

Whatever You Do, Is Not Architecture

A critical paper on the concept of “Junk space”, It's place and it's effect on the future of architecture.

By Rojan Nekourouymotlagh

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Tutor: NERMA CRIDGE

The following essay has been written as a part of the Third year history and Theory course at the Architectural Association.

The essay is written in a part fiction fashion, centring around the topic of 'JunkSpace' within architecture and ' Architectural Education' ,with a particular outlook on 'Counter-Architecture'. The essay bases itself majorly on 'Junkspace', a essay written by Rem Koolhaas appearing for the first time in 'The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping (2001)'. Junkspace was later reprinted in the 100th issue of October magazine as well as hundreds of other magazines, books, websites as well as OMA's follow-up to their book SMLXL, 'Content'. Within the very limited space of 7,500 words, Koolhaas explains in a critical fashion, what the present and future of the contemporary architecture resembles.

" This junk space, rather than modern architecture, is the true product of modernisation."

Will Wiles/ ICON Magazine

The following essay has been written in the three-act story format of home-away-home. The characters within the text are not real however the concept, the research and the argument very much are. The text is no longer just a piece of writing as it is a performance. The style of writing becomes a primary element of the text. We will not be speaking of a physical space nor will we address the preliminary information to prepare for delivering the text.

Each reader is an audience and each one of you plays a role of your own.

You will now find your place within the performance.

A critical paper on the concept of "Junk space", Its place and its effect on the future of architecture.



Written by Christopher Fletcher-Campbell
Tuesday May 3rd, 2003

Writing is simple, **Make them read it.** Writing is words, nothing more and nothing less. You would not survive 25 minutes in this office without making each and every single one of these half-educated 'colleagues' of mine listen. The second-hand clothes industry would not survive if the seller was describing each and every one of the jacket's fibres in a harmonious fashion. The butcher would have to close his shop if he described his famous chicken stuffed with turkey ham, as the 'simple yet gentle brushstroke of god upon humanity'. Words carry the same weight, they do not carry more, they can not. The words would fall apart much like a structure buckling under too much weight. This does not only apply to words but rather many forms of explaining.

When I first read 'Junkspace' I felt removed from the architectural world. A world which seemed removed from itself. It seemed as if the architects had tangled one another between the layers of their most contemporary work and were sinking under their own weight. A library of worn-out lectures and references using the classic not as a way to learn but as **gods of their frat parties**. Architecture seems to have reduced to the mantra of academic exchange, far removed from the realities in which architecture is not only a topic of discussion but also a source of conflict. Most of what is discussed about architecture can be pinpointed within the boundaries of 1000-2000 words which frankly have outlived their meaning and their true value. Junkspace remains one of the most thought-provoking pieces of 'fine written history' within the architectural realm and beyond that, I have written. The following article by yours truly can be viewed as a **critical response to Junkspace** or as a **love letter to Sir Rem Koolhaas**, you can be the judge of that.

Very early on within reading Junkspace I knew I disliked it. Which was not unexpected, I dislike most of the pieces I read and Junkspace was already not built up as this magnificent piece of written architecture in my head. However, one thing was majorly different, I was passionate about this dislike. It is not difficult to address egotistic writing style or lack thereof, within the said piece. The unquestioned wealth of the words carry the same amount of cash as a billionaire on the verge of being bankrupt. Junkspace (the essay) created a new era, in which the antagonism between the new and the old, can be titled 'Junkspace'. The essay takes the lengthy route of 7500 words or three weeks of your time to explain to you exactly what Junkspace is, only it isn't exact and it isn't for certain what you think it is. Nor is it what your friend thought she understood, nor is it anyone's description of Junkspace. The best description for Junkspace is the lack thereof. Junkspace is not physical, it is beyond code and beyond its own footsteps left behind. It resembles soft sand when no part of it has been touched by water. It does not breathe, it does not respond but its undouble shadow is standing 6ft above you, making sure you know it exists.

"Junkspace is sealed, held together not by structure but by skin, like a bubble."

Junkspace- Rem Koolhaas

Junkspace can not be remembered, not any more than the first few seconds of reality after a dream. It is overdetermined and intermediate at the same time. Its definition of form does not lay within what it is but what it isn't.

“Junkspace thrives on design, but design dies in Junkspace. There is no for, only proliferation.”

Junkspace- Rem Koolhaas

Koolhaas explains within his essay, how ‘traditional moments are defined by stapling and taping’. Stapling and taping the same recycled information over and over hoping it would increase its value by the time, resembling a 30-year-old bottle of wine. It’s making a different house form the same ten pieces of legos given to you by your older brother. The sheer repetition of these elements and the books written about them, lectures given every Wednesday at 6 after tutorials and yet still overrun by their users to give the illusion of an unbroken surface. Verbs unknown and unthinkable in architectural history.

Much of the language of architecture has been built on ‘convincing the jury’. We left architecture in the 20th century and brought architecture debris with us through. The social psychology of architecture, as we know it today, is not a response but rather a question to an answer. No architecture witnessed by yours truly to this very day can be called anything but Junkspace.

Architecture today is a trend at it’s best.

The language of architecture today is one that can be described as psychological self-absorption and internal intellectual cowardness.

The majority of contemporary, classic and just about every other text written is not an expression of self or the narrative but rather keeping up with the trend. A trend that requires one to stare at a square blue painting of a single primary colour and nod their heads as if seen by snake 10 meters away; silent, concise and elegant. *“Junkspace accommodates seeds of future perfection”*, explains Koolhaas.

All surfaces are archaeological, superpositions of different “periods”, at a corner, a piece of broken concrete can be looked at as a representation of socialism within countries with a higher poverty rate or, the descent of modern socio-political positions in the young generation.

Do you, the reader agree with me? The truth of the matter is, that it simply does not matter. The words above can mean so much but they don’t; just like a broken piece of concrete being just a broken piece of concrete. Authenticity is often mistaken to be valuable in a place in which the matter being authentic, has no real weight to it. In other words, the superiority of most words come from the wrapping paper of the essay. Language is now being used to ‘convince the jury’ or to ‘convince the reader’ that this is worth the three weeks you spent on reading it. Elucidated as being subjective, respective to each readers way of thinking, intellectually liberating, open and abstract, however, it is performed as essay pollution, pointless regulation, shallow with a mask of deep and **Junkspace**.

“Junkspace is the Bermuda triangle of concepts”

Junkspace- Rem Koolhaas

Junkspace to a good degree is directly related to human experience, we rob our visitors and expect them to sit, enjoy and pay £3.70 for 3 sips of coffee, Not surprising to us or them, they do. An experience, we say on the tickets, but it may as well have been titled ‘How much useless junk can we make people view for £30 and three weeks in advance booking’. Junkspace is so intensely consumed and fanatically driven, only to realise there is no driver, everybody on this Junkspace bus are at the back and they are about to crash into a hill but hopefully, their big sneakers and sheets of unnecessary stainless-steel partitions will help with the injury.

“Junkspace is a space of collision, a container of atoms, busy, not dense.”

Junkspace- Rem Koolhaas

Language has created a form of anarchy, a collective wisdom that has thrown transparency away and replaced it with **occupation**. Since when has language become occupation? Since when has it become a trend? Language has now for the majority of the written word within architecture become, a question to a question. It’s morphed into pollution of words and erosion of the public domain. Pointless regulations forcing a dress code to party that no one wants to go anyway. The formerly straight has been traded with the complex configuration which do not serve the same duty. Junkspace has devoured language while nibbling on our recycled information. Junkspace enters when language has **distorted** itself to appease a modern choreography created by what can only be described as the most hollow and self absorbed body of our society, or the ‘**Junkspacers**’.

Maybe, the irreconcilable trajectories launched by the ‘Junkspacers’ is simply a basic response to their livelihood, or maybe it is that, the more years go by, more of us find ourselves tangled in junkspace. Regardless the question rises ‘what will the future of contemporary counter architecture be?’

“Laughable emptiness infuses the respectful distance or tentative embrace that starchitects maintain in the presence of the past, authentic or not.”

Junkspace- Rem Koolhaas

Written by Unknown Student
Friday July 4th, 2003



Dear Mr Christopher Fletcher-Campbell,

I am writing to you on this lovely Friday afternoon to discuss an article you have written one about one month ago titled 'Whatever You Do Is Not Architecture'. I have been an admirer of your work for many years now, since I showed any interest in architecture at a younger age. I currently study at the Architectural Association as a Fourth year student.

I found myself reading and re-reading your piece many times over the past few weeks, your bold choice of words as well as your distinct yet clear cut form of thinking creates a great deal of space for conversation. I would have to admit, I found myself strongly disagreeing with you in terms of the origin of junkspace. Over my period in an architecture school I can undeniably see this subject being tackled from and **architectural education** point of view. I see students, lecturers, tutors and AA bar regulars come and go within this school everyday searching for their form to function, their question to their answer and trying to justify vacant architectural pro bono cases. Only to never realise their constant use of the recycled information given to them by their tutors as references and given to them by their tutors as references, Walking through their education being redefined by a political manifesto which preaches uniqueness but remains favouring the same wavelength of architects to-be. Like a farmer going through picking his carefully grown seeds of future architecture perfection. Rem Koolhaas explains this as well in Junkspace, *'Pretending histories left and right, its contents are dynamic yet stagnant, recycled or multiplied as in cloning: forms search for function like hermit crabs for a vacant shell....'*

For generations we have been cloning the same approach, the same systematic thinking yet creating an illusion of allowing space for uniqueness. Junkspace(the language) has spread to the very primary space of architectural vulnerability. And we expect to stop it with the millions of the same response. One might even go as far as assuming in a perfect world, we would be able to create a response to Junkspace or atleast establish our territory by it's side instead of getting devoured by it.

In your piece you mentioned about personally not having seen any piece of architecture that isn't junkspace in some form however I would like to present a project which has personally hugely interested me. **The RAUMPLAN by Adolf Loos** is one of architecture which has centered around it's effectiveness by using the elements within the domestic space as **forms for function**.

I have attached a small piece of writing by yours truly about the project.

The raised sitting area of the Moller house provide the occupant with a vintage point overlooking the interior. Comfort in this space is related to both Intimacy and control. This area is the most intimate of the sequence of living spaces, yet paradoxically, rather than being at the heart of the house, it is placed at the periphery, pushing a volume out of the street facade, just above the front entrance *"The photographs suggest that it is intended that these spaces be comprehended by occupation, by using this furniture, by 'entering' the photograph, by inhabiting it. But comfort in this space is more than just sensual, for there is also a psychological dimension.."*



Müller house interior, Prague, 1930



Friedman house interior, The Albertina Museum Vienna

Colomins, Beatriz. AA Files No.

Written by

I look forward to your response,
Best Regards,
Architectural Association Student

A follow-up paper to "Whatever You Do, Is Not Architecture", Written on May 3rd by Christopher Fletcher-Campbell

Written by Christopher Fletcher-Campbell
Thursday July 15th, 2003

Writing is simple, **Listen to them.** I was recently subjected towards a very interesting piece of writing. A thought provoking writing by a bright new mind. It is not like me to publish on a similar topic twice in the span of two months however, this topic begs to be questioned over and over again due to it's simple yet seamless nature.

Junkspace illustrates an idea of unifying but in fact it fractures the very core of our livelihood's systems. It does not create communities of similar taste but rather politicise our every need, to further grow it's egotastic, occupational, hollow consumer society.

"I see students, lecturers, tutors and AA bar regulars come and go within this school everyday searching for their form to function, their question to their answer and trying to justify vacant architectural pro bono cases. Only to never realise their constant use of the recycled information given to them by their tutors as references and given to them by their tutors as references, Walking through their education being redefined by a political manifesto which preaches uniqueness but remains favouring the same wavelength of architects to-be. Like a farmer going through picking his carefully grown seeds of future architecture perfection."

The architectural education as we know it currently not only produces a high portion of the commercial Junkspace within architecture, but the younger generation of architects to-be are often what can only be described as **'programmed'** in order to get a certain place within the architectural hierarchy. The starchitects to-be are hand picked very young and the rest are thrown away only to be working as interns for a good amount of their years. These **architecture wrapping papers** serve a similar position as junkspace (the language), the unavoidable identity parallels, the cowardness, the ethos and the lack of character allows for a perfect **seed of perfection for architecture.**

However one thing is for certain, the undeniable writing magic of Sir Rem Koolhaas within his essay "Junkspace". The essay at first glance appears to fail many attempts of making the reader understand the definition of Junkspace, however what it is doing is creating a deep understanding of the word not just by defining it. To my readers, I beg you to re-read Junkspace (the essay) using Junkspace (the language). The essay almost seems to have been layered in order to make the reader grasp it at a different level.

Architecture like many things has been domesticated by Junkspace and its sailors. Its future is its present if no step is taken. A profession which was once grieved and devoured in human debris. Fascism minus Dictator. Spreading like political misinformation, fast, dense, and seeming to be unstoppable. Arguably language has played a bigger role in fetishizing Junkspace than one might have hoped however, the recycled information and dismissing the unique identities within the architecture hierarchy, further accelerate fear of stepping out of junkspace due to the possibility of appearing shotsighted.

Junkspace is a vacuum of pretend perfection.

Mankind will continue to go on about architecture. What if Junkspace started looking at mankind? Would we appear as Sapcejunk? Would that help create a boundary in which humankind and junkspace co-exist without altering one another's realities? Would we need junkspace to study us like we tried to study it?