meuron; commission.

2 On Koolhaas's non-modernist approach, see Latour, 2005a.

3 Rem Koolhaas, Madelon Vriesendorp, Elia and Zoe Zenghelis founded the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) in 1975. They signed their projects and images under the mysterious acronym OMA. The OMA in Rotterdam was opened in 1980.

of any geographic distances – waiting to be reinvented by design.

Once in the office, a tiny question lingered in my mind for a while: ‘Where is his drawing pad?’ In his office, there were many books, large panels of different OMA buildings, material samples and models, but there was no drawing board. The tiny question then grew into a bigger one: ‘Does Rem Koolhaas draw at all?’ The question holds a provocation, though provocation is precisely what Rem taught me to value the most for two years of participant observation in his office. If I am to argue that he does not draw just because I have never seen him drawing, what does this tell us about the nature of design in the OMA or the specificity of their buildings? Whenever it looks like Rem is drawing he is usually scribbling on a printed diagram or making a plan to correct it, or selecting one design option among many, or giving input to the design process to further direct design reflection. Why have I never seen him drawing but just scribbling like an anthropologist would do? Is it because most of present-day architects do not draw? Or, at least Pritzker prize laureates? This is not entirely true. Frank Gehry draws, Zaha Hadid draws, and we can extend this list. In their offices, design is launched by a conceptual sketch made by the master architect and this is furthered by many other drawing hands and with the help of AutoCAD and other software. The younger designers will spend days and nights trying to achieve the same shade of grey or black as Zaha Hadid,⁵ or the same curved outlines as the ones produced by the creative thinking that ‘let Frank Gehry’s designer’s hand trace the mind’s non-preconceived intentions that go beyond the limits of the human imagination’.⁶ Triggered by a single slight of hand, in a moment of quasi-artistic inspiration but reproduced, repeated, retouched and corrected many times, slightly altered, versioned, rendered, rescaled, and displaced, the building emerges as a collective product, yet often signed by the same hand that drew the first sketches. These are, ‘Rembrandt-like’ workshops⁷ where the building arises

as a cumulative result of repetitions, corrections and adjustments of that initial set of conceptual drawings produced by the hand of a skilful master architect.

If Rem Koolhaas does not draw, or only rarely and occasionally draws, this is because design at the OMA often begins with collective experimentation at the table of models and not with a single-authored sketch; it is made by and 'is a response to a certain network'⁸ of architects, engineers, contractors and consultants, drawing software and drawing hands, boards and tracing papers. Design action is distributed differently in the OMA in comparison to the practices of Hadid or Gehry. Thus, it is quite expected that an architect would not be on his own in the creative process; there is a variety of other actors, both human and non-human,⁹ who participate in design and make it a heterogeneous and genuinely co-operative venture. As Rem himself states, 'it's not me, it's *made by OMA*'. A building or an urban concept that holds the stamp of OMA emerges as a relational effect of a whole network rather than as a sketch that travels and is collectively transformed, modified and translated on the way toward the final building.

Just as it is impossible to understand Rembrandt's work without understanding the aspects of his studio practice

4 Design at the OMA happens on different tables, which contain various scale models of a building, its parts and detailed variations. The tables are important cognitive tools and flexible organizational nodes in the process of design (Yaneva, 2009).

5 On Zaha Hadid and the importance of her design drawings and presentational strategy for the success of a project, see Crickhowell, 1997.

6 On Frank Gehry's drawing techniques, see Rappolt and Violette, 2005; Pollack, 2006; on the social use of architectural drawing, see Robbins, 1994.

7 Alpers described the Rembrandt enterprise emphasizing his specific approach of training his assistants and students to do an amazing amount of copying of drawings produced by the master in the studio; the students followed his lead in copying his drawings while he corrected and retouched the drawings, in a way that the paintings known as paradigmatic for his time were indeed painted by the hands of others rather than by Rembrandt himself as single creative genius (Alpers, 1988).

8 Interview with Ole, November 2002, OMA.

9 The term 'non-human' is used by Bruno Latour to replace 'object' as well as to widen its scope. Latour's view is that non-humans have an active role that is often forgotten or denied. He employs the terms 'human' and 'non-human' to avoid the restricted subject-object distinction and bypass it entirely (see Latour, 1999).

along with his specific handling of paint, the theatrical treatment of his models and his relationship with the market,¹⁰ it is impossible to understand Koolhaas's work without considering his design practice. If you still find it disturbing that some of the works of a great artist, seen as paradigmatic, are painted by other hands, you will not for a moment be less confused than I was when sitting in the office with two doors, comprehending that the hands of an architect like Rem Koolhaas rarely take part in the collective process of drawing and modelling in the OMA. Realizing that, it is astounding to see architectural theorists still desperately trying to understand his style, idiosyncrasy and strengths by simply referring to his singularity and individuality as a 'creator' – to his childhood, major architectural influences upon his work, or his Dutch-ness – as if we were to judge him as an eighteenth-century unique genius. That a contemporary architect is not reducible to his autographic oeuvre is nothing that would surprise designers today. Much less would the reader be amazed by a definition of architecture as a co-operative activity of architects and support personnel alike, humans and models, paints and pixels, material samples and plans, all of which constitute the *design world*.¹¹ Yet, such realistic accounts of contemporary architectural practices are still missing.¹²

A quick scheme or a slow story?

Shortly after I started working at the OMA,¹³ I met Markus who was the head of AMO¹⁴ at the time. He was intrigued by my study, but he could not understand why I wanted to spend so much time in the office following projects and architects at work. One day he came to me and sat on the table where I was working. He took a pencil and drew a diagram of the process. This was one of those step-by-step gradual rational design-process schemes that you often find in many books on design.

Happy with the visual result, Markus made a small 'to do' list for me to follow. He wanted to save me time by providing a quick overview of the stages of design at the