

Building, Defining, and Progressing an Evolving Paradigm

By: Gabriel J Fey

Abstract:

This paper discusses the emergence of a newly progressing paradigm that is shaping the way our urban environments function and form. Through the scope of work of both Rem Koolhaas and Bjarke Ingels, a narrative is established that implies the creation of a platform (by Rem Koolhaas) on which contemporary designers (i.e. Bjarke Ingels) base their work and then continue to advance the platform through the addition of their own progressive ideas. In the case of Bjarke Ingels, his addition is the focus on Social Engagement as a means of designing flexible spaces that are able to change and progress along with societal demands (which are becoming more and more rapid). The notion of infrastructure also plays a key role both in the work of Koolhaas and Ingels, and is used as an example of a unifying element between the 2 “links” of the chain that is the evolving paradigm.

Gabriel J Fey

12/15/11

Theories of Architecture

Professor Sabini

Building, Defining, and Progressing an Evolving Paradigm

Introduction:

Throughout the course of time, architecture, like many other aspects of life, has been known to adapt and evolve based on the ever-changing factors that influence it, regardless of how minimal or significant. The world now finds itself in a current state of rapid change that is exponentially progressing as we advance further in our understandings and interpretations of countless notions of life. Architecture and design, by nature, thrive in times such as these, given the influence and opportunity that they, and their individuals possess. While in the past we have been able to establish concrete standards from which design spawns, the same is not as true for us currently. In order to coincide with the rapidity of change, design has now begun to alter its intentions towards a more labyrinthine method of creation, during which countless paths are generated as new outlets on which to focus design. It is a resultant and a resolution to the many clashes of forces that occur on a daily basis in modern times. With our cities growing drastically and increasing in density and consumption, it has transformed to a multi-disciplinary field which functions at varying scales (some of which have never been fathomed before). Ultimately, architecture is no longer in a

current state of prescription, but rather of suggested possibilities.¹ It is in the process of reaching a delicate balance between pragmatics and utopianism that encompasses aspects of social, ecological, political, and cultural influences.²

Acknowledgment of State:

As history has shown, it is during these times of radical progression that few individuals come to fruition given their insight and intellect on the current and/or future trends. Rem Koolhaas has since emerged by intentionally creating a sometimes-ambiguous platform from which designs are based. The unique aspect of this platform that establishes it from most other paradigms is its culmination of architecture and urban design as equal factors in creating a new spatiality. This collaboration of all relevant fields inherently began to promote a sense of globalization given its independency and “break of obsession” with context.³ While it does tend to shy away from aspects of history and context, it is at the same time consistently drawn towards locales of maximum infrastructure within urban environments. In these situations the context will inevitably influence both economic criteria and ideals, given the consideration of differing political systems. This is precisely what allows for the complex layering of systems, disciplines, and realms within the given context, and what separates Koolhaas from the form-driven, and vanity induced designers (i.e. deconstructivists). He makes note of his awareness that cities across the globe (in particular Paris, Atlanta, and Tokyo) all tend to focus on problems within their own city,

¹ Rajchman, John. "Thinking Big-Dutch Architect Rem Koolhaas-Interview." *FindArticles*. Dec. 1994. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n4_v33/ai_16547724/>. P. 11

² Koolhaas, Rem, and Sanford Kwinter. *Rem Koolhaas: Conversations with Students*. Houston, TX: Rice University, School of Architecture, 1996. Print. P. 41

³ Rajchman, John. P. 10

when in actuality they all have the same issues.⁴ Koolhaas knew that poor habits of egotistical and power-desiring architecture would no longer suffice given the urban world's exponential shift of complexity. Because cities are now all developing similar characteristics, it can be assumed that people are beginning to envision what role they prefer their architecture, cities, and infrastructure to perform.

Koolhaas' intuition (as displayed through his writings and interviews) and ability to realize shifts in priorities are precisely what support his development of this architectural and urbanistic platform of design. Projects such as the Zeebrugge Sea Terminal, Biblioteque de France, and ZKM Center for Art (see Figure 1) all portray notions of programmatically informed decisions, circulation/congestion, and evolving media as new ways of approaching the design of spaces, while at the same time allowing for further investigation of innovation.

Developing an Established Platform:

Given this unique platform of malleability and evolution, Rem Koolhaas successfully opened the door for an infinite amount of designers to become involved in influencing where the future of design would ultimately aim. Among the many, Bjarke Ingels arose as one of Rem's most exemplary understudies. His [Ingels'] Darwinian analogy of architecture portrays his ambitions by relating society to the forces of *nature* (metaphorically meaning *architecture*)⁵, as well as mastering the idea of a pragmatic

⁴ Koolhaas, Rem, and Sanford Kwinter. P. 40

⁵ Bennett, Linda. "Interview with Bjarke Ingels." *Arch-Ninja*. 10 Nov. 2009. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.archi-ninja.com/interview-with-bjarke-ingels/>>. P. 2

utopian design style in order to improve the world around us. He views architecture not as an end result, but rather a bridge that enables an end result to occur. For him, architecture is “the physical manifestation of all other forces of society that are constantly in development.”⁶ It is about the process that exists behind the design; that is where the innovation and evolution occurs.

One of Koolhaas’ most prominent influences on Ingels was his manner of approaching each and every project as its own experiment. Previously, Bjarke Ingels recognized a pattern of static architects who unavoidably seemed to become rutted in singular design styles or concepts. The primary issue here, though, is the disconnect that is imposed by this on the active world around us through the both static and selfish designs. Simply put, “architecture is not an autonomous art form or entity.”⁷ By designing potential in the world (i.e. architecture/spaces) Ingels allows for society to utilize and expand upon his creations, therefore bringing to fruition whatever is most desired and appropriate in it’s specific place (just as Koolhaas created an open platform from which Ingels [and others] to build upon). This concept can be depicted in his ‘looping’ projects, which promote a sense of endless interaction between users, program, infrastructure, and space.⁸ Bjarke Ingels Group’s (BIG) proposition for the St. Petersburg pier is defined by its literal looping form that is juxtaposed out into the Tampa Bay waters (see Figure 2). Its design allows for it to evolve along with the city by using “its strong form and generous spaces [to] accommodate a multitude of

⁶ Ohtake, Miyoko. "Bjarke Ingels of BIG." *Dwell*. Dwell Magazine, 23 July 2009. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.dwell.com/articles/bjarke-ingels-of-big.html>>. P. 3

⁷ Ohtake, Miyoko. P. 2

⁸ "Interview with Bjarke Ingels." *The Dirt*. Ed. Jared Green. ASLA, 24 Oct. 2011. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <<http://dirt.asla.org/2011/10/24/interview-with-bjarke-ingels/>>.

programs, either one single destination or multiple individual activities or tenants” (see Figure 3). The size, flexibility, and malleability of the design allow for the city’s users to alter either the physical spaces of the loop over time and/or manipulate the programmatic conditions within them so as to ever avoid a dormant design (such as the existing one). Ironically, one can make the observation of similarities between BIG’s Wave Pier and Rem Koolhaas’ CCTV building (see Figure 4, which is also a looping building, yet simply more orthogonal. In both cases, the architects enhance the condition of spatiality through program and user, however BIG’s intention of pliability is one that holds great significance...

+ Social Engagement:

While the influences and similarities between the two prominent architects are apparent, I find there to be one defining difference which serves as a testament to this evolutionary process, and that is the notion of Social Engagement. Although Koolhaas was aware that the public realm had declined drastically, he was unable to copiously apprehend what sense of sociality this new condition posed, and likewise, the possibilities that existed along with it. He made note of a “non-architectural cohesion” that arose when there was a competition of ambitions between the architect and society; however, Koolhaas was rarely able to successfully include this aspect in his design.⁹ This is in no way meant to be a negative reflection on the work of Rem Koolhaas, but rather a celebration and verification of his intuition, which enabled him to realize that an evolutionary approach towards architecture was necessary. A prime example of his recognition of this ‘break in cohesion’ is his realization that architecture

⁹ Koolhaas, Rem, and Sanford Kwinter. P. 43

is so often rooted in a nostalgic sense of analysis. Koolhaas alludes to the obsession architects have with pedestrian axes, and how they believe them to be a sort of end-all-be-all solution, when in actuality they often promote vacancy in the surrounding areas, therefore doing just the opposite of what they are initially intended to do.¹⁰ In this sense, architects weaken their profession by refusing to address the public domain with a sense of reality and pragmatics, rather than a prescribed nostalgic manner. Koolhaas' significance in the world of design dwells in the fact that he is among one of the first selfless architects that humbly places the progression of both design and the world ahead of his own specific desires.

Likewise, in the case of Bjarke Ingels, countless projects depict his inclusion of society and the public realm. Projects such as 8House, Danish Pavilion, Slussen and many others, all showcase this cohesion in their own way. In the case of 8House, Ingels' utilizes his concept of "architectural alchemy" by combining several programmatic conditions that on their own are very typical (i.e. housing, office, commercial), yet when comprised in the unique way they are, a better sense of social interaction takes place, thus improving the quality of the public realm (see Figure 5).¹¹ Bjarke's Danish Pavilion (which is essentially a horizontal loop) in Shanghai was rooted in both the similarities and differences that exist between the Danish and Chinese cultural realms (see Figure 6). He was successfully able to temporarily instill certain Danish values within the Chinese context by creating a biking pavilion (a concept that used to be prominent in Shanghai, and currently is in Denmark), while at the same time incorporating Chinese culture within Denmark (by replacing Copenhagen's Little

¹⁰Koolhaas, Rem, and Sanford Kwinter. P. 42

¹¹Ohtake, Miyoko. P. 5

Mermaid with piece of Chinese art). Slussen, yet another example, displays several social considerations that culminate simultaneously at singular node of bridging infrastructure (see Figure 7). By reversing the traditional relationship, Ingels surrounds traffic with public space and creates a distinctive interaction while still being able to allow each specific function to act successfully. The subtleties of ascending and descending ramps then gradually help to connect the many layers of programmatic, social, and infrastructural elements, both literally and figuratively.

Paralleling this notion of infrastructure, BIG begins to perfectly display the amalgamation of his Koolhaas influence of designed congestion with his [Ingels] addition of societal commitment. The Superkilen, Stockholmsporten, and Miami Audi Highway Design are key precedents that employ Ingels' concept of 'social infrastructure' as a way of increasing activity and life, as well as influencing the city's form and function.¹² In the case of the Superkilen, his aforementioned analogy is depicted by the decision to design an "open creation" which *allows* for an end result, rather than him directly creating an end result. The cultural park utilizes surface, texture, color, and material to designate a dichotomous relationship between users and space, which in turn promotes involvement in the areas in order to bring to fruition a fluctuating urban art piece that is simultaneously a piece of pedestrian infrastructure. The stockholmsporten is even more so tied to infrastructure given its focus on two bypassing highways that physically separate an urban environment. Again, we see Ingels implement a loop, but this time using the landscape as a means to create a democratic space that intertwines the different programmatic circumstances. While he emphasizes the notion that a gateway is merely a point in space, he complements this

¹² "Interview with Bjarke Ingels." *The Dirt*. Ed. Jared Green.

idea by creating a bowl, or valley, that acts a container within which the infrastructure is able to expand and contract as necessary. Of the three case studies the Miami Audi Highway Design is the most strongly related to this perception of social infrastructure, primarily because it literally enforces the interaction of user and infrastructure. By utilizing advanced technology (some of which is not entirely possible yet), BIG proposes to eliminate all physical barriers that prevent this interaction, and replace them with digital information that is able to calculate, predict, and promote a pre-determined (or existing) amount of congestion. In doing so, a completely new dynamic is created between the way users utilize infrastructure, and the way that infrastructure influences the form and function of the urban environment.

Through these social infrastructural designs, Bjarke Ingels perfectly displays his furthering of Rem Koolhaas' ideal while simultaneously layering his own theories upon it. He was able to recognize that these two entities (society/people and infrastructure) are among the most dominant factors of how modern day cities function. When his intuition of a hedonistic sustainability, which is designing efficiently without jeopardizing our status/quality of life, is merged with these social infrastructural models it is almost impossible for an urban environment to neglect or discount the direction of the design. And even if this would become so, the designs are such that the users would be able to alter the spaces/designs freely until the necessary space/function was acquired.

Conclusion:

What we have now come to understand, with the assistance of Rem Koolhaas and Bjarke Ingels, is that our design philosophy has reached a sense of Evolution, not

Revolution (as it so often has in the past)¹³. Architecture is no longer about radical separation from precedent values, but rather a furthering of what has previously been realized. Rem Koolhaas established a basis of design from which Bjarke Ingels has successfully promoted a kind of positive, hedonistic progression that allows for society to concurrently improve its efficiency, as well as its comfortability. Where Koolhaas was uninterested in determining the exact direction and significance of the inclusion of social engagement, Ingels is willing to understand and exploit this concept to the fullest by building off of what Koolhaas ascertained. While Bjarke Ingels tends to have more of an agenda (perhaps due to his younger age or ambitious character), he is aware that without Koolhaas' modest and humbly unbiased approach (which is due to his media/journalist background) there would be no basis for his [Ingels'] work. As more designers come to appreciate this phenomenon of societal inclusion, we will eventually reach an all-encompassing design theory that is constantly learning and developing with and from others as a means of consistently diverging into countless paths of experimentation and succession. This, in turn, will allow for design to compete with the rapid and exponential progression of society as we become more and more intellectual and intelligent. Our spatial design ultimately reflects the culture and society in which it is created, therefore emphasizing Jurgen Habermas' position that modernity is an "incomplete project."

¹³Ingels, Bjarke. *Yes Is More: an Archicomic on Architectural Evolution*. Köln: Evergreen, 2010. Print.

Figure 1

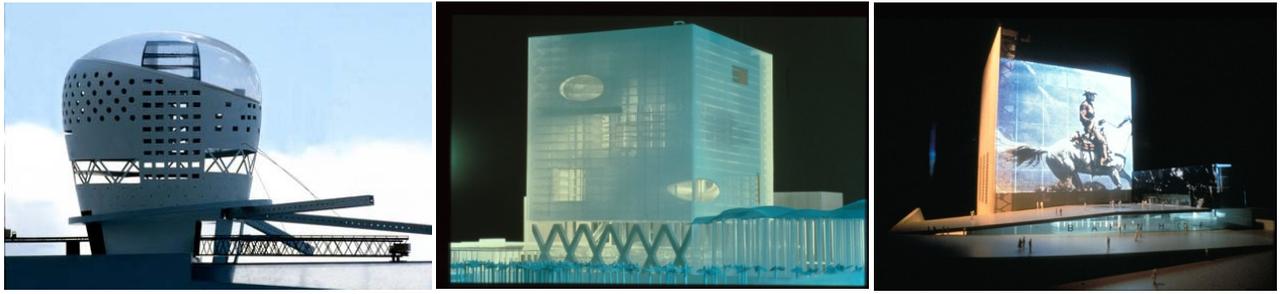


Figure 2



Figure 3

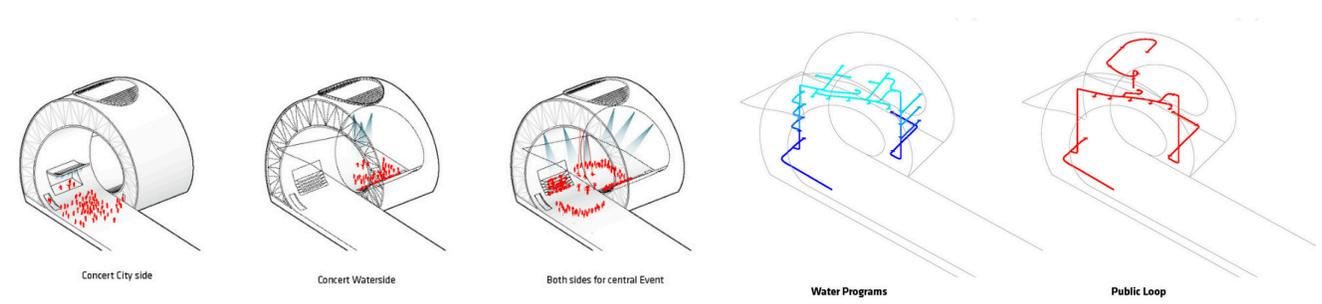


Figure 4

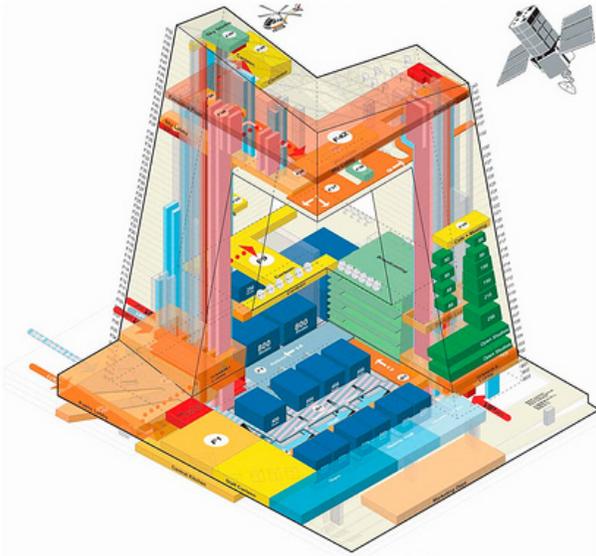


Figure 5

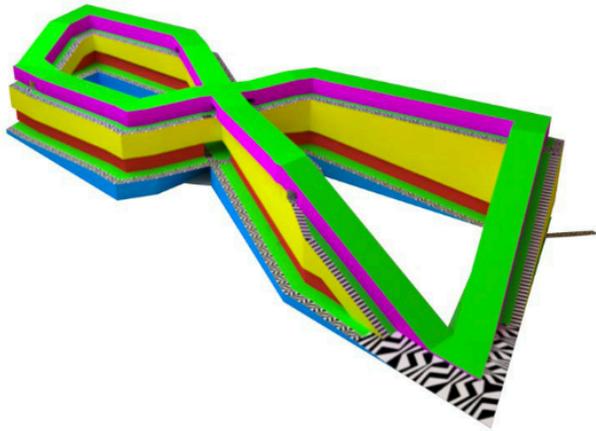
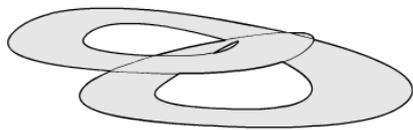


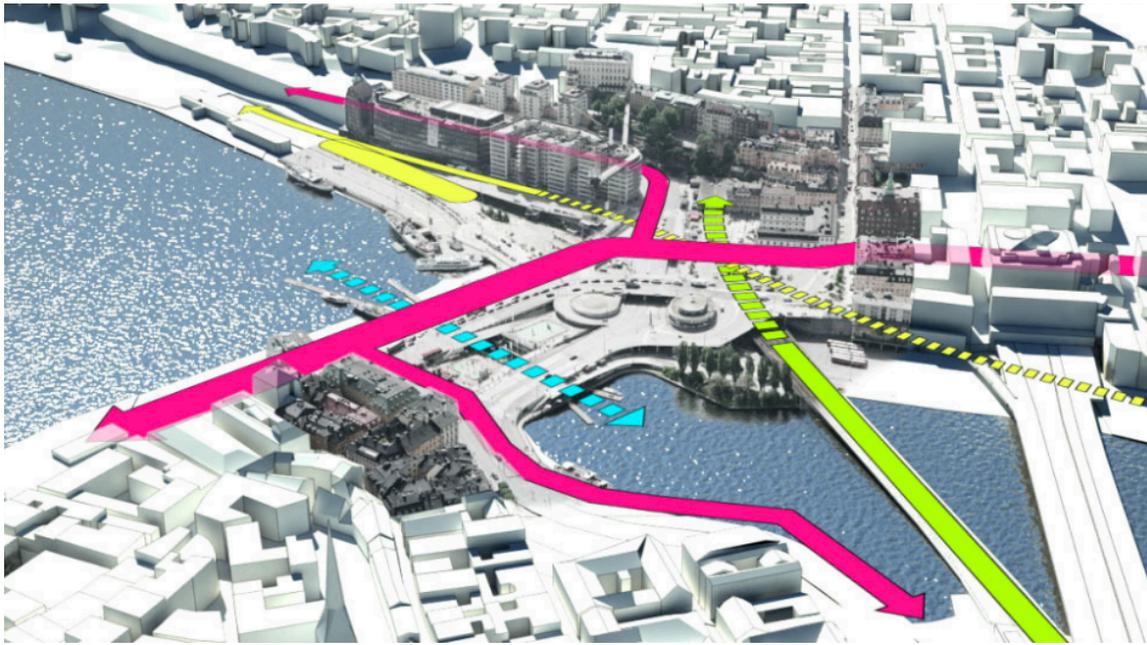
Figure 6



CONTINUOUS EXHIBITION



Figure 7



Bibliography

- Bennett, Linda. "Interview with Bjarke Ingels." *Arch-Ninja*. 10 Nov. 2009. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.archi-ninja.com/interview-with-bjarke-ingels/>>.
- Hajer, M. "The Generic City." *Theory, Culture & Society* 16.4 (1999): 137-44. Print.
- Ingels, Bjarke. *Yes Is More: an Archicomic on Architectural Evolution*. Köln: Evergreen, 2010. Print.
- "Interview with Bjarke Ingels." *The Dirt*. Ed. Jared Green. ASLA, 24 Oct. 2011. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <<http://dirt.asla.org/2011/10/24/interview-with-bjarke-ingels/>>.
- Koolhaas, Rem, and Bruce Mau. *S M L XL: OMA*. S.l.: S.n., 1993. Print.
- Koolhaas, Rem, and Sanford Kwinter. *Rem Koolhaas: Conversations with Students*. Houston, TX: Rice University, School of Architecture, 1996. Print.
- Losada, Ramiro. "TV Interview: Bjarke Ingels." *Arch Tracker*. Studio Banana, 27 Dec. 2010. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.archtracker.com/bjarke-ingels-big-interview-by-studio-banana/2010/12/>>.
- Ohtake, Miyoko. "Bjarke Ingels of BIG." *Dwell*. Dwell Magazine, 23 July 2009. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.dwell.com/articles/bjarke-ingels-of-big.html>>.
- Rajchman, John. "Thinking Big-Dutch Architect Rem Koolhaas-Interview." *FindArticles*. Dec. 1994. Web. 16 Nov. 2011. <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n4_v33/ai_16547724/>.