

# review

Content

Rem Koolhaas, (AMO/OMA) et al  
by Patrick Lichty

book

Upon picking up *Content*, a collection of missives on contemporary culture by Rem Koolhaas and the groups AMO and OMA, one notices a collage of mass media juxtapositions: a McBush with a gun-wielding crucifix and Freedom Fries, a Rambo-Hussein, and a muscle-bound Mr. Bean on a WTC and EU-starred background, all bristling with weaponry. Tabloid hyperbole on the front conflates genres in a Baudrillardian transparency of evils -- "sweatshop demographics," "big-brother skyscrapers," and "homicidal engineering" give a hint when it comes to the fractured cultural dialectic contained in the book. On one of the opening pages, the text raises the question whether *Content* is a magazine or a book (a book-sized 530+ pages on glossy magazine stock), and self-consciously declares the tension between the two as being super-interesting. This affirmation takes the hyperbolic stance of the cutting edge of broadcast media and much of new media, which often assert their placement at the "bleeding edge" of culture.

While the declaration of "super-interesting"-ness makes explicit numerous agendas of the book that might be best explored by the reader, *Content* constructs a polemic arising from texts by OMA writers in the US, the EU, Japan and others, and bound and counterbalanced by the AMO connective group that spans the globe, which reinforces the book's dialectical architecture. The fractal discussion of media, architecture, and culture continues through a twisting sprawl of (possibly) faux ads, articles, and agitprop illustration. *Content* combines the collection of texts in a volume as dense and shallow as 500 channels of Cable TV. Throughout its structure, the book continually mirrors contemporary culture by simultaneously sending up culture and shooting its own foot -- by putting reams of material in a book that is easily dog-eared, placing timeless ideas in a disposable vessel, and having a press premiere in the NY Women's Republican club.

The continuously self-referential, mocking, self-effacing structure of *Content* is perhaps its only weakness. It's almost too well constructed, too well formulated, without media quantizing, loopy parody or spurious asides in the architecture of noise, which would add bit of spice to the piece. In its critique of a "culture of flat-

ness," *Content* becomes rhizomatic in itself, again mimicking the culture it reflects upon. However, this seems to be a deliberately constructed paradox.

What is probably more interesting is not the subject of its title, i.e. its "content," but the zeitgeist it encapsulates. The volume captures the millennial, global aesthetic of excess and is best read in the style of the flaneur, strolling through its media blast, while perusing here and there. By taking repeated journeys through its pages, one gradually builds a map of *Content's* navigation through the First World media sprawl. As a book, *Content* is an amorphous mass of nuggets from mass culture, sociology, urban architecture, design, architecture, and advertising. As mentioned in the beginning of this review, it is a publication that doesn't know whether it is a book or a magazine, an art text or a coffee-table tabloid. In short, it is a book that self-consciously questions its own identity in a culture that lacks an identity of its own. *Content* blasts contemporary culture by creating its own media blast.

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