● Robert Venturi: *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 1966
● Rem Koolhaas: *Junkspace. October No. 100: 175–90*, 2002
● Bjarke Ingels: *Yes Is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution*, 2009
● Teuvo Kohonen: *Self-Organized Formation of Topologically Correct Feature Maps. Biological Cybernetics 43 (1):
59–69*, 2009

Being a 'Brand'

Diana Alvarez-Marin and Miro Roman

Articulating Identities Amidst The Big Plenty

In our chapter on Visualisation we note the extent to which iconic architecture is experienced not as three-dimensional structures in the physical world, but as imagery of those structures, and how much of that imagery is encountered online. This is one of the main factors that make architecture iconic in the first place: we keep coming across it, seeing it represented, expressed in pictures. And the more imagery there is, the more the architecture is talked about: in books, in articles, in academic papers, in journals. The more architecture is talked about, the more it is taken seriously and considered important, and the more important it is considered to be, the more people go and visit it. Entire cities have been lifted from comparative obscurity, and their flagging economies revived, on the back of iconic architecture, and that would scarcely be the case if the architecture itself were not comprehensively medialised.

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Representing architecture in pictures and words is obviously not new. Since the beginnings, writing about architecture and illustrating it has served as a way not only of talking about the built-up environment around you – whether or not you're an architect – but very specifically also as a platform for architects to explain themselves, to put forward ideas, their rationale, their vision. Hand in hand with this goes the desire, and to quite some extent the need, to promote themselves: in some countries – the USA until the 1970s and India to this day, for example – architects were or still are not allowed to advertise or market their work directly through traditional channels. So publishing and being published allows you to make yourself heard, to enter an exchange with the world of architecture; to formulate your own style, and to make yourself and your work a recognisable entity: what today, a little loosely perhaps, we tend to think of as a 'brand'.

The idea alone of 'being a brand' may not come naturally, or sit so easily, with us, but it's nevertheless of growing significance. Ask any hundred people in the street of any European city what they think of Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, and you're likely to get as many blank stares. Ask them, on the other hand, what they think of 'Le Corbusier', and a fair number among them are likely to have an opinion, or at least know who you're talking about. The Swiss-French architect, designer, and urban planner Le Corbusier (1887–1965) is as known for his distinctive ideas as he is for his 'brand'. He is, in fact, possibly the first architect

to more or less invent himself deliberately as a brand. Long before star architects systematically thought of themselves as concepts, he latched on to the fact that being someone in architecture was at least partly a case of making yourself unmistakably you.

Considering how influential Le Corbusier became, it is perhaps surprising to learn that neither he, nor his equally famous contemporary, the Welsh-American architect and designer Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), nor indeed the German-American architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), who together (though not, it has to be said, exclusively) shaped the modernist post-war architecture of the 20th century, had any formal training as architects. What marks them out so much is that, apart from being gifted and inspired designers, they were all exceptionally good at articulating themselves and their architecture.

So in this chapter on Being a 'Brand' we very specifically want to ask this particular question: how do you, as a young architect setting out on your path today, *articulate* yourself in the digital world. We make the point often in this *Atlas* that this is a radically different one to the pre-digital world. And here, as elsewhere, we want to emphasise that we are not thinking so much of the *essence* as radically different, or let alone new – as we've just seen, and as we see throughout this *Atlas*, architects have, in one way or another, been asking themselves this question always – nor is it even the case that thinking of articulation as a form of 'marketing' is wholly new or unique to our era. When the 'product' you are selling is really, through your work, you, then 'marketing' immediately takes on an abstract dimension; that is, the dimension of you expressing yourself *about* your work in articles, texts, professional literature, interviews, lectures. After all, depending on what area of architecture you focus on, each and any of your objects may only ever be 'marketed' to one set of clients. And as we also remind ourselves repeatedly in this *Atlas*, these sets of clients can be quite complex in their make-up, and correspondingly demanding. Still, the need to articulate yourself is not what's new. What is new is the quantity and quality (as in character or type) of the images and words about architecture that abound in the world in which you express yourself.

Your challenge as a young architect today is how to be you, amidst this seemingly limitless wealth of indexes. Because here lies the great difference to where we were before, and the significant change that digitality has brought about: in the past – in the pre-digital era – we articulated ourselves through books and references which were, in a sense, 'curated' and certainly went through some kind of editorial process, whereby publishers, magazine or journal editors, and other gatekeepers would assess and approve or reject work, based on their understanding of the work (or lack thereof) on the one hand, and to quite some extent, as always, based also on the level of recognition a given author might be enjoying at the time. Today we have a situation which was famously and astutely (though perhaps not entirely accurately) foretold by the American artist Andy Warhol (1928–1987), in a programme note for a show of his works in Sweden in 1968: "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes."

Whether that is strictly true or not, what is certainly the case is that today we have an abundance of indexes, and everyone can (and a great many people do) pro- mote themselves. You could argue, therefore, that up until about the 1980s to early 1990s, information had a more explicit meaning: it was largely imbued with an interpretation and put in a context that made some sort of sense, to someone. As the sheer volume of information has grown, so, in a way, has its 'meaning- lessness'; or, to look at it from another, perhaps more positively phrased perspective, what has grown is the potential of information to have *any* 'meaning' we assign to it. At the same time, information is now so plentiful, and the means to express, share, and store it so omnipresent and affordable, that getting 'the message' out there (whatever that message may be) is really no longer a problem. Getting it heard among the din, let alone understood, on the other hand, has become more difficult than ever: the level of entropy in digital content has, as it must, only gone up.

If you look at this rich – some would argue exces- sive – stream of information, and you realise that you will need to be a part of its flow, you may be forgiven for losing heart. The challenge is formidable. And it is now not so much about making sense of it all, as it is about learning how to handle it and how to formulate a response to it; in other words: master it. Because what is the alternative? There isn't one as such. A possible counter-reaction might be to shy away from it in fear. Or to slam down the brakes and cry: '*Enough!* We can't handle this undisciplined mess. Let's regulate, curtail, *forbid it!*' We, as the authors and editors of this *Atlas* don't, as you know, advocate such a stance. What we suggest instead is that we approach the deluge – which is so vast now, we can't even measure it with normal metrics any more – with an open and curious mind: embrace its complexity completely.

Doing so affords us great new freedoms: we can be anyone we like to be, we can invent ourselves. We can be humans, mutants, we can be aliens. We are all present in this great mix, there is distance between individual elements, and there are relation- ships, and through these relationships – not through being the same! – we find affinity with each other, and that is also how we escape the given structures and how we are able to shape new ones; we are really curating – we know the term is overused right now, but here it fits – the way we want to be seen, and we are choosing our 'masks' that we wear at this feast of realities: we articulate ourselves.

In articulating ourselves, we are not only choos- ing what we want to say and how we want to say it, we are also deciding who we want to be talking to, and when. That means we also enter the realm of encryption and decryption: when previously it was a matter mainly of structuring the selective information there was, today it is as much about sifting through the unlimited information we have, and choosing what we want to be seen and heard, by whom. As we've moved from books, via magazines, to online forums and blogs, we are no longer figures in a linear narrative, we are quantum citizens. We can be in two or several places or nowhere, all at the same time, and how and whether you see us depends entirely on how you look at us: your act of observation changes the nature of the observed, and in this case that's us.

ARCHITECTURE ONLINE

Since the beginning of the 21st century, architects – along with other creative professionals and artists – everybody else – have been moving their 'presence' online. And since the capacity for an online presence is not really restricted by any obvious physical factors, this move has entailed an unprecedented proliferation of words and images; but also of new representational 'species', so to speak. The digital space is inhabited not only by traditional text and picture material that is now simply hosted and made accessible online – although that evidently too – but also by avatars, bots, crypto-currencies; entities that behave, and enable us to behave, in new ways. Blogs, micro-blogs, image collections, comments, conversations: the presenta- tional world is saturated with content, and much of that content is immediate or extremely quick in coming about. Ironically, it may then be much longer lived than much of the content that previously was much longer in preparation but really had the shelf life, for most of the reading public, of the magazine or jour- nal it appeared in only. Apart from some collectors' reference and library copies, most printed content would simply disappear after a while. A little different perhaps with books, where certainly those that made an impact would stand a good chance of survival over several generations or possibly, and in rare cases, over centuries, or even millennia.

Digital content may also disappear or go under, but then again, it may not, and often it doesn't or doesn't for a long time. Rather, it remains indexed and therefore searchable, and it doesn't fade, dis- integrate or perish with time but stays stable and accessible, at least for as long as data storage is available and intact. Which is one of the main reasons why such great efforts are now being made to digitise existing analogue materials, adding yet more to the volume that is generated fresh every day. And with this volume comes the other new challenge. Not only: 'how do I behave in a medially saturated world?' But also: 'how do I deal with it in order to get what I need or want out of it?'

And so, while online publications have not done away with printed books, magazines and journals (this *Atlas* attests to that), their numbers, both in terms of their readership and the volume of content they are able to produce, outstrip by far those of tra- ditional means of publication. And in some respects they bring that content closer to us. Digital formats encapsulate all other media, and because they are so immediate and dynamic, they facilitate a deeper, more intimate, and more layered interaction with the content, and through it with its creators, than any traditional format. And they enable us to easily become content creators and thus signal generators ourselves. (When we say 'easily', we still refer only to the process of putting material online. Getting that material noticed is, once more, a different matter.)

MORE, MORE, MORE

When Mies van der Rohe put down his metaphori- cal flag in the new territory of post-war, minimalist architecture in 1947, he resolutely declared "less is more," not so much coining as borrowing the phrase and turning it into something of an architectural manifesto. Nearly twenty years later, in 1966, the American architect Robert Venturi (1925–2018) deliv- ered his bold response: "Less is a bore," only to be met, after another couple of decades, with a deliber- ate provocation by American architect Philip Johnson (1906–2005), who in 1984, at the age of 78, echoed it by simply declaring: "I am a whore." It didn't end there. Dutch architect and urbanist Rem Koolhaas (b. 1944) got back impatiently in 2001 with "more is more," just two years after Danish architect Bjarke Ingels (b. 1974) had already taken the, for his era tell- ingly commercial, stance: "yes is more." Consider yourself invited to contribute your own variation on the theme whenever you feel ready to do so…

Mies van der Rohe obviously did not refer to data or content, but to an architectural approach. It's nev- ertheless fascinating to note the progression from an ideal of minimalism, formulated at a time when it was not only possible but desirable to think of architec- ture and art in terms of reduction, simplification, and essentially the weeding out of anything that could be considered surplus to requirement, to an acceptance that there simply *is* more. Of everything. More pic- tures, more words, more ideas, more people, more cit- ies, more people in cities, more people in cities using words and pictures to talk about people in cities. The thought of stemming the flow now seems absurd: we find ourselves in a baroque voluptuousness of con- tent and data: a global feast of everything. Today we inhabit a galaxy of uncharted paths, and we behave in patterns of potential states and connections.

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ANOTHER DIMENSION

What happens to us – to our memory, our archives, our sense of time – in the digital world? Do we expe- rience time as linear, or as circular, or as something else? If past, present, and future collapse into one narrative, where 'pre-', 'post-', and 'neo-' become self-referential meaninglessnesses, what *are* we dealing with? The more we dive into this ocean of indexes, the more we realise that our attempts at categorising, canalising, 'managing' it, remain essen- tially a search *for* dimensions.

And so we can differentiate our challenge and formulate it further. Not only is it one of defining our own behaviour in a world of plenty, and one of mas- tering the plenty, it is also one of scanning – in our case especially architectural – universes across time (and beyond dogma) in order to get some 'useful' or at least 'interesting' or 'relevant' distillations. It's a question of how to look through different lenses simultaneously so that we can tap into the richness of these indexes, without getting lost in our endeavour.

A NEW PUBLIC SPACE

This challenge is one we face in a new public space, and that's yet another reason why it calls for new methods. Once upon a time, not so very long ago, the public space was defined by what we, as individuals, mostly in a compact with society and its institutions, the authorities – agreed and declared to be public. The 'default' setting, so to speak, was 'private' for our personal lives, especially at home, and 'public' for what we did outside the house (there would, necessarily, be overlaps and exceptions). This made it comparatively easy to know whether you were in the public or in the private space, because all you had to do to move from one to the other was leave the house or go back home.

This is no longer the case. Much of what was once our private sphere is now visible and accessi- ble to third parties, sometimes with, often without our knowledge or express permission. At the same time, much of what we think of as public space is in fact privately owned and we can be there only because we are 'tolerated', as long as we behave as if we were in someone else's front garden. Much, if not indeed most, of our public space is under constant surveillance, and to this we add everything we freely and voluntarily share online about some of our most intimate actions, thoughts, and adventures.

We are able to create and maintain complete new and artificial identities, and yet in reality we pres- ent ourselves online much as we are off. Our social network profiles and our picture streams may portray us as perhaps a little happier, more interesting, better travelled, and more successful than we really are, but anyone who has ever used a dating or hookup app will know that nineteen times out of twenty what you see is more or less exactly what you get: we are remarkably ourselves, no matter which reality we choose to operate in. Or perhaps: we turn ourselves into versions of ourselves much in the same vein, whether that is in the virtual or in the physical life. Both are real. (And, here too, exceptions apply.)

What we can and do do is blur or extinguish some of our traces and make them selective, perhaps super-selective. We do not, by and large, want everyone to have access to our bank details. So we use encryp- tion: there is still a private sphere, even if it is located and maintained differently to where it once was.

So let us explore then how we, as architects, as digital citizens, today can behave in this space, and how we can begin to articulate ourselves in a world where everything is available and anything is possible.

A NEW METHOD

Perhaps if we want to position ourselves in a world of abundance, find or define our identities, and learn to articulate ourselves as ourselves in it – whatever we happen to decide 'ourselves' to be – it may help us to embrace the Plenty and welcome it into our thinking.

One way we can do so – and this is the approach we are proposing to adopt for the purposes of this exercise – is by emulating the methods used by the big digital 'players', such as Google, Facebook, or Amazon: we will use crawlers and bots to search and collect data, and we will use machine learning – Self- Organising Map (SOM) algorithms and information visualisation techniques – to organise and cluster this data into word and image clouds. (There are many other methods available, within both machine learning

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and information visualisation, since these are very popular and growing fields. We discuss both in more detail in our chapter on Big Data & Machine Learning.)

What we want to emphasise though is that it does not data we collect and the way we present it, but *us in the world*, and how we reflect the world as it is, but *us in the world*, and how we see ourselves in it. This is an important distinction to make. And there are two major facets to this that we need to always be aware of. Firstly: no data, no game. The 'game' we're about to play through, by way of illustration, is a data hungry one. So it not only allows us to deal with large quantities of data, it presupposes that we have data at our fingertips in the first place. Secondly, and this is perhaps even more significant: through the act of selecting what data we are going to use, and deciding in which way we are going to use to use and deciding in which way we are going to use.

it, we are leaving behind the world where there is a clear delineation between 'objective' and 'subjective', and entering a world in which these boundaries are blurred to the point where they cease to exist.

So now, rather than explain to you in detail what a crawler is or how to code a bot, we want to show you what we mean, by playing through an example of how this can work. It's a fictional 'scenario' that illustrates more than anything an approach or, even more fundamental than that, a way of thinking. We eschew the idea of recipes, and so this is not meant as an example of what to do and how to do it in order to achieve a particular result, it is really first and foremost a figure, a gesture, from which you can draw your own conclusions and decide to what extent, if any, it may be 'useful' to you.

An Encounter With Plenty, in Two Acts

I think, I read, I draw, I take pictures. I share. I mess around with things that seem like objects, but I'm nowhere ready to build. I make a model, I change it. I don't have a style yet, as far as I know; I have no commission. I have ideas, I nearly have projects. I have an ambition, sure, but I'm not sure what it is. I look around and wonder: now what? Now actually, genuinely, just what? I search for inspiration, but I don't 'search' so much as I gaze; I graze the imagery, I nibble at the words...

PICTURES THAT TALK

I say to myself, all right then, show me. Show me what there is, and maybe that can be a start. It's

certainly not going to be the end. There isn't a destination, as such, of that I am pretty certain. But let me get a feel for what is out there in architecture, what is around. How people think, and what they see; what they build. Let me get an introduction to the world of architecture, as it presents itself today. The Internet is an obvious place to start. Architectural blogs: the pictures and words people post on architecture.

I opt for *Dezeen* and *ArchDaily* (at dezeen. com and archdaily.com). There are many other relevant blogs on architecture, but today I am interested in these two. Why? It's a personal, random choice. I know they're both influential, they're both respected and taken note of, and so they interest me. My choosing them makes them my universe, for the time being.

I decide to start with pictures; and to get a feel for the size of my 'universe', I want to find out just how *many* pictures there are, never even mind what kind, or what they actually depict.

I write a few lines of code and run it, and the numbers I get are, as expected, impressive:

Number of images published by *Dezeen* and *ArchDaily* between 2000 and 2016:
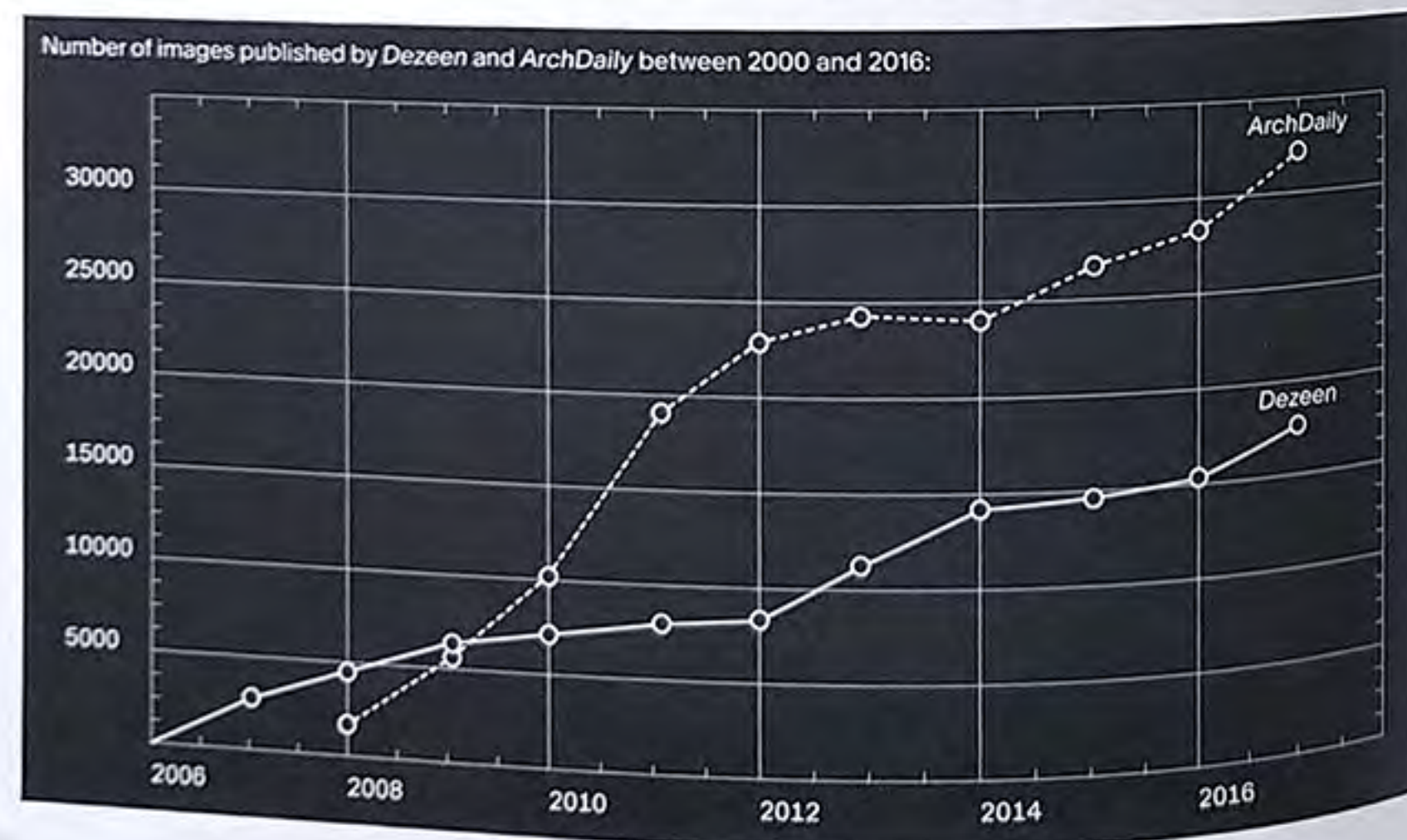
What also doesn't come as a surprise is that they have steadily gone up over the last ten years or so. On *Arch-Daily*, they've done so on a steep curve with a bump, on *Dezeen* in a more gentle incline. But both platforms publish many times as many pictures today as they did ten years ago, *ArchDaily* tickling the 30,000 mark, *Dezeen* roughly half. That's new images posted *each year*. There is no sign of this flood of imagery abating, if anything I expect that there will be more. So I now wonder: how do I collect, mediate, and measure all these images? How do I even *look* at them?

Obviously, I can't take them all in by just browsing them, as I would a website. I can't examine them all in detail, analyse them, form an opinion on them, and draw any conclusions about where architecture

is at today, let alone how mine might fit in or complement or contradict it or rebel against it. But that doesn't stop me.

In fact the opposite, it spurs me on: I go for it and decide I want to have everything. Everything they have ever published in terms of picture material. To me, that's not unreasonable: it's called online *publishing* after all; it's all publicly available. So I do what Google does, but I'm not a big global corporation, I am an individual, a private person active in a new public space; literate in a new way in the Quantum City, so I use its tools.

I write another small piece of code, a short script, a crawler. It's not very long, three dozen lines that look like this:

ArchDaily crawler as a 23-line 'poem':

```
ADpages[page_] := Module[{source, pos, links},
 source = Import[page, "Source"];
 pos = StringPosition[source,"<span itemprop='url'>" -- Shortest[__] -- "</span>"];
 links = "http://" <> StringDrop[StringDrop[StringTake[source, #], 28], -7] & /@ pos]

ADimages[link_] := Module[{source, strings, image, imagelink, images, imagelinks, pos, dateY,
  name},
 source = ToString@Import[link, "Source"];
 pos = StringPosition[source, "<li class=\"theDate\">" -- Shortest[__] -- "</li>"];
 dateY = StringTake[StringDrop[StringTake[source, pos], -5], -4];
 strings =
  Flatten[DeleteDuplicates[StringCases[StringSplit[ToString[source]],
   "data-src='https://images.adsttc.com/media/images/" -- __ -- ".jpg"]] /. {} -> Nothing];
 strings = StringDrop[strings[[#]], 10] & /@ Range[Length[strings]];

 If[ Length[strings] > 2, {
  strings = Delete[strings, {{-1}}];
  If[ Length[strings] > 12, {strings = Take[strings, 12], Flatten[strings]}];
  {image = Import[#, "Graphics"], name = StringJoin[{dateY, "_", StringTake[#, -10]}], #}
   & /@ strings
 }, {Print["article does not have enough images"]}]]

input = "http://www.archdaily.com/page/"; startpage = 1; stoppage = 1;
pagelinks = input -- ToString[#] & /@ Range[startpage, stoppage]; links = Flatten[ADpages[#]
 & /@ pagelinks];
Column@links

article = 1;
imgAD = ADimages[links[[article]]][[1]];
ImageResize[imgAD[[#, 1]], 300] & /@ Range[Length[imgAD]]
```

It's almost poetic in its succinct simplicity, and it finds all the articles' URLs , like this:

ArchDaily – links published in one day:

```
http://www.archdaily.com/895216/the-2018-venice-biennale-winners,
http://www.archdaily.com/895115/warwick-street-squire-and-partners,
http://www.archdaily.com/895237/casa-terra-bernardes-arquitetura,
http://www.archdaily.com/895174/conference-hotel-de-botanica-jeanne-dekkers-architctuur,
http://www.archdaily.com/895191/architecture-for-wellness-the-space-for-body-and-soul,
http://www.archdaily.com/894805/wang-jing-memorial-hall-dna,
http://www.archdaily.com/894780/ais-contact-center-development-and-training-arena-
 plan-architect,
http://www.archdaily.com/894979/neri-oxman-and-mit-develop-programmable-biocomposites-
 for-digital-fabrication,
http://www.archdaily.com/894976/eva-franch-i-gilabert-on-the-meaning-of-architecture,
http://www.archdaily.com/893808/chucao-house-abestudio,
http://www.archdaily.com/895077/tensile-structures-11-edgy-images-under-strain,
http://www.archdaily.com/893996/bbva-headquarters-herzog-and-de-meuron,
http://www.archdaily.com/894678/this-instagram-is-dedicated-to-stunning-walls-from-across-
 the-world,
http://www.archdaily.com/894378/why-the-world-needs-more-architecture-memes,
http://www.archdaily.com/895041/housing-bo-lrarchitects,
http://www.archdaily.com/894856/shanghai-modern-art-museum-atelier-deshaus,
http://www.archdaily.com/895064/juraku-ro-geneto,
http://www.archdaily.com/894877/aia-announces-2018-housing-awards-winners
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Now, before I do anything else, I experimentally pull down the pictures from *one single* article only:

354A ○ 680   354B ○ 680   354C ○ 680

354D ○ 681   354E ○ 681

354F ○ 681

That's seven, out of hundreds of thousands. With these, I get a feel at a glance which ones, if any, appeal to me; and what, if anything, they mean, or evoke, or do for me. All it takes is one look for me to identify the colour schemes, the patterns, the things that I'm interested in. That's not a problem: so far, so good.

This having been so easy and worked so well, I now cast the net and grab them all. By the time my crawler has pulled down about 300,000 pictures from *ArchDaily* and *Dezeen* (depending on my computer and my Internet connection, this may take anything from a few hours to a few days) and put them together into a composite: different story. Now that question of how to look at them really becomes relevant as a practical issue. Because if they are to play a part in this informational game and have any kind of meaning in it, these images now need new 'identities', and here is where my new means of curation, mediation, and measurement come into play. The images need to be equipped with numbers: informationally encoded. They have to become vectors that point me in one direction or another. But what is the unit of measure?

I'm going to have to define my own metrics. These are not objective, standard units of measure, such as kilos, or grams, or metres, and so I don't expect to get an objective, or universally applicable, result of which I can say it is definitely 'useful' or let alone 'true'. Yes, there are some objective parameters, but what these mean to me is mostly up to me. (A lot of people can agree whether or not something is blue, or whether a line is straight or curved. But how they feel about it, what it signifies to them, that's a matter of personal taste and cultural coding.)

And so what these pictures are going to tell me depends on me: that's the interesting thing. It's my choice of what I'm looking at – and how I look at it – that defines my articulation. I'm in the world of data, and this generic, informational 'material' can be articulated in an infinite number of ways. None of them are good or bad, right or wrong: they just sit at different points on a spectrum, and so terms such as 'consistency', 'beauty', 'sophistication', or 'branding' all become part of this spectral constitution that I am the master of.

With this in mind, I take my next step, and I start looking for colours and edges:

355 ○ 681

Like I say: this is just one way of defining 'units of measure' for an image. There can be many other ways. But each provides me with a set of numbers, my vector. And here it is; an informational face of an image; one of many possible ones:
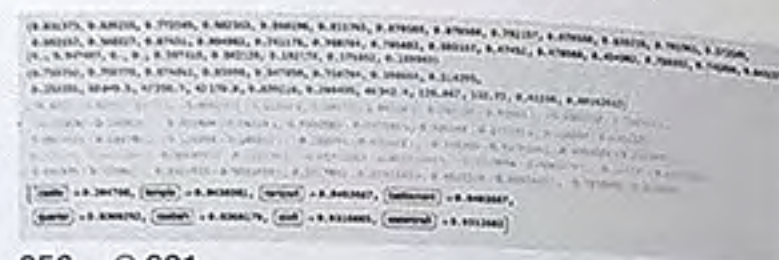
356 ○ 681

And now the spectacle can really begin. In the same way as I've just encoded this one image, I can encode *all* the images, give all of them informational faces.

Here they all are, 300,000 images, assembled from *Dezeen* and *ArchDaily*:

357 ○ 682

It's like a mood cloud of ten years of architecture: an impression, a face, a rendering.

But what does it tell me? Can this really be a trend barometer, a fashion gauge, or a brand checker? Let alone a 'machine' to help me articulate my own personal brand? Maybe not directly. What it does show me is the kind of pictures – in terms of composition, colour, mood – that have been used to represent architecture over the last ten years. And that, if nothing else, is a flavour.

A flavour is exactly what I'm after, and now I can dip into this mix and collect some samples, to get a taste for what I like and what I don't like, what agrees with me and what doesn't.

Textured objects, with a solidity and lightness, earthy elements and stones. They appeal to me, they taste like an old malt whisky:
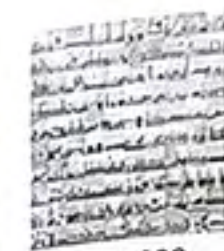

358 ○ 682

Unlike these lonely solids, heavily placed in a white, abstract space; this I don't like, for me, they are the artificial mixer in a cocktail, too sweet, too sterile:

359 ○ 682

Or the 'new chic': interiors, soft shadows, floors, and ceilings that merge to celebrate the materiality of an object; a dry crisp wine, perhaps?

360 ○ 682

Or patterns: I like these, they can be and become anything, they are abstract enough to be free:

361 ○ 682

And houses (let's not forget houses…) with their strict and unequivocal lines; vertical, diagonal:

362 ○ 682

I like the calm of horizontals, garnished with a dash of green…

363 ○ 682

I could go on forever, but now I think I am onto something: I'm beginning to project my own taste, my palate onto the cloud. I am finding my own formula, my own selection of flavours, I am making my own label; my – dare I say it – own 'brand'.

So I specify the kinds of images I like, and they become my filter. Pictures that resemble them should pass, the others don't:

364 ○ 683

I try this out with 20 new images, just to test it:

365 ○ 683

It's working! Not perfectly, but I can adjust the filter, and in any case, this is just for today; tomorrow I may want to change it all again, depending on my mood. Here are the images that pass:

366 ○ 683

And here is my personal 'portrait of the day' on the cloud of *ArchDaily* and *Dezeen*:

367 ○ 684

It's unique. To me, and to the way in which I've arrived at it today. Tomorrow, my personal 'portrait of the day' may look very different, with different individual images giving it different hues, different patterns, a different feel. And as with any portrait, the real characteristics that give it its 'personality' may be quite subtle: I may have to look closely to see what gives this picture its specific power.

This has been a success. But I'm only halfway there: I now have a distillation of the wealth of images and made it my own; and in their own way these images are telling me a story, they're certainly talking to me about themselves and about their constellation, but there is a part missing still that is just as important: the words. I'm hearing the stories pictures can tell, I now want to also see what pictures words can paint…

TEXTS THAT DRAW

What happens with words? What do words do for architects, what do words do for me? They are, after all, how we express what we think, not only, but certainly also not least, about architecture.

What do architects say? What language do they use? What would they say to each other, at a dinner table? I set about to find out, and my method is not dissimilar to the one I used for pictures. I sit down at an imaginary table, and since I can make the table as big or as small as I want, I decide on a simple round figure for my guests. It could be a thousand, it could be a dozen; I decide on a hundred.

100 architects from the 20th and 21st century:

51N4E, AAA, Adam Caruso, Aldo Rossi, Alejandro Aravena, Alejandro Zaera-Polo, Álvaro Siza, AmidCero9, Andres Jaque,

Anne Holtrop, Achim Menges, Assemble, Atelier Bow Wow, Benjamin Dillenburger, Bernard Cache, Bernard Khoury, Bernard Tschumi, Bjarke Ingels, Carlo Ratti, Christ Gantenbein, Christian Kerez, COBE, DAAR, Daniel Libeskind, David Chipperfield, David Kohn, E2A, Ecosistema Urbano, Fake Industries AA, Forensic Architecture, Frank Gehry, Glenn Murcutt, Greg Lynn, Hans Hollein, Herzog & de Meuron, HWKN, JDS, Jean Nouvel, Johnston Marklee, Juhani Pallasmaa, Junya Ishigami, Kuehn Malvezzi, Lacaton & Vassal, LAN, Lebbeus Woods, Liam Young, Li Xiadong, Made In, MAD, Maio, Marc Fornes, MASS Design Group, Metro, Michael Hansmeyer, MOS, Nameless, Neri Hu, Neri Oxman, Norman Foster, Office KGDVS, Ole Scheeren, OOPEAA, Patrik Schumacher, Peter Eisenman, Peter Zumthor, Philip Johnson, Philippe Rahm, Pier Vittorio Aureli, Plan B, RAAAF, Rafael Moneo, RCR, Rem Koolhaas, REX, Robert Venturi, Rojkind, Sam Jacob, SANAA, SeArch, SelgasCano, Serie Architects, Smiljan Radic, Snøhetta, Eduardo Souto de Moura, Sou Fujimoto, Standard, Steven Holl, Supermachine Studio, Sverre Fehn, Tadao Ando, Team Mazzanti, Tham & Videgård, Thomas Heatherwick, Thom Mayne, Toyo Ito, Urban Think Thank, Valerio Olgiati, Wang Shu, WOHA, Zaha Hadid.

Young architects of today will talk to people who have influenced – maybe inspired – them, about anything I decide. But just as I can't expect myself to plough through hundreds of thousands of pictures, so I don't have the capacity or the time to read dozens of texts by a hundred architects each, to orchestrate this conversation. And I don't have to. All I have to do is tap into the repository of knowledge and opinion that is available online and specify what the conversation should be about: I'm the host and I not only send out the invitations, I also set the topic. And I am, of course, the 101st person at the table. I don't just sit back and observe, I take part: my stance, too, has value, and so as I add my voice to the conversation, I am projecting myself onto this conceptual 'spirit' I'm about to conjure up.

I like to think of my table as a 'space of similarity', rather than one of sameness. The similarity stems – this is an assumption – from the shared starting point of all the guests: they all have an architectural background. But I want to discover something beyond that, and dig deeper into what makes us all feel at home in architecture.

But before I ask my guests anything at all, just like at any dinner party, I let them mingle; reveal themselves and what's important to them, in their own words:

368 ● 608

The words that stand out are words I can assume matter to them, and I am not surprised to find, in this 'space of similarity' that I have prepared for them, some similarities: they talk about their 'work', their 'project', what they 'build' in the 'city', and obviously they talk about 'architecture'. This is exactly what I want to hone in on now. *How* do they talk about 'architecture'. What do they actually have to say about it? And here I'm taken with the spectrum they cover: yes, the most used words – the keywords – are much as expected, but they are surrounded now by soft clouds of personal vocabulary.

And so, already, instead of having to listen to a professor or two, telling me what architecture is (what it is to them), I can ask my guests to tell me, in their own words. I want to listen more closely. They don't talk, after all, in disjointed words: like anyone who has anything to say, they formulate themselves in sentences.

One after the other, my guests start speaking, and they do so in clusters of affinity; like a ripple of thoughts, where the first statement I hear is as far as it can be from the last person at the table, but as close as possible to its immediate neighbour. We have ourselves another spectrum, one of positions on architecture:

HANS HOLLEIN
To me architecture is not primarily the solution of a problem, but the making of a statement.

BERNARD TSCHUMI
I am talking about inclusive architecture; all architecture is social.

TEAM MAZZANTI
I used to say and still say that architecture is the materialisation of the concept.

JUHANI PALLASMAA
Every touching experience of architecture is multi-sensory. Qualities of matter, space and scale are measured equally by the eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton, and muscle. Silence, Time, and Solitude. However, the most essential auditory experience created by architecture is tranquility.

ROBERT VENTURI
But architecture is necessarily complex and contradictory in its very inclusion of the traditional Vitruvian elements of commodity, firmness, and delight.

JUHANI PALLASMAA
Architecture presents the drama of construction silenced into matter and space; architecture is the art of petrified silence.

BERNARD TSCHUMI
Ongoing questioning and discussion, as well as a motivation to transgress given limits…

ROBERT VENTURI
Modern architecture is never implicit.

BERNARD TSCHUMI
…constitute part of the development of every project.

DAAR
if architecture is a weapon in a military arsenal that implements the power relations of colonialist ideologies, then architecture must burn.

PATRIK SCHUMACHER
The core competency of architecture is thus the task of articulation.

MOS
Ultimately, the problem with a truly autonomous language of architecture is there is no task to perform, no goals, there are only language games. In this mode, working within and using cultural production, architecture is a pseudodiscipline.

BENJAMIN DILLENBURGER
The resolution of architecture is a measure of the spatial density of information inherent in a building.

MASS DESIGN GROUP
I think all architecture is political of course.

BENJAMIN DILLENBURGER
But the purpose of architecture is an open notion, depending on the physical, social, economic cultural and historical background, where it is used.

CHRISTIAN KEREZ
Well, I would say: my understanding of architecture is close to the understanding of art, in the sense that I consider architecture as being a media; like music defined by noises, like culture defined by volumes, and architecture is defined by the space.

RAFAEL MONEO
Of course, the more common problem of architecture is that buildings are just plainly trivial.

STEVEN HOLL
Frank Lloyd Wright said that architecture is the mother of all arts.

JEAN NOUVEL
I would like to mention Gaudí: his architecture is so spectacular but also so natural at the same time.

MAIO
It is always a reason of joy when Spanish architecture is internationally recognised.

SELGASCANO
We believe that the most interesting architecture is precisely the type that helps you to realise that architecture isn't necessary; the type that leads you to decide not to build.

SNØHETTA
That's what architecture is about, the art of prepositions: under, in, through, in front of.

ALDO ROSSI
I have always felt that my architecture is timeless.

SOU FUJIMOTO
All architecture is, in a sense, one room.

OFFICE KGDVS
Someone could say that the minimum of architecture is a wall, and that, therefore, materials do not play an important role.

STEVEN HOLL
One of the great excitements now in architecture is that we are free!

TADAO ANDO
One thing about architecture is that the more you look at good buildings, the more love you have for them.

JDS
We believe it is now exhausted and that a new approach to architecture is urgent.

ZAHA HADID
Ultimately architecture is all about the creation of pleasant and stimulating settings for all aspects of social life.

TADAO ANDO
For me, I think architecture is one of the best professions for society.

RCR
Architecture is a very long word; can it be abbreviated?

I want to explore further their ideas in text, but not as a linguist, which I'm not; I want to go beneath the language and analyse the concepts they employ, looking for rules, structures, and grammars amongst those. So here again, just as I did with pictures, I'm choosing my lens, my measure of unit. It could be a paragraph, a sentence, a letter. I choose as my unit the word, because I want to explore contemporary architectural concepts, and the smallest unit in language that can convey meaning on its own is the word. I want to look at words now as indexes, in relation to each other; place them in their contextual environment. This means that my words, rather than functioning as units inside grammatically correct sentences, now become nodes on a network; and their relationships with the words that surround them become edges.

So what interests me now is not the definition of a word itself, but the other words it can be related to. Because by looking at these relationships, I can weight them. I don't look at words as carriers of meaning any longer, but I examine the relationships they stand in, to find some meaning or significance there.

As the brook of words begins to pour out, and the droplets that are the words connect with and relate to each other, forming a stream, my guests themselves now acquire a new informational face, which consists of the words they use and their multiple connections. My dinner table for a hundred architects turns into a banquet of characters, each one unique, each one vivid in their individual appearance. I find a new way of getting to know them, through them getting to know each other.

369 ● 608

Once again, I choose my method, and I don't have to justify or explain it, either to myself or to them, or to anyone else; it's just what happens to take my fancy, right now. I am, as I was when playing with pictures, master of my own story. The way I see and understand each of my guests depends on the lens through which I glance at them.

370 ● 608

Up until now, all of my guests have come with their own words and stories. But in order to make them talk to one another, rather than just iterate a multitude of monologues, I define the common space for discussion: a collective dictionary.

I'm not surprised if, as at any good dinner party, some words – some topics – turn out to be more prevalent than others. A hot topic will be in everyone's mouth, as will some basic terminology, some words that my guests will naturally use all the time; they are, after all, all architects. So in my 'dictionary' that I allow for discussion, I now declare some exclusions. There are those words I hear too often for them to reveal anything of interest to me, so I say to my guests, 'I take these terms for granted, I know you all "work" in "space," you "create" and "design." So let's leave those words out for the time being:'
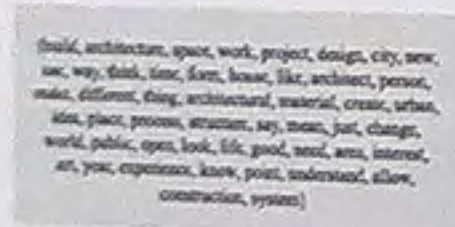
371 ● 609

There are also some words that are simply too specific: for some of my guests they are unfamiliar or irrelevant and they don't like using them, while others may not even know what they mean. I'm after a degree of clarity, and I'm also after participation, and so I make some further decisions about what I think goes too far. It's just my choice again, you would choose differently altogether, that's the beauty of it:

372 ● 609

Now that I have my space for discussion, I can start to listen in. I can wander around my feast, like the host that I am, and eavesdrop on what my architect

friends are saying to each other. It's not so much a dinner table any more, it's a masked ball where my guests choose words to obscure or reveal them-selves, maybe reveal themselves with obscurity?

This is how the first words in our dictionary are experienced and weighted by each one of us:
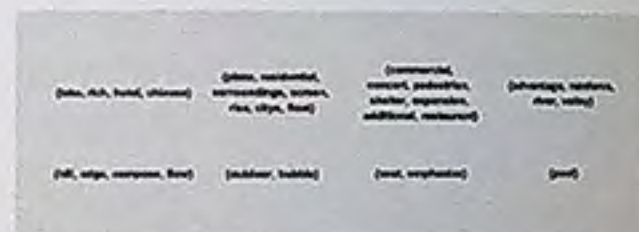
373 ○ 609

And now I can take a position. I can choose more precisely the questions I want to ask. For example, I could ask my guests how they feel about a specific word, or I can ask what these words articulate in relation to them. This is how I discover our galaxy of concepts. Here then is my first concept map:

374 ● 610

Which I can zoom into to take a closer look:

375A ● 610

375B ● 610

The concepts can be anything that moves my guests. Some will talk about the economic activities in an urban setting, and their concepts will be, perhaps, 'commercial', 'pedestrian', 'restaurant', 'concert', 'expansion', 'hotel', 'rich'. What exactly is it they're talking about in this group? I don't know, I hear only the fragments, but I get a feel for what is important to them. Is it important to me? If it is I can pause and listen some more. I wander on and hear another group talk about 'scenario', 'actor', 'author', 'agent', 'phenomenon', 'trend': they seem to be talking about something more fundamental to architecture?

The words start drawing portraits on our conceptual canvas, my guests populate the concept map at wish. Beautiful spectrums, each one unique, yet more or less similar. Here are our first 'portraits':

376 ○ 684

Each guest with their own look, words, style, interests. They start showing themselves – is it their mask? Is it their face? – the way they want to exist in this new public space.

I stumble upon Bjarke Ingels and Neri Oxman in a diagonal exchange. Bjarke likes solving problems, giving answers, responding to challenges, engaging in decisions; he is an architect of action, he wants to give precise answers to architectural problems. He cares about challenges, solutions, competitions, propositions, answers, and 'yes, yes, yes':

377 ○ 685   378 ○ 685

Neri seems less certain, but more intuitive. She explores concepts around morphology and fabrication; flirts with biology, mathematics, multiplicity, computation, code, applications, software, algorithms, indexes.

379 ○ 686   380 ○ 686

I can almost hear them, across the room:

NERI
In the Biological Age, designers and builders are empowered to dream up new, dynamic design possibilities, where products and structures can grow, heal, and adapt.

BJARKE
We architects don't control the city – we can only aspire to intervene. Architecture evolves from the collision of political, economical, functional, logistic, cultural, structural, environmental, social, and many yet unnamed and unforeseeable interests.

NERI
But striding Nature's way is far from natural. It requires a change in the way we see 'Mother Nature', from a boundless nourishing entity to one that begs nourishment by design.

BJARKE
Architecture is never triggered by a single event, never conceived by a single mind, and never shaped by a single hand. Neither is it the direct materialisation of a personal agenda or pure ideals, but rather the result of an ongoing adaptation to the multiple conflicting forces flowing through society.

NERI
As we master 'unnatural' processes at a speed and sophistication that dwarfs evolution, Material Ecology propels us into the age where we mother Nature by design.

I remind myself that neither of them is right or wrong. And that what I hear them say stems from the dictionary I have given them to use. With a different set of words and under a different lens, I might well find that they agree much more than they differ, or disagree even more: it's just one way of looking at them, one way of listening to them.

381 ○ 687

As I zoom in closely, I notice that both Bjarke and Neri have made their own circle of affinities. I have no label for them, nor any need for one; that, I think, would only negate them. As with any two individuals, their relationship with each other and their connections and relationships with people are fluid, overlapping, sometimes focusing here, sometimes there: they celebrate their similarities as well as their differences in their own way, declare their friendships on their own terms.

382 ○ 687

My guests, much as I hoped and anticipated, do not stand still: they change positions, they continue to mingle. They gather, but they remain borderless, porous, flexible, magnetic. They start a new conversation here and another one there, they move on from one person to the next but take with them still some of what they've been talking about: they carry concepts into the next connection.

383 ○ 688

384 ○ 588

385 ○ 688

386 ○ 689

The stories, affinities and conversations I have heard tonight are not absolute. They are not an architectural

truth nor a theory. Just a version of many that are possible; I've said it before but I will say it again, because it is so important: it's just one way of seeing. In one world some of my guests might indulge in a love affair, in another they might repel each other and distance themselves from each other as far a space allows. I just collect a multitude of narratives of how my guests could have behaved at this party, under different circumstances, in different worlds:

387 ○ 689

With all these different realities simultaneously in my sight, I can establish a new kind of conversation. I'm inclined to call it a 'meta-discussion', an encapsulation, where the realities talk among themselves about what my architect guests say and do. It seems like a bit of a far-fetched idea, but it's happening: the different ways of looking at my guests tell of the hidden tensions and the dynamics governing my table, or, as I should call it now, my room.

Concepts are now no longer populated by just words, but really, by the architects themselves. An architect becomes a concept, a 'brand'! Concepts encapsulate other concepts, and each time a new concept is articulated, it shows up new affinities between my guests. There is hue, there is flavour. There is proximity and colour. Proximity is attraction, affinity: my guests make friends. Hues from light green to dark purple tell me how my guests like to talk, spanning from a more common vocabulary towards more personal expressions of themselves.

And now it is my turn to take a stance and ask, where should I sit at this table? Who are my friends? Who do I have an affinity with? Can I find my place, can I see myself reflected? As I explore these questions, the idea of what my 'brand' could be starts taking shape. My friends are already talking about it and I am ready to learn from them, much as they may learn from me. I find myself surrounded by Jean Nouvel, Steven Holl, Álvaro Siza, Herzog & de Meuron, Glenn Murcutt, AAA, and Plan B. Most of them are 'stars', as famous for their brand as for their architectural production.

This is the character I decide to be today, using my vocabulary and my ideas on how to present architecture. Tomorrow I can be someone else, if I want to: I may come up with different ideas and desires, different words and concepts, different guests joining me at my table. As they change, so do I, so does my 'brand', my mark. Perhaps an identity then, in this ever fluid, ever dynamic world, isn't so much a brand, a mark, fixed and burnt into my presence, any longer: it is, as I am, effervescent, organic, changeable, live.

And here now, finally, a picture of our dinner table, with me present. This is our 'selfie' of this unforgettable evening. I recognise myself, there amongst my friends and idols, and those who challenge me, feasting, talking.

This is who I can be in the world of The Big Plenty...

388 ○ 690

And none of it is frivolous. If you've ever spent an afternoon with a five-year-old or witnessed a game of rugby (or any other sport for that matter); play is dead serious. And so are we when we suggest that in order to cope with what we are calling The Big Plenty, we want to develop our thinking, that in order to orientate ourselves in the new public space we want to learn how to use the tools that are being employed in this space, that we recognise and at the same time take it upon ourselves to redefine what we want to mean by concepts such as 'identity' or, indeed, 'brand'.

Our universe is one in which we are all human beings and at the same time we are all aliens, mutants, cyborgs. There is literally no defined space and so there is by definition no exact or agreed-upon time. And as we look out onto a very foreseeable future where even the binary duality that lies at the heart of digitality gives way to quantum states, there are now no real distinctions. There are blurred lines and fascinating hybrids, there are mixtures and fusions, and there is neither a pure reality nor is there a pure fiction. There is architecture. We want to be right at home here.

Coda

389 ○ 690

We asked at the beginning: if we think of coding as literacy and of the Internet as a new public space, then how do we as architects – more to the point, how do you as a young, aspiring architect – behave in this space? It's a space in which we have moved beyond mere formal representation; our abstractions are symbolic: figures, fugues, faces, masks, indexes, atoms, elements, characters, avatars. And so articulating ourselves has become about infusing, narrating, doping, positioning within fluid contexts.

What hasn't changed though is that articulating ourselves is about mastery. And with our 'Two Act Play' we've attempted to illustrate, in a playful way, an approach, a methodology. It is more of a game, really, but there is a reason why in English, as in German, the activity of enacting a dramatised scenario uses the same verb as the action of diverting yourself in experimentation and learning. The reason we've opted for this, rather than, say, a formal, maybe instructive way of presenting an example lies in the very 'nature' of what we are talking about (there is of course nothing 'natural' about it, it is all human-made artifice): the digital world, with its boundlessness, its voluptuousness, its outrageousness, invites us only to play. The distractions are not a few, they are overwhelming, in their billions. Just keeping your mind concentrated on one document or piece of work in front of you on your screen for longer than ten minutes has become a serious challenge. Genres, categories, disciplines are all being messed up and reconfigured, seemingly at random. The way the digital world behaves – and that's us, in the digital world – is exactly as superficially chaotic as it seems. But of course there are patterns. Of course there are dynamic relationships that influence and inform each other. And of course there is always more to it than meets the eye.