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THE EMPIRE AND ITS AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT

If Vladimir Tatlin back in 1919 was the harbinger of the World Revolution with his Monument to the Third International, David Fisher heralded the Age of the Empire in 2008 with his Dynamic Tower in Dubai. Both projected towers were of roughly the same height, over 400 meters, and featured revolving elements, but whereas Tatlin imagined a public building for the future world government, the Comintern, and had the volumes slowly rotate at different speeds as in a cosmic calendar, Fisher envisages the millionaire residents of his tower constantly reorienting each floor according to their personal wishes.[1]

Fisher's concept grabbed the attention of the planet with the punch of a Lady Gaga video, and earned the designer the sixteenth place in Time Magazine's list of Best Inventions of 2008, as well as the coveted title of the Architect of the Year 2008.[2] The latter distinction was awarded to Fisher by DBA, an international real estate and construction organization, out of a record number of 2325 nominees;

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1 In Tatlin's tower, the largest volume, a suspended cube, housed an auditorium and completed one rotation in a year; above it was a lop-sided pyramid housing administration and completing one rotation in a month; still higher, a cylinder with an information and broadcasting center, completing one rotation in a day. On the top, there was a hemisphere for radio and projector equipment.
2 It was featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Le Figaro*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Robb Report*, *National Geographic* as well as *TIME Magazine*, and the video spread in the internet like a wildfire.

the other finalists were Foster & Partners, Jean Nouvel, Santiago Calatrava, Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects, and Zaha Hadid. To really appreciate the honor, though, one should know that DBA or The Developer & Builders Alliance was founded in 2002 as Florida Builders Association, and the Architect of the Year prize had only been given once before, to a local Miami architect Kobi Karp, as one of many Community Advancement Awards.[3] While no resident of Florida, Dr. Fisher turns out to be DBA's corporate associate.

Soon after the unveiling of the plans for the dynamic tower, critics started to voice doubts about Fisher's credentials. Having studied architecture in Florence, Fisher claimed to hold an honorary doctorate from "the Prodeo Institute at Columbia University in New York." When Columbia University announced it had no such institute and had never awarded Fisher any degree, his publicists responded that he actually had been given the degree by the Catholic University of Rome at a 1994 ceremony just around the corner from Columbia, at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine—a surprising choice, to be sure, since it is not a Catholic but an Episcopalian church. Later the reference to a doctorate was removed from the CV, and Fisher's publicists issued an email cryptically stating that "Dr. Fisher did receive an honorary doctorate in Economics from Pre Deo University, but it has been removed from his bio because he wants to be entirely accurate and cannot be with this information."[4] At present, Fisher claims he got his doctorate from the University of Florence.[5] Academic degrees aside, Fisher has not built or designed any high-rise buildings, nor has he practiced architecture in the past two decades, although he does head the Leonardo da Vinci Smart Bathroom company.[6]

However, Fisher's team includes the structural engineer Leslie Robertson, famous for his dynamic construction of the World Trade Center towers in New York.[7] "You can build anything," Robertson explains and assures that the spin-

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3 In fact, Karb and Fisher may forever remain the only Architects of the Year as the DBA has not awarded the title since 2008.

4 **There is indeed a Pro Deo State University in New York that often confers honorary degrees** to businessmen and stages the events in impressive locations, such as the Hungarian Police Academy in Budapest. Lewis, Hilary: "Architect Behind Dubai's Rotating Skyscraper A Fraud?" *Business Insider*, June 26, 2008. http://www.businessinsider.com/2008/6/architect-behind-dubai-s-rotating-skyscraper-a-fraud-

5 http://www.dynamicarchitecture.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=21&Itemid=39&lang=eng

6 Fortunately, as Fisher says, "This skyscraper is easy to design … The Rotating Tower will be a challenge to traditional Architecture, until now based on gravity." http://www.dynamicarchitecture.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=21&Itemid=39&lang=eng

7 Days before the attack on the World Trade Center, Robertson was asked at a conference

ning tower will be economical and safe.[8] Besides the load bearing structure of the Dubai tower, there have been questions about many details, from fire escapes to plumbing. Fortunately, Fisher who is an expert on bathrooms envisages that the plumbing will function in the same way as "the refueling of an aircraft in flight … The toilets and water systems shut off periodically while the aircraft is in motion." However, "I can't disclose all the details," he cautions.[9] Although he also refuses to disclose the client and the location of the building, he claims the construction is about to start.

Building for the Empire

Of course, Tatlin did not work out the construction details either, nor did he find a site for his tower, and still there is a difference between the paper architecture of the early modernists and Fisher's work, or other fantastic projects that circulate in the Internet. It is not, however, that newer projects would necessarily be more radical or revolutionary. Take for example Paul Scheerbart's musings from the 1914 book *Glasarchitektur*. He imagined rotating houses, but also buildings that can be raised and lowered from cranes, floating and airborne structures, even a city on wheels. The sense of motion was further accentuated by the use of constantly changing lights, reflecting pools of water, mirrors placed near build-

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in Frankfurt what he had done to protect the Twin Towers from terrorist attacks. He replied, "I designed it for a 707 to smash into it," without elaborating further. See Kamin, Blair: "Engineers seek answers after mighty towers fall." *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 12, 2001. http://articles. chicagotribune.com/2001-09-12/news/0109120215_1_sears-tower-tallest-petronas-twin-towers

Robertson maintains that the possibility of airplane fuel causing a fire was not considered. However, John Skilling, the other main engineer of the original World Trade Center team contradicts this information in an interview in 1993. See Naider, Eric, "Twin Towers Engineered To Withstand Jet Collision." *The Seattle Times*, 2/27/1993. http://community.seattletimes.nwsource. com/archive/?date=19930227&slug=1687698

When in a recent interview Robertson was asked if there was anything in the design of the World Trade Center that he would change in light of the events on 9/11, the engineer answered: "The World Trade Centre was designed for impact of aircraft and the building withstood the impact of aircraft without falling. The towers would be standing there today were it not for the subsequent event of the fire. In any event a structural engineer has the responsibility to produce buildings that are safe. All of our buildings are designed to be very robust and strong. They are able to accept unforeseen circumstances and they are very ductile so you can bend them without breaking them." "Designing a post-9/11 world." ArabianBusiness.com July 7, 2007

http://www.arabianbusiness.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=495729
8 "World's First 'Building In Motion' Set For Dubai." WCBSTV.com June 25, 2008 http://wcbstv. com/national/dubai.david.fisher.2.756027.html
9 Frangos, Alex: "Dubai Puts a New Spin on Skyscrapers." *The Wall Street Journal Online*. April 11, 2007 http://online.wsj.com/article/SB117625795099465923.html

ings, and glass floors that revealed the movements of waves and fish in a lake beneath.[10] Scheerbart's loyal follower Bruno Taut took these visions to the next level, describing structures that form a kaleidoscopic architecture of impermanence, only to dissolve and to regroup into new configurations constantly. Going far beyond the gigantic scale of buildings that are currently projected for Dubai, Taut proposed cutting up whole mountain ranges in the Alps and dressing them up with colored glass. In contrast to the spectacles of recent years, his goal was the reform of society; Taut argued that while stone buildings make stone hearts, the crystal conceals nothing, and so glass architecture would liberate sexuality, erase private property, and unify people in a spiritual community, led by artists.

Compared to Taut's visions, Fisher's tower is not only mundane and unoriginal, but more importantly it illustrates a crucial move from utopian architecture to visionary real estate. Fisher is already taking in orders for the apartment units before the concept has been worked out at any level of detail; in effect, architectural expertise is reduced to the production of recognizable icons, colorful renderings and downloadable film clips that catch the eye of the investors. The emphasis on the project's uniqueness and spectacular extravagance, the lack of context, and the remarkable dissemination of the project on the Internet are additional aspects that Fisher's scheme has in common with much of recent "iconic" architecture. It may be, then, that the Dynamic Tower represents the architecture for the Empire.

Strong architecture for strong men

It looks like it only took one iconic museum to turn a small industrial town in Northern Spain into a major tourist attraction. Subsequently, countless other cities have turned to star architects in order to reproduce the Bilbao effect. Places whose identity is not yet fixed or marketable are increasingly relying on architecture to give the special competitive edge. Toyo Ito once remarked that what the Chinese clients expect from architects are strong symbolic images even if it is far from clear what one is supposed to symbolize.[11]

This demand for strong architecture is by no means limited to China. To give another example, much was made in 2008 of Zaha Hadid's design for a cultural center in Baku. What was at issue was not the symbolism of the parametric

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10 Whyte, Iain Boyd (ed.): *The Crystal Chain Letters.* Cambridge, Mass.: the MIT Press, 1985, p. 117.

11 Ota,Kayoko: "Toyo Ito: Big Time Dilemmas." In: Rem Koolhaas and Brendan McGetrick (eds.): *Content,* Köln: Bendedikt Taschen Verlag, 2004, p. 448.

forms that Hadid develops with characteristic originality and rigor, but rather the political ramifications of the commission. The center, named after the deceased president Heydar Aliyev, will be built by his son and successor as president, Ilham Aliyev, as part of a larger building program related to Azeri bid for the Olympics 2016. The son has already erected a number of other monuments in the father's honor. After *Heydər Baba*, Grandfather Heydar, died in 2003, the MP and sculptor Omar Eldarov has unveiled a new statue of him almost every month. He also designed the sepulchral monument for Aliyev Sr. at Fakhri Khiyabani or the Avenue of the Honorable Cemetery in Baku.[12]

In the 1940s, Heydar Aliyev studied architecture and also joined the national security agency.[13] Excelling in particular in his second area of expertise, he became the head of Azerbaijani KGB in 1967 and a full member of the Politburo in 1982. From 1993 to 2003, he was the president of Azerbaijan until his son took over. Aliyev ruled his country with determination; now Amnesty International accuses him of human rights abuses. Despite such allegations, Zaha Hadid is reported to have laid flowers at his grave before attending the ground-breaking ceremony on September 17, 2007. Be that as it may, Ilham Aliyev states on his official homepage: "I am sure that the beautiful and magnificient building will be built. It will be worthy of Heydar Aliyev's name both because of its outside appearance and internal quality. It will be as much beautiful, mighty and inflexible as he was."[14]

Perhaps in response to this commission, Daniel Libeskind called for a discussion of ethical dilemmas in architecture and urged his colleagues not to work for totalitarian regimes.[15] The debate is a perennial one, and it would be unfair to single out Zaha since quite a few of our most famous stars—from Rem Koolhaas, Herzog & de Meuron, Norman Foster, Steven Holl and Thom Mayne to Meinhard von Gerkan and Albert Speer Jr., to add just a few names—have worked for countries, such as China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Abu Dhabi or Dubai, whose records on

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12 The monument features a free-standing statue of the ex-president before a wall with the map of Azerbaijan. Interestingly, the country as depicted encompasses an area that is about 20% larger than defined by present border lines. Olcayto, Rory: "Azerbaijan Project." *Building Design*, Jan 25, 2008. http://www.bdonline.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=426&storycode=3104589
13 Aliyev studied architecture at the Azerbaijan Industrial Institute (now the Azerbaijan State Oil Academy).
14 http://www.president.az/?locale=en
15 Olcayto, Rory: "Ethics debate: Take an ethical stance, Libeskind tells his peers." *bdonline.co.uk* Feb. 15, 2008 http://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/ethics-debate-take-an-ethical-stance-libeskind-tells-his-peers/biography.aspx?contact=16810

human rights and democratic practices have been questioned by Western critics. In fact, architects often get their most spectacular commissions from leaders who need not consult democratically elected committees or heed to conservative planning regulations. "The more centralized the power, the less compromises need to be made in architecture," explains Peter Eisenman.[16] As a result, our most progressive architecture is often sponsored by either private enterprises or countries with repressive regimes. This fact is enough to signal the end of any dreams of a critical practice, or to dispel the old modernist notion that high architecture would function as a leftist critique of political or economic power.

It is interesting, though, that architects seem to be less likely to be publicly criticized for accepting commissions from corporations involved in shady practices. Like Rem Koolhaas for his CCTV complex, Herzog & De Meuron were chided for the Bird's Nest stadium whereas their many projects for the Hoffmann-La Roche pharmaceutical company have not been questioned at all on political grounds even if the same guilt-by-association technique would apply here as well. At the 2010 World Economic Forum in Davos, for example, Hoffmann-La Roche was awarded the "Public Eye People's Award" and the "Public Eye Swiss Award" from Greenpeace and the Berne Declaration (EvB), a Swiss NGO, for the "nastiest" business practices. The Swiss corporation is said to conduct studies in China on transplanted organs that come from executed prisoners.[17] The tendency to keep a close eye on political regimes but give large companies (that are equally undemocratic in their decision making practices) more leeway may be a remainder from the days of the Cold War, but it is definitely a bias that favors globalization.

Ideology and opportunism

If the advanced architecture of today has the best chances of realization when democratic political controls are not active, advanced architectural theory certainly helps in emphasizing apolitical themes, such as ornaments, atmospheres and moods, and grounding their arguments on a universalizing phenomenological or physiological foundation that suppresses social and political differences. Thus

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16 Pogrebin, Robin: "I'm the Designer. My Client's the Autocrat." *New York Times*, June 22, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/22/arts/design/22pogr.html?_r=1&pagewanted=1
17 http://www.publiceye.ch/de In addition, Roche is also producing the drug Cell Cept that prevents the rejection of transplanted organs for the Chinese market. The problem is that according to the Chinese vice health minister, 90 % of a total of 10,000 organ transplants come from executed prisoners, and cannot be considered voluntary donations. I am grateful for Josef Schwendiger for bringing up this example.

fig. 1: Gunnar Asplund et al., Acceptera. *Stockholm: Tidens förlag, 1931, front page.*

it could be suggested that current architectural theories are nothing more than an opportunistic rationalization of economic necessities in the Empire. Such an accusation, however, would be unfair, for opportunism has always been characteristic of architects.

To take a few examples from the allegedly more political era of modernism, the Swedish functionalists named their 1930 manifesto, *acceptera,* commanding everyone to "accept the reality before you."[18] They were merely rephrasing what Ludwig Mies van der Rohe had written already in 1923: "let us accept the changed economic and social conditions as a fact. All these things go their way guided by destiny and blind to values."[19] In a similar spirit, the Swiss group ABC defined the machine as "nothing more than the inexorable dictator of the possibilities and tasks common to all our lives … not a servant, but a dictator", that which "dictates how we are to think and what we have to understand …"[20] Le Corbusier agreed, stating that "industry overwhelms us like a flood which rolls on towards its destined ends" and Walter Gropius declared that what is needed is "a resolute affirmation" of the new conditions.[21]

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18 Asplund, Gunnar et Gahn, Markelius, Paulsson, Sundahl, Åhren: *acceptera*. Arlöv: Berlings, 1980, p. 198.

19 Mies as quoted in Conrads, p. 114.

20 Mies as quoted in Conrads, Ulrich: *Programme und Manifeste zur Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts.* Ullstein Bauwelt Fundamente 1. Berlin Wes: Verlag Ullstein GmbH, 1964, p. 108.

21 Le Corbusier: *Vers une architecture.* Paris: Les Editions G. Crès et Cie, 1924, p. x. Gropius as quoted in Conrads p. 90. In fact, the founder of the Bauhaus had often taken a hard look at the conditions of the day and invariably drawn the appropriate conclusions. Before the First World War, Gropius and Adolf Meyer had emerged as the most progressive architects in the Werkbund by virtue of such radical exercises in glass and steel as the Faguswerk in Alfeld and the Model Factory in Cologne. Surprisingly enough, in 1920 Gropius declared that it was not glass, steel or concrete that would be the building material of tomorrow but rather the future belonged to timber. It has been suggested that the motivation for this announcement was the fact that a Berlin saw owner, Karl Sommerfeld, had commissioned the Bauhaus to make a house out of teak planks he had bought for a good price from an old ship. Realizing that the craftsmen of Thuringia

Given that even the heroic functionalists are so eager to "go uncompromisingly with the flow," Rem Koolhaas was probably not wrong to claim that "there is in the deepest motivations of architecture something that cannot be critical."[22] This may be because when an architect builds a monumental building, he will be not considered the owner of his work as the artist is of his painting nor does he possess it, as Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc observed.[23] The new element in recent projective practice, as opposed to modernism and postmodernism, is that the economic determination of architecture is not taken as a limitation or an embarrassment, but rather something to be celebrated: what used to be seen as an unavoidable compromise has now been declared the new program. In the description of his 2006 design for the Waterfront City in Dubai, for example, Rem explains that his strategy was "to find optimism in the inevitable."[24] The idea is close to the Nietzschean *amor fati* and its ethical corollary of seeing "as beautiful what is necessary in things."[25] Indeed, Koolhaas updates Nietzsche's promise to "be only a Yes-sayer" ever so slightly by changing the spelling to read: ¥€$.[26] Yet it is a *non sequitur* to insist that something should be given a positive value

opposed to the school, Gropius also recanted his statement that craftsmen would be the future leaders of society, and restarted attempts to win over the support of industry for while "industry does not need us—we need industry." Franciscono, Marcel: *Walter Gropius and the Creation of the Bauhaus in Weimar: the Ideals and Artistic Theories of its Founding Years.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971, pp. 40ff.

22 Koolhaas and Mau: *S, M, L, XL*, p. 849; the second quotation of Koolhaas comes originally from Beth Kapusta's article in *The Canadian Architect,* Vol. 39, August 1994, p. 10; here it is quoted from Baird, George: "'Criticality' and Its Discontents." *Harvard Design Magazine*, Fall 2004/Winter 2005, Number 21, p. 2.

23 Viollet as quoted by Lipstadt, Hélène: "World Upside Down." Wien. UmBau 22, p. 55.

24 Ouroussoff, Nicolai: "City on the Gulf: Koolhaas Lays Out a Grand Urban Experiment in Dubai." *New York Times,* March 3, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/03/arts/design/03kool.html?_r=3&pagewanted=1&oref=slogin

25 Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, §276. Incidentally, the same passage influenced Georges Bataille in 1924 to launch an *Oui* movement, "implying a perpetual acquiescence to everything … which would have the advantage over the *Non* movement that had been Dada of escaping what was childish about a systematically provocational negation." See Surya, Michel: *Georges Bataille. An Intellectual Biography.* Tr. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. New York: Verso, 2002, p. 72. Of course, John Ruskin is an earlier advocate of acceptance, advising painters to "reject nothing, select nothing, and score nothing." See Ruskin, John: *Modern Painters,* Vol. 1. Section 21.

26 Nietzsche, see Note 25, §276. Koolhaas, Rem: "Earning Trust." Lecture at a conference on *Superhumanism* in London in 2001. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.dandad.org/content/super/pdf/koolhaas.pdf> p. 1.

only because it is unavoidable; it is like saying that since we are all mortal, our goal and highest value in life should be death.

Sic et non

In general, Koolhaas confesses to an instrumental ethics: he does not want to define values or set norms but to realize goals defined by others. What he calls "ultimate architecture", Bigness, is a good example. According to Koolhaas, Bigness "becomes instrument of other forces, it depends. … 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. … Beyond signature, Bigness means surrender to technologies; to engineers, contractors, manufacturers; to politics; to others."[27] He also refuses any moral criticism and claims that through their size alone, big buildings "enter an amoral domain, beyond good or bad."[28]

An earlier but equally influential proponent of instrumentalist ethics was Jacques-Nicolas-Louis Durand. Partly prompted by the dire economic situation of the revolutionary years in France, Durand concluded: "all the talent of the architect reduces itself to resolving these two problems: 1st, with a given sum of money to make a building the most fitting it can possibly be, as in private buildings; and 2nd, the fitness of the building being given, to make the building with the least possible expense, as in public projects."[29] Durand refuses to take issue with the program, the site, or the client and merely looks for the most economical solution to a predefined assignment.

In response to such utilitarianism, John Ruskin complains about "the prevalent feeling of modern times, which desires to produce the largest results at the least cost."[30] This tendency tends to privilege the technical over the imaginative element in "the distinctively political art of Architecture."[31] For Ruskin, the actual *purpose* of the building should no longer be "one of utility merely; as the purpose of a cathe-

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27 Koolhaas and Mau, see note 22, p. 514.

28 Ibid., p. 502.

29 Collins, Peter: *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1965, pp. 25–26; De Zurko, Edward Robert: *Origins of Functionalist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957, pp. 168–171.

30 Ruskin, John: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture. Lectures on Architecture and Painting. The Study of Architecture. Sesame and Lilies. Unto This Last. The Queen of the Air. The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*. Boston: Dana Estes & Company, n.d., p. 17.

31 Ibid., p. 10.

dral is not so much to shelter the congregation as to awe them."[32] In *Seven Lamps*, he argues that architecture proper begins where necessity ends: it is precisely *uselessness* that distinguishes architecture from mere building. Architecture "concerns itself only with those characters of an edifice which are above and beyond its common use."[33] Ultimately, the goal of architecture is to create and sustain a community.

A more extreme rejection of economic instrumentalism was offered by Giancarlo de Carlo in the revolutionary year of 1968, as he exclaimed: we have a right to ask 'why' housing should be as cheap as possible and not, for example, rather expensive; 'why' instead of making every effort to reduce it to minimum levels of surface, of thickness, of materials, we should not try to make it spacious, protected, isolated, comfortable, well equipped, rich in opportunities for privacy, communication, exchange, personal creativity. No one … can be satisfied by an answer which appeals to the scarcity of resources when we all know how much is spent on wars, on the construction of missiles and anti-ballistic systems, on moon projects, on research for the defoliation of forests inhabited by partisans and for the paralyzation of the demonstrators emerging from the ghettos, on hidden persuasion, on the invention of artificial needs etc."[34] Like many other architects of the time, de Carlo saw himself committed to a notion of inalienable human rights.

An more explicitly argued case of non-instrumental ethics is the Hippocratic oath in medicine, a moral code independent of the client's demands.[35] Its independence is premised on the identification with the profession: first and foremost, the original oath requires that the doctor treat his teachers with as much respect as his parents. Conversely, the oath also prohibits any attempts to infringe on the territory of other professions: thus, a doctor is never to cross disciplinary lines by attempting to perform a surgery. In the world of architecture, however, nothing comparable to the Hippocratic Oath has been generally accepted.[36] While the Hip-

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32 See note 30, p. 278. He opines that men should sacrifice their wealth to the decoration of God's house instead of their own; yet "it is not the church we want, but the sacrifice … not the gift but the giving." Ibid., p. 25.

33 Ibid., p. 16.

34 Quoted by Frampton, Kenneth: *Modern Architecture. A Critical History*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1982, p. 278.

35 The oath forbids the doctor to harm a patient in any way, and specifies that the doctor may not prescribe a lethal drug, even if asked to do so. Moreover, a doctor is not allowed to induce abortion with a pessary or breach doctor-patient confidentiality.

36 There have been many attempts to formulate a moral code for architects along similar lines. To take a random example, let us consider the Dutch *Vademecum of the Architectural Profession* of 1984, where it is written that "(1) An architect shall faithfully carry out the duties which he undertakes and shall have proper regard for the material and human interests both of those

pocratic principle assumes a basic biological value that is widely accepted by the general public, namely that it is better to be alive than dead, architecture deals with social values that are more often contested.[37]

If no absolute moral truths can be formulated as regards architecture, the most logical strategy might be to keep all options open. Defining architecture as "the imposition on the world of structures it never asked for and that existed previously only as clouds of conjectures in the minds of their creators," Koolhaas concluded that "architecture is monstrous in the way in which each choice leads to the reduction of possibility" for "where there is nothing, everything is possible. Where there is architecture, nothing (else) is possible."[38] In order to preserve freedom and not enforce unjustified moral precepts on the users, the logical thing to do is to reduce architecture to degree zero. At the level of a building, this approach leads to the Typical Plan; at the level of the city, it brings about the Generic City. "Typical Plan is a segment of an unacknowledged utopia, the promise of a post-architectural future," Rem explained, for its only function is "to let its occupants exist."[39] It is thus the ideal accommodation for business, "the most formless of programs", for "business makes no demands."[40] Another regime of freedom is the Generic City because it represents "the apotheosis of the multiple-choice concept: all boxes crossed."[41]

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who commission and those who may be expected to use or enjoy the product of his work; (2) An architect shall avoid actions and situations inconsistent with his professional obligations … or likely to raise doubt about his integrity; (3) An architect shall rely only on ability and achievement for his advancement, without soliciting, undercutting or supplanting," etc. *A Vademecum of the Architectural Profession.* Delft: Delft University Press, 1984. As quoted in Johnson, Paul-Alan, *The Theory of Architecture. Concepts, Themes & Practices*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold., 1994, p. 217.

37 Of course, not everyone thinks that life as such is valuable; the Master of Those Who Know, Aristotle famously argued that it is better to be dead than alive and best is not to be born at all. *N. E.* 1215b15-22.

38 Delirious New York, 246. Koolhaas and Mau, see note 22, p. 344, 199. At first glance, it may seem trivially true that every decision cancels possibilities: if I can choose between acts A, B, and C, and go with the last one, I have effectively cancelled A and B. Moreover, if I have fewer possible choices, it seems that I have lost some of my freedom. This reasoning, however, is premised on the assumption that the choice of alternatives will change neither independent of my choices, nor as a result of them. Obviously, this condition does not normally hold. For example, today we have some alternative ways to respond to global warming; if we choose to do nothing, the same alternatives are not going to be available in twenty years any more. On the other hand, the right choices might open up many new alternative options in the future.
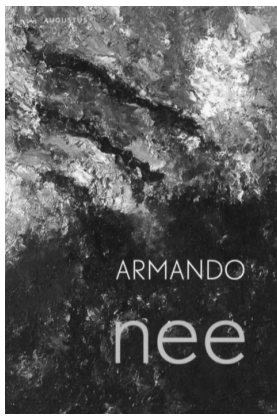
39 Ibid., p. 336.

40 Ibid., p. 337.

41 Ibid., p. 1253.

On the other hand, Koolhaas knows very well that avoiding decisions and actions is not the typical role of an architect for every seriously proposed design is a normative recommendation. Moreover, he argues, "if there is a repertoire of possible action between making changes in the world and leaving it as it is, the architect is always on the side of change. If the repertoire is between executing ideas and observing them, the architect is always on the side of execution."[42] That means that architects are often frustrated with the inefficiency of democracy and instead attracted to "deciders." Rem comments: "One of the things that is most counterproductive in Europe, and even in America, for executing the task of planning is the terrifying phenomenon of the change in political systems every four years. … if the Socialists lose a few seats and the Greens gain a few, not a single tree can be felled. … The kind of jagged line of development can be related in America to the power of certain developers, and in Europe to the relative power of the different political parties."[43] Often making similar points, Le Corbusier demanded "a strong assault on compromise and democratic stagnation" and declared: "France needs a Father."[44] In 1940, he even wrote to his mother: "If he is sincere in his promises, Hitler could crown his life by an overwhelming creation: the reshaping of Europe. … Personally I believe the outcome could be favorable.

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42 *Supercritical. Architecture Words I.* Ed. Brett Steele. London: AA, 2010, p. 13.

43 Kwinter, Sanford (ed.): *Rem Koolhaas: Conversation with Students*. New York: Princeton Architecture Press, 1996, p. 48.

44 Le Corbusier: *Urbanisme*. Paris: Les Éditions Crés et Cie, 1925, 137, 285. He ends the book *Urbanisme* with a picture of Louis XV and the caption: "Homage to a great town-planner. This despot conceived great projects and realized them." Later, he elaborated on the same theme: "Authority must now step in, patriarchal authority, the authority of a father concerned for his children. … Let all skeptics and snickerers keep away! We have had enough of their so civilized materialism and its pretty results: unemployment, ruin, famine, despair and revolution!" Le Corbusier: *La Ville Radieuse,* Paris: Les Éditions Vincent, Fréal et Cie, Paris, 1964, p. 152. With Biblical overtones, he further demanded that "the eyes that see, the people that know, they must be let to construct the world anew." Le Corbusier, *Quand les Cathédrales étaient blanches*. Paris: Plon, 1937, p. 13.

… It would mean the end of speeches from the tribunal, of endless meetings of committees, of parliamentary eloquence and sterility."[45] At this time, Le Corbusier had long since embraced a decisionist position similar to Carl Schmitt's who argued that in the absence of moral or religious authority in a secularized modernity, an arbitrary decision by an authority can serve as a source of value, if taken as an indisputable fact.[46] This makes it possible for an architect to push for action but only by denouncing previous moralities altogether, or in the words of Koolhaas, "We have to dare to be utterly uncritical."[47]

Business art

Rem's amorality goes back to his time at *Haagse Post* when his mentor Armando formulated the principles of the movement *Nul*, or 'zero': "no moralizing, no interpretation of reality, but a reinforcement. Starting point: the uncompromised acceptance of reality. Method: isolation, appropriation. Result: authenticity. Not of the creator but of information. The artist is no longer an artist but the cold, rational eye."[48] However, similar ideas Koolhaas could have also picked up from Nietzsche's *Gay Science* or from his two artistic idols, Salvador Dali and Andy Warhol.

Warhol not only accepted the popular culture of his day, depicting commercial products in his artworks, but also challenged the value system of the avant-garde in many other ways. For example, Warhol explains that "Business Art is the step

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45 Letter to his mother, Oct. 31, 1940. As quoted in Weber, Nicholas Fox: *Le Corbusier: A Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008, p. 425. In the original: "Si le marché est sincere, Hitler peut couronner sa vie par une oeuvre grandiose: l'aménagement de l'Europe. … Personnellement je crois le jeu bien fait. … C'est la fin des discours de tribune ou de meetings, de l'éloquence et de la stérilité parlementaire. " Le Corbusier: *Choix de lettres*. Sélection, introduction et notes par Jean Jenger. Basel : Birkhäuser, 2002, p. 272 – 273.

46 In May, 1933—as books were burning in Berlin—Le Corbusier dedicated his *Ville Radieuse* simply to 'Authority' and demanded that "the plan must rule; it is the plan which is right, it proclaims indubitable realities." Le Corbusier: *La Ville Radieuse,* p. 248. On October 3, 1933, Schmitt equated Hitler for the first time with the law, talking about "Adolf Hitler, dessen Wille heute der *nomos* des deutschen Volkes ist." A month later, Martin Heidegger used a similar expression in his talk to the students of Freiburg University: "Der Führer selbst und allein *ist* die heutige und künftige deutsche Wirklichkeit und ihr Gesetz." Finally, Schmitt defined: "*Heute ist das Gesetz Wille und Plan des Führers;"* Schmitt, Carl: "Kodifikation oder Novelle? Über die Aufgabe und Methode der heutigen Gesetzgebung." in: *Deutsche Juristen-Zeitung,* 40. Jg., Heft 15/16, Sp. 919 – 925, here p. 924. See also Mehring, Reinhard: *Carl Schmitt. Zur Einführung.* Hamburg: Junius, 1992, pp. 57, 107, 108.

47 Ibid., p. 971.

48 See Lootsma, p. 13.

that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called 'art' or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art."[49] Reacting to the anti-capitalist hippy culture of the 1960s, Warhol concludes: "Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art."[50] Although Warhol and his Factory were phenomenally successful as producers of business art, he has been surpassed in recent years by Damien Hirst who is even more open about his motives, musing: "Right now the world is different from every other time there's ever been. And what if, just maybe, this is the first time money's ever become important for artists? … Maybe we're just at that point. Where money's an element in the composition. … This is what I do. You're a conduit from art to money. … And if money becomes king, then it just does."[51] In his open embrace of wealth, Hirst comes close to Salvador Dali who was kicked out of the Surrealist group because of his shameless flirting with rich commissions, for example from Disney and Hollywood; André Breton twisted his name into the anagram, "*avida dollars*," hungry for dollars.

Koolhaas' position does not seem to be very different from those of the artists. He also refuses to any radical difference between art and commerce: "We know that Las Vegas is junk, but at the same time I think that exactly the same process and ultimately also perhaps the same logic attaches itself to or underlies our masterpieces."[52] Koolhaas' first attempt to mix art with business was a store for Prada, replacing the unsuccessful SoHo extension of the Guggenheim museum.[53] Personally, however, Koolhaas feels he has not received the recognition he deserves. In a recent interview he complains: "… although we provide icons of today's market economy, we are the only artistic discipline that doesn't really

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49 Warhol, Andy: *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and back again)*. San Diege/ New York/London: Harcourt, 1975, p. 92. He further explained that "Business Art is a much better thing to be making than Art Art, because Art Art doesn't support the space it takes up, whereas Business Art does. (If Business Art doesn't support its own space it goes out-of-business.)" Ibid., p. 144.

50 Ibid., pp. 92–93.

51 Burns, Gordon: "The Naked Hirst (Part 2)," Guardian 6 October 2001, p. 138. http://www.guardian.co.uk/weekend/story/0,3605,564027,00.html>

52 Koolhaas, see note 26, p. 2.

53 He described the store as "a space that can be commercial, but that in four minutes can contract to completely compact condition in which the rest of the store can be returned to public space, and where Prada can sponsor, in the absurdly commercial conditions of SoHo, little events." Ibid., p. 4.

fig. 3: Gordon Ashe, The Promise of Diamonds, *New York: Signet, 1965, cover.*
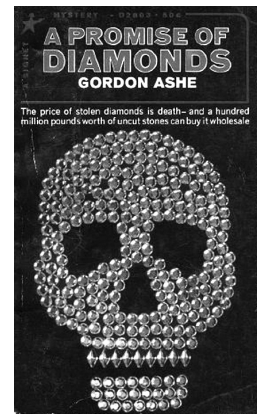
benefit from it. Movie stars make astronomical amounts of money, and we have art stars and sports superstars, but by comparison architects remain on a stubbornly horizontal line of income, with only a few like Foster or Gehry attaining a modest stratosphere of fame or money. Compared to other incomes, their levels of fame or money are of course laughable, so we have to change architecture."[54]

Instrumentality

In 1900 Cass Gilbert defined the skyscraper as "a machine that makes the land pay"; in 1913 he was able to test his theories as he finished the tallest tower in the world, the Woolworth Building in New York.[55] Koolhaas is equally explicit about the role of architecture as a moneymaker in *Delirious New York* where he explains that the skyscraper is a way of multiplying buildable land and thus making a profit.[56] In 2001, Koolhaas still held onto this idea, suggesting that 'architecture' is "a nostalgic name for an activity which produces a magical effect on income by multiplying the ground… although we mention architecture, we are living in a kind of situation of working real estate … where shopping and therefore consumption is the cement that holds everything in our world together, forming a seamless carpet from entertainment to religion to shopping centres, to airports."[57]

More generally, he demands that architecture must "dissociate itself from the exhausted artistic/ideological movements of modernism and formalism to regain its instrumentality as vehicle of modernization."[58] The instrumentality is premised on the notion of the technological determination of architecture: the

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54 See note 42, p. 12.

55 As quoted in Willis, Carol: *Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995, p. 19.

56 Koolhaas, Rem: *Delirious New York, A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, The Monacelli Press. 1994. Of course, Le Corbusier's argument for the pilotis and the roof garden was essentially the same.

57 Koolhaas, see note 26, p. 2.

58 Koolhaas and Mau, see note 22, p. 510.

And if you need a genius, I offer my services. . . Here I am!

fig. 4: Le Corbusier, Radiant City. *NY: Orion Press, 1964, p. 208.*

skyscraper is said to be the logical and inevitable product of the elevator while the escalator and air conditioning together cause the shopping to emerge. In effect, we are dealing here with the old Saint-Simonian chimera of replacing the government of men by the administration of things, recently often rephrased in the Deleuzean language of diagrams and abstract machines.[59]

Now, if architecture is merely the instrument of modernization, as mediated by technology, then architects cannot be held morally responsible for their designs, with the possible exception of those architects who vainly attempt to resists this automatic determination. Koolhaas explains that once the delusions of omnipotence are left behind, the architect is free to enter uncharted waters and take amoral risks: "Since we are not responsible, we have to become irresponsible."[60]

The move from an understanding of architecture as a social technology, as in the Charter of Athens, to real estate is part of what Koolhaas describes as the architects' realignment with post-heroic neutrality.[61] Le Corbusier already asked us to choose between architecture and revolution, and promised that revolution can be avoided.[62] Nonetheless, Koolhaas promises that the ultimate architecture of Bigness will in fact reinvent the collective, presumably through air conditioning which is said to impose "a regime of sharing (air) that defines invisible communities, homogeneous segments of an airborne collective aligned in more powerful wholes like the iron molecules that form a magnetic field."[63] At the urban level, however, no comparable community is created. Instead, Bigness "generates a new kind of city. The exterior of the city is no longer a collective theater where 'it' hap-

59 Taylor, Keith, *Henri Saint-Simon: Selected Writings on Science, Industry and Social Organisation.* New York, Holes and Meier Publishers, 1975, *passim.*

60 Koolhaas and Mau, see note 22, p. 971.

61 Ibid., p. 514.

62 See note 21, p. 243.

63 Koolhaas and Mau, see note 22, p. 340.

pens; there's no collective 'it' left."[64] Bigness is urban in a precise technical sense, namely "in the quantity and complexity of the facilities it offers."[65]

In a deliberate negation of postmodern theory, Rem and many other contemporary architects tend to bracket out the socio-political dimensions of urbanism. For example, Massimiliano Fuksas explains his concept for the Twin Towers in Vienna as follows: "Transition, connection and transparency. For the city is energy and tension."[66] It is not the place here to question how "transition, connection and transparency" could be deduced from "energy and tension"; the important aspect is the neo-modernist vision of the city not as a social system but as a concentration of physical energy. Koolhaas speaks of people in a similar way: "It is perhaps a very old-fashioned aspect of our work that we're actually interested in people, not in humanitarian, humanist or architecturally 'nice' ways, but simply in how people exist in the flows and behaviours of global culture today."[67] Here, people are treated instrumentally as one of the means to the effective organization of economy, not as ends in themselves in a Kantian sense or as members of social systems.

Expertise

While the neo-modernist claim that architectural decisions follow necessarily from objective conditions exculpates the architects of moral responsibility, it is premised on the existence of a specific architectural expertise in making such deductions. The question we have to ask, then, is the same that Louis Sullivan already formulated: "What is it that justifies the name architect, what is his special, exclusive function?"[68] Ever since Vitruvius, architects have claimed the ability to tap into expert knowledge from diverse fields and forge it into a culturally cogent synthesis. Still, it remains unclear to many what exactly it is that architects do better than other experts.

Some of the leading offices of today—Foreign Office Architects, Zaha Hadid Architects, or UN Studio—talk about specific architectural knowledge. Alejandro Zaera-Polo explains that FOA's design process is a way of creating knowledge, and insists that theoretical speculation and practical knowledge should not be "understood either in opposition or in a complementary, dialectical relationship, but rather as a complex continuum in which both forms of knowledge oper-

64 Ibid., p. 514.
65 Ibid., p. 515.
66 http://bene.com/office-furniture/at_twintower.html
67 See note 42, p. 16.
68 Sullivan, Louis: *Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings, p.* 139.

ate as devices capable of effectively transforming reality."[69] Patrik Schumacher goes as far as to describe parametricism in terms similar to Imre Lakatos' idea of research programs in science. Both conceptions of architectural knowledge are problematical in that they take the broader relevance of certain disciplinary issues to be self-evident and assume such meta-values as coherence without argument.

By contrast, the proposal by Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos of UN Studio makes the case for the continuing social relevance of architecture very clearly. Looking for models in Calvin Klein's fashion empire and the production plants for Audi and Volkswagen, they articulate the basic conditions for a future architectural practice.[70] In order not to be reduced to mere facilitators, architects need to "formulate their policy by activating the imagination and using new, enabling techniques. No capital is needed—only the will and the capacity for fabrication. Imagination is itself empowering. As in politics and economy, power in the building industry is operational and consensual."[71] Once this way of thinking is introduced, they expect the social role of the architect to change fundamentally. "New concepts of control transform the untenable position of master builder into a public scientist. As an expert on everyday public information, the architect collects information that is potentially structuring, co-ordinates it, transforms it and offers ideas and images for the organization of public life in an endless, seamless system."[72] For van Berkel and Bos, the architect is a specialist who commands a very particular expertise: "In the same way that a cosmologist uses his knowledge of the universe to visualise situations so far removed that they are beyond the reach of the telescope, as in the theories of the big bang and the black holes, the architect can access remote and complex situations by combining specific knowledge and visualising techniques." [73]

But what is this specific knowledge about? It could, for example, be formal, as in the case of a consistent parametric generation of shapes, or functional, as in the case of a manipulation of atmospheres in order to sustain a particular pattern of behavior. One problem is that once any such a field of knowledge is fully

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69 Zaera-Polo, Alejandro: "A Scientific Autobiography 1982–2004: Madrid, Harvard, OMA, the AA, Yokohama, the Globe." In *The New Architectural Pragmatism: A Harvard Design Magazine Reader*. Ed. William Saunders. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, pp. 1, 12.
70 Van Berkel, Ben, and Bos, Caroline: *Move. Vol. 1. Imagination*. Amsterdam: UN Studio & Goose Press, 1999, p. 27.
71 Ibid., p. 24.
72 Ibid., p. 28.
73 Ibid., p. 23–24.

articulated, it may lose its relevance because of the emphasis given to creativity in the discourse on architecture. If something an architect has developed truly works well, it will probably be applied by many reasonable architects and eventually prescribed as a norm, in which case it really has nothing to do with creative rchitecture. As a result, architecture is often understood as that part of building production that eludes rational study and that can better be explained as resulting from shifts in taste than from the advancement of knowledge.[74] Another problem is that design is an irreducibly normative practice: architects determine how others should live. Given that two millennia of moral philosophy have failed to provide a single credible argument in favor of ethical realism, it is hard to see how anyone could claim moral expertise.

If no specific knowledge can be identified, architects might be best off claiming to be exceptional generalists. Certainly, Koolhaas believes that architects are well-equipped to become experts on virtually everything: "what we've tried to become, in our office, is not architectural intellectuals but rather public intellectuals, in other words intellectuals who are able to contribute in domains beyond architecture. … We do this by analysing the political and other components of each project to see if there is a cumulative effect to what we're trying to do, building up an intelligence that is not just a knowledge about architecture but, increasingly, a knowledge about the world—or about discrepancies in the world."[75] It is probably as a public intellectual that Koolhaas was invited to join the EU "Reflection Group", chaired by the former prime minister of Spain, Felipe Gonzalez; other members include the former CEO of Nokia, Jorma Ollila; the former president of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga; and the former president of Poland, Lech Walesa. The task of the group of nine experts is to envisage the future of Europe for the time period of 2020–2030.

But what does it mean to be a public intellectual? Russell Jacoby, who coined the term in 1987, names Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, C. Wright Mills, William H.

74 In this sense, architecture might be comparable to philosophy. In ancient Greece, philosophy was the universal science, so that Aristotle for example discussed everything from physics, biology and anthropology to history, art, politics, etc. His philosophical speculations, however, often led to empirical errors. Thus in *Historia animalium* (501b20-23) he claims that "males have more teeth than females in the case of men, sheep, goats, and swine; in the case of other animals observations have not yet been made." Later, as more rigorous observations were carried out, the empirical science of biology soon refuted Aristotle's intimations. Today, to exaggerate but slightly, only those issues remain within the realm of philosophy where no scientific progress is possible. In the same way, architects have given away many of their traditional theoretical or scientific areas, including construction, ecological concerns, etc. to specialized sciences.
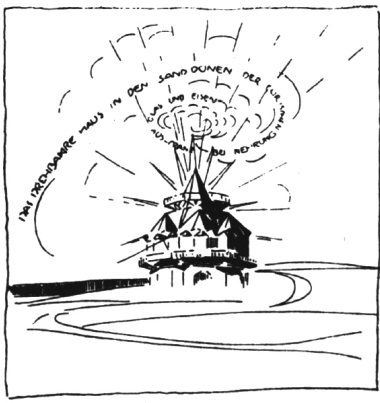75 See note 42, p. 13.

Whyte, Paul and Percival Goodman as public intellectuals who actively took part in public and political discussions and did so in a vernacular idiom, rather than assuming the specialist language and authority of an academic or other expert. Their ultimate goal was to engage the public in a true political debate about matters that make a difference.

Koolhaas is certainly a qualified candidate for a public intellectual, having collected every architectural accolade in the world, keeping a certain independence from the academia, and writing in a provocative and accessible style. However, there is a problem associated with the instrumental ethics he propounds. Jacoby makes a fundamental distinction between a 'public intellectual' and a 'publicist' which "now signifies someone who handles and manipulates the media, an advance of front man (or women). A public intellectual or old-style publicist is something else, perhaps the opposite, an incorrigibly independent soul answering to no one."[76] It is hard to imagine a public intellectual without strong values, and so far Koolhaas has failed to articulate his, except to recommend "a deliberate surrender—tactical maneuver to reverse a defensive position," more precisely, a "surrender to technologies; to engineers, contractors, manufacturers; to politics; to others."[77]

For the architects of FOA, for example, such a strategy of capitulation is not particularly appealing. In order not to be reduced to a service provider and to take control instead, Alejandro Zaera-Polo wants to use iconography as an excuse for formal experimentation and a ruse to sell the project to a client. During a presentation of the Yokohama Port Terminal project, he realized that the audience was not grasping the specifically architectural knowledge relating to the circulation diagrams, the geometric transformations and the construction technologies

76 Jacoby, Russell: *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe. New* York: Basic Books, 2000 (first edition 1987), p. 235.
77 Koolhaas, Rem: "Surrender, Ville Nouvelle Melun-Sènart France competition 1987", 1995, p. 974; *Bigness*, p. 513.

involved. In the spur of the moment, he suggested that the designers had actually been inspired by Hokusai's popular woodcut *Wave* – and the audience bought it. Likewise, FOA's bundled skyscraper for the Ground Zero site was originally described as a result of structural optimizations and prefaced harshly: "Let's not even consider remembering. What for?" In the patriotic atmosphere of post-9/11 America, however, the concept needed to be repackaged as a visual metaphor for the slogan, "United We Stand." Zaera-Polo concludes that "by opening form into the reprocessing of identity and iconography we can perhaps sustain a re-empowerment of the architect as a relevant expert with a public dimension, rather than a hermetic—even if seductive—practitioner."[78]

More generally, van Berkel and Bos explain that the contemporary architect needs to master a specific meta-technique: "Mediation breeds spin—the practice that enables the effective communication of complex policies to a mass audience. In an age in which politics are dissociated from fixed values, spin-doctors are becoming the real politicians. Who will be the real architects?"[79] Dr. David Fisher with his spinning tower may be the ultimate champion of this technique. Asked to describe himself as the dynamic architect of the future, he proffers the following: "I am a person who grew up with a strong sense of responsibility towards humanity, in the global sense, with the desire to change the world, improving it and making it better and better for the quality of human life. I am a person that has an absolute conviction that everything is possible, we are part of a system that has no limits and no limitations." And he adds: "It needs to be remembered, however, that there is a huge premium on the price of property for iconic Dynamic towers!!!"[80]

78 Zaera-Polo, Alejandro: "The Hokusai Wave." *Quaderns*, April 2005, pp. 78, 79, 83, 86. He sees the issue of interpretation clearly as a matter of power and control, arguing: "one of our crucial duties is to keep broadcasting a new interpretation of reality with consistent frequency. In doing so, we guarantee a certain initiative in our relation with whoever is invested with the authority to commission and administer projects, and we are empowered to pursue certain goals beyond the mere provision of architectural services. By constructing arguments that exceed a specific project and conveying them to a broader public, we produce a more ambiguous regime of power in our client relationships." Ibid. p. 78.

79 See note 70, p. 17.

80 http://www.dynamicarchitecture.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=21&Itemid=39&lang=eng. See also http://www.dynamicarchitecture.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33&Itemid=30&lang=eng