



ROBERTO ZANCAN
STABILIZING THE IMAGE
events
on the film "Koolhaas Houselife" by
Ila Beka and Louise Lemoine

Defined the "architectural cult-movie of the recent years", *Koolhaas Houselife* was officially presented at the 2008 Venice Architecture Biennial. Before then, a series of previews - at the NAI in Rotterdam, at the CCA in Montreal, at the Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York City, at Harvard's GSD - contributed to making this film part of a sort of epochal perspective. It could in fact be linked to reactions against the assumed exhaustion of the social function of architecture and the ever more frequent inability for architects to respond to the users' needs.

In other words *Koolhaas Houselife* was presented as an episode - possibly the noblest - of a long line of blogs, reportages and *Fuffas*⁰¹ of all kinds who everyday murder - "with an incredible blackness" - the art of construction which has become, for many, just "an architecture of the absurd", "an art which has been disfigured by genes", speculative buildings far from the public interest, *embellishment for developers*. A well known savagery, that more or less consciously refers to some writings from the Sixties, when, for example, Tom Wolfe began to expound the necessity to understand the bursting out of popular culture, of vernacular and of mass behavior versus the elitarian conceptions of modernism. At that time, Bob Venturi, scoffing at the call to order of Peter Blake's *God's own junkyard*, explained the need to learn from Las Vegas. Such savagery returned at the end of the 1990s when a magazine like "Le Visiteur" introduced a "negative criticism

in architecture" which would be capable of evaluating the dysfunctions of the architectural projects and not just of proclaiming its merits, because "this does not prevent one from appreciating the work from an aesthetic point of view, as long as this formal appreciation is not expressed by the subjectivity of he who expresses it. A criticism on the social and cultural objectives would be far more radical. By pointing out more tangible, quantifiable and transmissible criteria, it would also take on the role of questioning the architectural practice by repositioning it in the public domain, outside the inner circle of insiders and of their uncertainties as far as an aesthetic judgement is concerned".



Although Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine have been placed inside such a debate, their work is indifferent to all that which, in their own words, “happens until the very moment one inhabits a house”. They are looking at cinema more than at architecture, both when it allows us to perceive the reality that lives without us and that every *Buongiorno*⁰² ridicules, and when their films⁰³ rely completely on the “recording of space... of empty space, of architectural space, of urban space and of human space”.

And so, despite the most widespread opinions, it was a chance that they looked at Rem Koolhaas’s architecture. The only archistar who showed interest for *post-occupancy*, that ambiguous work on a polemical terrain that, starting from the most self-evident observations (“the architecture book has the most beautiful images... it shows a building which is even nicer than in reality”), introduces an attempt to give voice to the users of architecture, even those who have negative comments, and it insists on values which are not merely aesthetical.

And if Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine are interested in understanding what happens “as soon as a person starts inhabiting a place”, Rem Koolhaas, watching their film, said: “what I find interesting in your film is the way it shows daily participation. It is not flattering, but is realistic, and with no bad intentions. Just a sort of documentary on practical engagement and on its results... And for me it is very beautiful because it creates a certain stability, it stabilizes the image”.

notes:

- 01. a parody of Massimiliano Fuksas by famous Italian comedian Maurizio Crozza.
- 02. *Buongiorno* is the title of a film by Melo Prino, produced by Ila Bêka and awarded as one of the best short films in Italy some years ago.
- 03. as Tiziana Finzi pointed out in speaking of *Quodlibet* (a film by Ila Bêka which was featured at the Locarno festival in 2007)

