



2042: *The Villa Dall'Ava*—a Short Film on the Secret Life of a Building

Andrea Anselmo, UCLouvain, Brussels, andrea.anselmo@uclouvain.be

Villa Dall'Ava (1984–91) has been recognised as a significant work in the oeuvre of Rem Koolhaas/OMA. The building's enduring intrigue is tied to a set of famous photographs taken at the villa whose enigmatic subjects have long baffled critics and that have raised conjectures regarding the villa's connections with surrealism and the oeuvre of Salvador Dalí. Drawing on archival research and interviews with the protagonists of the project, this article identifies the origins of the photographs' subjects in an unpublished short film and in a series of 400 film stills by Hans Werlemann and Claudi Cornaz that were made in 1991 but only recently resurfaced from the archives. Werlemann's ostensible intention was to narrate the villa's future life through 'memories' rooted in his shared interests with Koolhaas, but his secret aim was to unveil the principles that guided OMA in the villa project. The creative process behind the short film provides evidence that challenges the traditional Daliesque interpretation of these images and instead indicates they were inspired by the cinematic and photographic work of Man Ray, whose 'analogies' enabled Werlemann to transform the villa into a 'personality' that comes alive to narrate its secret life. Finally, the article discusses Koolhaas's and Werlemann's contrasting interpretations of the short film and their differing views of it as a medium for the interpretation of architecture.

Keywords: Hans Werlemann; Rem Koolhaas; OMA; Man Ray; montage; analogy



Introduction

In the letters written in April and May 1984 by Dominique Boudet, the editor of architecture magazine *AMC*, to commission Rem Koolhaas and his studio OMA, the design of a villa for himself, his wife Lydie Dall'Ava, and their daughter Laure, he declares his 'rêves' (dreams) and 'désirs fous' (wild desires) for an architecture that could stand alongside the works of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe (AOMA 11/04/1984, AOMA 26/05/1984).¹ He envisioned a villa that could function as a 'laboratory' for the construction of a new form of 'modern' architecture and physically realize the theories that Koolhaas until the 1980s had only been able to represent through drawing.²

Those dreams seem to have come true, as Villa Dall'Ava has been acknowledged as a milestone in Rem Koolhaas's production and in the realm of contemporary architecture more broadly, awarded the Équerre d'argent special award in 1992 and added to the list of French historical monuments in 2018. This recognition is also a reflection of the many critical analyses and news articles that since 1992 have given it pride of place in their accounts of OMA's output and that have related it to the domestic modernist projects of architects from Le Corbusier to Mies and Richard Neutra (Cohen 1992; Lootsma 1992a, 1992b; Lucan 1992a, 1992b; Menard 1992). These writings have examined it based on a selection of historical documents (Biraghi 2024; Böck 2015; Gargiani 2004, 2006, 2008; Van Gerrewey 2019), explored its potential connections with art and cinema (Fromonot 2014, 2020, 2025), analysed different drawing techniques Koolhaas used in conceiving it (Colonnese 2022), and discussed emblematic spaces and elements of it (Burriel 2020, 2021).

Many of these analyses (Biraghi 2024; Fromonot 2014, 2020, 2025; Gargiani 2004, 2006, 2008; Lootsma 1992a, 1992b, 2014) interpret the villa primarily by way of a close examination a set of photographs of the villa admired for their staging of architecture in dialogue with enigmatic and alienating subjects, such as a giraffe and a group of bathers dressed in swimsuits reminiscent of the 1920s (**Figures 1 and 2**). Their inscrutability has spurred many readings, contributing decisively to fixing Villa Dall'Ava among the references for recent generations of architects. Adding to the aura of mystery is the fact that while these photographs began circulating in early 1992, soon after construction was completed, OMA has not often republished them.³ Although in recent years some critics have taken these photographs as a cue to propose a surrealist and Daliesque interpretation of the villa (Biraghi 2024; Fromonot 2014, 2020, 2025; Gargiani 2004, 2006, 2008; Lootsma 1992a, 1992b, 2014), questions such as who chose the animals and characters, who staged the photographs and why, what story they relay, and what they tell us about the villa and its architect have not been answered.



Figure 1: A giraffe wanders in the garden. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Villa Dall'Ava, Saint-Cloud, France, 1991. Hans Werleemann Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werleemann.

This article answers these questions through new archival research and a series of interviews conducted by the author with the main participants in the project.⁴ The article expands the analysis beyond the limited selection of pictures that have been available to critics until now by considering the entire collection of over 400 photographs taken in 1991 and, more specifically, a little-known 12-minute film made in the same period entitled *2042: The Villa Dall'Ava* that portrays the life of the villa in a hypothetical future fifty years after its construction against a backdrop of fantastical events. The film, made in the autumn of 1991 by Hans Werleemann and Claudi Cornaz, professionals regularly involved in photographic shoots of OMA's works, has never been addressed in the literature on the villa.⁵ The archival documents reveal the origins of this film and the accompanying photographs, which the script, written by Werleemann, describes



Figure 2: A group of bathers engage in physical exercise on the roof. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Villa Dall'Ava, Saint-Cloud, France, 1991. Hans Werlemann Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann.

as 'film-stills', indicating that the film conceptually underpins the photographs.⁶ This discovery, along with additional commentary by Werlemann, allows for a reinterpretation of both the film and the photographs in an entirely new light.

While Werlemann is credited as the primary author of this video-photographic project, it is in fact the outcome of various contributors to the villa project, including Cornaz, a long-time collaborator of Werlemann whose crucial role in filming and editing the work earns him recognition as a coauthor, Xaveer De Geyter, Jeroen Thomas, and interior designer Petra Blaisse, who played a large part in the design of the film set. The connective tissue between these authors was Koolhaas himself, whose theoretical references and previous experience as a filmmaker constituted a guiding principle for the various participants in the project. However, despite his influence, the fact that Koolhaas did not participate in writing the script, as acknowledged by both Werlemann and Koolhaas, calls into question what critics had previously considered settled: that Koolhaas had participated in taking the photographs and that therefore they must be

associated with surrealism and the work of Salvador Dalí.⁷ The article argues that other influences and biographical elements were more crucial in shaping Werlemann's work as the sole author of the script and Cornaz's contributions as coauthor of the video-photographic project. Koolhaas/OMA remained in the background.

Werlemann and Cornaz's project elevates the villa to the status of a character, defined by Werlemann as a 'personality' (AHW 04/10/1991: 6), embracing the Koolhaasian interpretation of buildings as animated beings (Werlemann 2008). The article shows how Werlemann's use of fragments of his 'memories' (AHW 31/03/1992) in conceiving the film aligns with the cinematographic and photographic experiments carried out in the early 20th century by Man Ray that draw on the concept of personification. While earlier texts point to Man Ray's work as merely a circumstantial source for the project (Fromonot 2014, 2020, 2025), the article suggests it is in fact its primary critical influence.⁸

Finally, the article addresses the role of representation in the Villa Dall'Ava project and in OMA's work more broadly at a time when the paper projects that had established Koolhaas's reputation were finally being realised and needed to be disseminated in architectural magazines. The way Werlemann represented the villa eventually led to a conflict between him and Koolhaas, who felt Werlemann's vision did not reflect OMA's "growing up", and he ended up disavowing the film (OMA, Koolhaas, and Mau 1995).

Transforming the Villa into a 'Personality': Werlemann's 'Fictie' for the Fonds BKVB

In the summer of 1991, Koolhaas and the team of OMA architects involved in the construction of Villa Dall'Ava — De Geyter, Loïc Richalet, and Thomas — had decided they had to complete it by autumn, and so they began to think about photographs, texts, and drawings they could use to disseminate what would be OMA's first building in France to as broad an audience as possible while respecting the client's wish that he not appear in any of these materials so as to avoid any form of conflict of interest (as Boudet at that time served as the vice president of the architecture editorial group *Le Moniteur*). His decision to use his wife's maiden name, Dall'Ava, for the villa was no doubt motivated by the same concern.

The person commissioned by Koolhaas to photograph the villa upon completion of the construction site was Werlemann and his collaborator Cornaz. Both had been working with OMA for some years, photographing models, construction sites, and buildings. They also produced videos capturing the work inside the Rotterdam studio, filmed Koolhaas receiving prizes and giving interviews, and designed kinetic and acoustic devices that enabled them to simulate metropolitan atmospheres in their videos (Werlemann 2010). During various phases of the Villa Dall'Ava project, Werlemann and

Cornaz took photographs and videos of models and specific construction site stages, made possible also through a helmet-mounted camera Cornaz had designed that he would wear to convey the feeling of a live recording in the film (Holger 2022). They also participated in the set design of the exhibition *OMA: Fin de Siècle* held at the Institut français d'architecture in Paris in the spring of 1990 that featured a 1:1 scale reproduction of a part of the villa. This fluid combination of artistic and technological media in the work of Werlemann and Cornaz was encouraged by Werlemann's immersion in the creative commune Utopia — a true melting pot of photographers, architects, artists, designers, musicians, filmmakers, and set designers — where he had lived and worked since 1978 (Van den Tol, De Vette, and Werlemann 2019).

The collaboration between Koolhaas and Werlemann can be explained in light of a shared interest. On the one hand, OMA had been engaged for years in the development of project drawings that used a combination of painting and collage to construct a narrative about each building and installation and to prevent architectural drawing from devolving into professional representation. On the other hand, Werlemann had also been engaging in photographic experimentation, using technological tools to alter through different colours and atmospheres how his works were perceived (**Figure 3**).⁹ Like OMA, he aimed to avoid lapsing into professional representation. He wanted his photographs to represent architecture as lived-in and already altered by the lives of its users even though it had only been recently built, in contrast to how the photographs published in architecture magazines in those years portrayed it (Werlemann called these photographs 'clichés' [AHW 04/10/1991: 7]). Koolhaas and Werlemann embarked on projects combining graphic, photographic, and video experiments that subverted the traditional elements of architecture. For example, they transformed the façade of the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe (1989) into a massive screen wall made up of thousands of reflecting surfaces that featured images projected through a laser beam (Van den Tol, De Vette, and Werlemann 2019, 46; Werlemann 2010, 46).

The photographic campaign for Villa Dall'Ava turned into, in Werlemann's words, an 'experiment' requiring 'additional financial support' (AHW 26/09/1991) that he sought to acquire by applying for a grant from the Fonds voor Beeldende Kunsten Vormgeving en Bouwkunst (Fonds BKVB), a Dutch foundation supporting visual art, design, and architecture. On 4 October 1991, Werlemann submitted an application generically entitled 'Villa Dall'Ava' that described several scenes to be filmed with a video camera and captured with a still camera. Although in his first letter to the Fonds BKVB, Werlemann proposed a 'photo series' (AHW 26/09/1991), he referred to the photographs that would make up this series as 'film stills' (AHW 04/10/1991: 6), confirming his intention to make a short film from which he could derive photographs.¹⁰ The combination of video and photographs, at first merely sketched out, became a

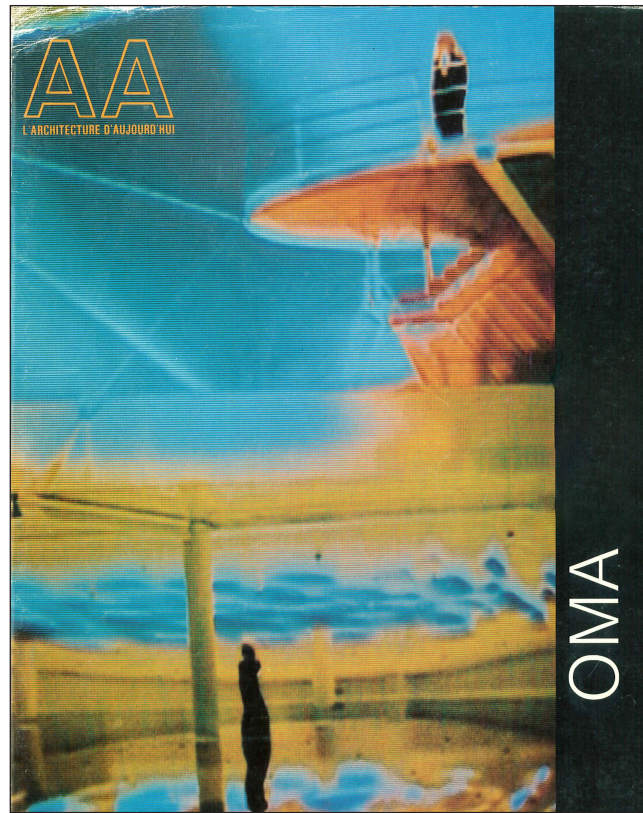


Figure 3: Hans Werlemann's photograph of a model of OMA's Nederlands Dans Theater captured through a monitor connected to a fixed camera and a "color generator" built by Claudi Cornaz. Cover of *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 238, April 1985. © L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui.

decisive strategy Werlemann used to supersede traditional architectural representation that led to the production of a special kind of short film that integrates the video footage with the photographic shots.

In describing the script of the short film, Werlemann referred to it as 'fictie', or 'fiction' (AHW 16/10/1991), alluding to its fantastical character. The common thread running through the 'fiction' was to be the villa itself, which would become a 'personality' that each 'inhabitant' and 'imaginary' situation had to deal with. There was to be no linear story with a beginning, middle, and end but rather a depiction of fragments of life punctuated by both extraordinary events featuring wild animals, renowned architects, and enigmatic characters and everyday events depicting inhabitants immersed in reading, chatting, and speaking on the phone, engaged in disputes, sharing affectionate glances, and expressing sadness. The goal of the fiction was to evoke feelings such as 'anger, love, sadness, optimism, and pessimism' (AHW 16/10/1991). The alternation of nighttime and daytime scenes was intended to generate the effect of a narrative portraying a wide time span that offered a snapshot of a vibrant and hectic villa life. The photos and scenes, assembled into autonomous fragments,

were to be combined according to a principle Werlemann called ‘analogical’, the aim of which was to establish unexpected juxtapositions between the villa, its spaces, and the situations in the script.¹¹ ‘Forms’ of Werlemann’s ‘memory’ (AHW 16/10/1991) were to feature in this analogical approach, which meant that autobiographical recollections would be incorporated into the script.

Owing to the fragmented nature of the script, the events Werlemann describes in it take on the form of apparitions. The spiral staircase and the ramp can be read as the analogical representation of the new way of moving for people and animals (a wolf appears on the scene). A giraffe analogically represents the villa’s slender metal structure and its relation to the Eiffel Tower, as if tracing a history of construction from the metal experiments of the early 20th century to the seemingly random order of Koolhaas’s structure (in the transformation of animal into architecture, the giraffe becomes for Werlemann the ‘shadow’ of the tower [AHW 16/10/1991], which recalls how a few years before he turned the cranes of Rotterdam’s port into dancers for the short film *Kranenballet* [Werlemann 2010]). A panther dashing through a revolving wall and surprising its prey, Lydie Dall’Ava, can be seen as the analogue representation of the villa’s fluid pathways, while ‘walls’ symbolise for Werlemann domestic defences ‘against’ outsiders’ ‘voyeuristic’ gazes (AHW 16/10/1991), possibly those of the neighbours who had complained about the direct view from the villa’s large glazing.¹² The kitchen can be interpreted as representing the heart of the house, where feelings of love come to life, while the villa’s technological equipment, including computers and cables, might be seen as a symbol of the media broadcasting news about the international political situation.

At the request of the Fonds BKVB to clarify certain aspects of the project, Werlemann contemplated a new title for it. On the first page of the ‘fictie’ dated 16 October 1991, ‘2042’ appears in pencil, indicating that Werlemann now wanted the film he was proposing to be seen as a projection into a future like that of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.¹³ The new title explicitly expresses Werlemann’s desire to produce a film set fifty years after the villa’s realisation, envisioning a future that mirrored the complexities of contemporary times produced by the political, economic, and social conjuncture of the Gulf War.¹⁴ In the film itself, the villa is subject to conditions and events that dramatically impact its architecture and inhabitants: it is hit by strong winds and invaded by plants and animals seeking refuge to avoid extinction; it is also struck by war, which enters into it through television and radio. Werlemann stages the life of a building that has evolved into a ‘personality’, capable of accommodating both animate and inanimate beings and of persisting through time, despite its skeleton having become a slender and tilted structure.

Werlemann also proposed to illustrate this architectural ‘personality’ by transforming the street the villa overlooked, Avenue Clodoald, into a bustling ‘Boulevard Saint Germain’, thereby transposing the villa to the centre of Paris and staging one of the well-known movements to which Koolhaas subjected his buildings. The only sketch included in the application, featured on the cover, depicted this relationship between the villa and the centre of Paris, where Koolhaas had long sought to build (Figure 4).

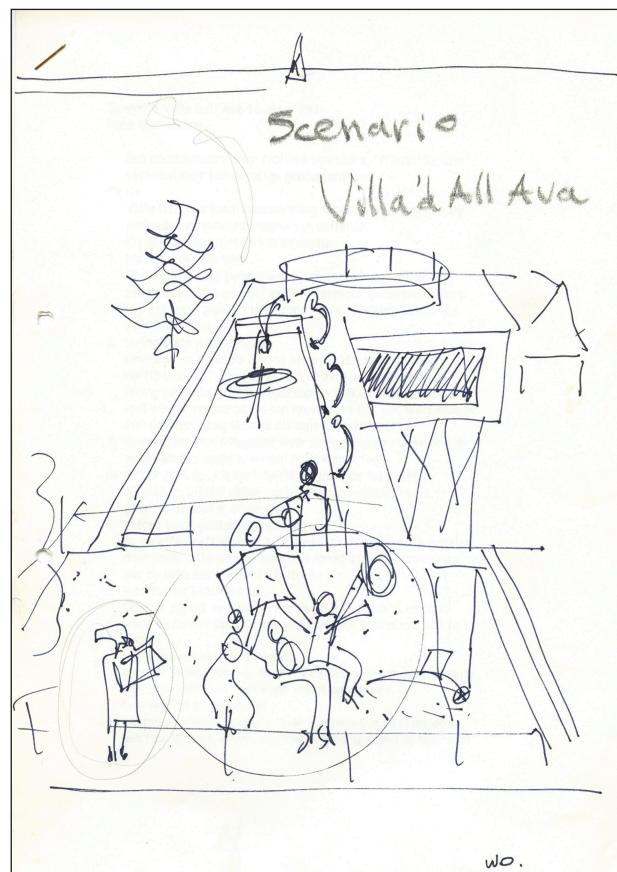


Figure 4: Cover of Hans Werlemann script “Villa Dall’Ava”, 16 October 1991. Hans Werlemann Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann.

In this drawing, the villa’s inhabitants and its prismatic volume stand out prominently against a white, uniform surface, and the Eiffel Tower rendered in profile is represented as the villa’s ideal destination and its only interlocutor on the scale of the city in a re-actualisation of that relationship between the needle and the globe, shapes that, according to Koolhaas defined the architecture of Manhattan at the beginning of the twentieth century (Koolhaas 1978, 27). Two groups of people stand on the roof of the villa: one group occupies the terrace, while another is ready to dive into the pool.

By proposing to bring these various situations together, Werlemann announces the elements he intended to assemble and superimpose in the film, as in a collage, to stage a 'confrontation' between different meanings that could only be found 'at the furthest confines of the imagination' (Werlemann 2010, 46).¹⁵

Beyond the Villa as a Static Setting

On 19 November, the Fonds BKVB approved the 'Villa Dall'Ava' project and granted approximately half of the requested amount of 130,000 guilders (AHW 07/11/1991 and AHW 19/11/1991).¹⁶ Although this shortfall required removing certain elements from the fiction and thus changed it in significant ways, it did not distort its content.¹⁷

At this time, Werlemann and Koolhaas decided to involve Petra Blaisse, an interior designer, to work on the set. Werlemann was used to collaborating with her on OMA's exhibitions, and Koolhaas was convinced Blaisse's participation would allow him to follow Werlemann's project and that her proficiency in French would be strategically useful.¹⁸

The photographic and film shoot was initially supposed to take place from 4 to 17 November 1991, but it was rescheduled and ended up being carried out over a period between November and December 1991 for a duration of two weeks (AHW 31/03/1992). In the runup to the shoot, Blaisse, Werlemann, and Cornaz built a real film set consisting of a scenography with ramps and scaffolding, projectors, spotlights, various cameras, and props. Professional actors were also recruited and the search for a giraffe at a circus began with the help of an animal trainer (AHW 04/10/1991).

The interior of the villa was so transformed by the set that Werlemann ended up signing an agreement with the Boudet family, who had already been living in the villa for some weeks, promising to protect it from damage (AOMA 07/11/1991).¹⁹ Furniture and objects were rented, and temporary lampshades made of black photographic paper were installed to decrease the amount of light in the living room. Blaisse, Koolhaas, De Geyter, and the clients all took part in selecting the furniture.²⁰ Blaisse recommended furniture with sensuous shapes and materials that would create a domestic atmosphere reminiscent of California modern houses (which OMA had researched for the project), such as Pierre Paulin's tongue armchair and Charles and Ray Eames's La Chaise chair (APB 91CLO) with their curvilinear geometries that resemble human figures.²¹ Blaisse also recommended Fontana Arte's Uovo lamp, an obvious homage to one of Koolhaas's paranoid-critical figures (Gargiani 2004, 2008). These expressive and symbolic furniture pieces contrasted those owned by the Boudet family, which matched the aesthetic of the modern movement in the tradition of Le Corbusier.²²

The natural light-filtering systems developed by Blaisse also contributed to the transformation of the villa. She proposed a range of curtains, each crafted with a different material and texture, to give each space in the villa a distinct atmosphere: yellow silk to enhance the luminosity and preciousness of the living room, gold to interact with the interplay of light and shadow on the translucent walls of the bathroom and to single it out (these curtains did not end up being installed), ice blue silk to create a suffused atmosphere in Lydie Boudet's studio (Blaisse ultimately decided to use purple instead), and fabric depicting 'surreal nature' in the form of fantastic flora and fauna for the room of Boudet's daughter, Laure, that synced with wild animals populating Werlemann's script. Blaisse also suggested using a boa in the film to create an exotic atmosphere (APB 91CLO).

Werlemann took the photographs using a Pentax 6×7 camera, while Cornaz shot the film footage using a VHS camera. The video-recording device was mounted on Cornaz's back to facilitate a realistic and dynamic shot, like the one he obtained using his helmet camera (AHW LAVA6×6494). This choice resulted in frequently blurred and occasionally distorted shots, in line with the concept of 'low-resolution' photography Werlemann adopted to generate a suspended atmosphere and thus create a feeling in the observer of uncertainty and openness to ever-new interpretations (Werlemann 2010, 44).

The viewpoints of the photographs were chosen by Werlemann, while the shots for the short film were defined by him in collaboration with Cornaz, who shared with Werlemann an interest in experimenting with unique filming techniques, having been influenced by the likes of Andrei Tarkovsky.²³ Although in the 'fictie' Werlemann had precisely indicated the sequence of events to be shot, Cornaz continuously recorded everything happening during the shoot, whether fortuitous or planned. The additions in the footage included moments of set preparation, visits by other OMA clients to the villa, a postman ringing the doorbell who thereby generated an unexpected analogy with *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (ACC 1991), and a girl who swims in the pool and then, covered only with a towel, eats an apple, evoking a scene reminiscent of the Garden of Eden (AHW villa0022).²⁴

The Short Film as an 'Ode to Man Ray': Analogical Montage of Werlemann's 'Memories'

In March 1992, in preparation for the upcoming exhibition of his commissioned photographs (*Fotografie in opdracht*) at the Beurs van Berlage in Amsterdam (Werlemann 1992) and in order to submit the project material to the BKVB Fund, the recorded footage was cut, edited, and mounted with the photographic shots, a soundtrack, and

closing credits into a proper 12-minute film (AHW 31/03/1992). The montage of the sequences was based on an artistic and personal sensibility aimed at revealing the principles that guided Koolhaas and OMA in the development of the villa along with other aspects of life inside the villa as observed by the inhabitants, actors, and animals. The editing principles followed by Werlemann and Cornaz were based on both analogy, which had shaped the construction of the fiction, and improvisation in introducing new situations.

Cornaz's continuous shot was dissected into various fragments which were reassembled, producing a new unity that still retained the essence of each fragment. However, this reconstruction disrupts the sequence of events in the fiction. Although the choice of pieces was influenced by the principle of analogy, their combination into a continuous sequence produces the effect of a collision of heterogeneous elements like that OMA adopted in its designs and that Werlemann had admired in the advertising collages in 1960s American magazines collected by his father (Lootsma 1993). Werlemann and Cornaz combined footage and photographs of the spaces, furnishings, and inhabitants with shots of persons and objects in a play of cutting, editing, and points of view that echoes Lautréamont's famous dictum that the beautiful is 'the chance meeting, on a dissecting table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella' (Breton 1962). The integration and collision of elements is further accentuated by the accompanying music, whose rhythms are made up of deep, resonant noises and recurring dissonant sounds that owe to the influence of Philip Glass's soundtrack for the film *Koyaanisqatsi* on composer and guitarist Beat Cornaz, Claudi's brother, who created the score and electronically processed it by combining of sampled and pre-recorded sounds. Beat also sought to emphasise the pivotal moments of the short film in the same way Richard Strauss's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* does in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.²⁵

Although the film is a 'personal' representation of the villa as seen through Werlemann's eyes (AHW 31/03/1992), it is replete with OMA references as well, as Werlemann had closely identified with the company over the years.²⁶ The convergence between Werlemann's and Koolhaas's interests is evident in the dossier delivered to the Fonds BKVB that mentions a photograph titled 'Ode to Man Ray' in a list of photographs supporting his portfolio (AHW 04/10/1991).²⁷ It is precisely in light of this annotation that it is possible to reread Werlemann's short film as such an ode: in the techniques used, in the dreamlike atmospheres, in the filming of certain situations and figures, and in the use of light. Man Ray's work was likely a source of inspiration for Werlemann beginning with *Kranenballet*.²⁸ The use of photographs and film footage in Man Ray's films is a technique similar to that adopted by Werlemann and Cornaz in 2042. The predilection for 'improvisation' and the unexpected (AHW 31/03/1992)

guiding Werlemann and Cornaz in their pursuit of dreamlike effects, always in line with a 'low-resolution' philosophy (Werlemann 2010, 44), also recalls Man Ray's early films. Like the symbolic and enigmatic scenes of *Emak Bakia* (1926), those of *2042* also embrace the principles of non sequitur, generating 'dreamlike sequences without apparent logic' (Man Ray 1963, 274).

The short film reflects the unexpected association of geometric figures common in Man Ray's films as in the polygonal slate slabs of the plinth and the spots on the giraffe's skin, the waves of the aluminium and polycarbonate panels, the circles of the porthole and the holes in the ceiling, and the diagonals of the *pilotis* and handrails. These unexpected associations are reinforced by Werlemann and Cornaz's transformation of the villa's living room from a transparent glass house into a phantasmagorical screen that renders the shadow of the giraffe on the outside mysterious and even frightening (Figure 5). In this game of superimpositions reminiscent of Man Ray's cinematic techniques, the giraffe plays a crucial role. Represented in the form of a dark, irregular spot, it superimposes itself on Werlemann's head, forming a chimeric figure, half animal and half human. Such metamorphoses occur throughout the film, hinting at the transformation of the villa into a 'personality', evoking the idea of the building as a body, and establishing a distant dialogue with Man Ray's work. Kiki de Montparnasse moves in the shadow of a striped curtain in *Le retour à la raison* (1923), while the villa in *2042* is protected by Blaisse's yellow curtain with *brise-soleil* shadows and comes alive



Figure 5: Shadows of the giraffe against translucent glass window of the living room. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Villa Dall'Ava, Saint-Cloud, France, 1991. Hans Werlemann Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann.

like the body of a person (Figures 6 and 7). Like Mademoiselle Dorita who clings to a snake in a 1930 Man Ray photograph, the giraffe wriggles and rubs against the *pilotis*, suggesting the transformation of those columns into human limbs (Figures 8 and 9). The association of the giraffe and staircase that transforms the stairs into the spinal column of the building-personality recalls the superimposition of a starfish onto parts of the human body in *L'étoile de mer* (1928). Like Man Ray, Werlemann, whose family founded the Amsterdam zoo, makes recurring use of exotic and wild animals in his work.²⁹



Figure 6: The revolving body of Kiki de Montparnasse veiled by the shadows of a curtain. Still frame from Man Ray, *Le retour à la raison*, 5 July 1923. © SABAM Belgium 2024.



Figure 7: Yellow curtain with *brise-soleil* shadows undulating in the living room. Still frame from Hans Werlemann and Claudi Cornaz, 2042: *The Villa Dall'Ava*, 1992. Claudi Cornaz Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann, © Claudi Cornaz.



Figure 8: Man Ray, *Mademoiselle Dorita, charmeuse de serpents*, 1930. © SABAM Belgium 2024.



Figure 9: Giraffe rubbing against the villa *pilotis*. Still frame from Hans Werlemann and Claudi Cornaz, 2042: *The Villa Dall'Ava*, 1992. Claudi Cornaz Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann, © Claudi Cornaz.

A direct precursor for Werleermann's work is a film titled *Les mystères du château de Dé* that Charles de Noailles commissioned Man Ray to make about his villa, designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens (Fromonot 2014, 2020, 2025), whose staging of an imaginary life inside the villa and construction of specific situations 2042 mirrors. Noailles's bathers, dressed in long, striped costumes and wearing dark tights over their heads to conceal their identity (**Figure 10**), are analogous to Werleermann's 'lifeguards' (AHW 16/10/1991) in 2042 and to the 'architect/lifeguards' in Koolhaas's *The Story of the Pool* (Koolhaas 1978, 293–311), to the extent that their costumes resemble the Russian ones collected by Koolhaas.³⁰ In Mallet Stevens's villa, the basement conceals a mechanical device for storing works of art, while in Werleermann's work, it becomes the technological heart of the villa, a jumble of cables, light indicators, and chips. Similarly, Man Ray's 'intruder' (intruder), which penetrated and mysteriously plumbed the interior of Villa Noailles, is recalled in Werleermann's film through various characters. It takes on the form now of a group of people in fur coats belonging to a 'mafia' and engaged in a rooftop fight (**Figure 11**), a woman who kneels as she cleans with her dress half open, and a mysterious person in a raincoat and hat smoking in the garden in the dazzling light of a beacon.³¹ 2042 also features an intruder who reads, falls asleep, and awakens to news about the Gulf War (**Figure 12**). This intruder is architect Jean Nouvel, whom Blaisse invited to take part in the film.³² The scene refers to a real event: Werleermann's first meeting with Nouvel, which occurred in the OMA studio late at night.³³ The unsettling



Figure 10: Bathers wearing long striped costumes and dark tights on their heads play on the roof of the Villa Noailles. Still frame from Man Ray, *Les mystères du château de Dé*, 1929. © SABAM Belgium 2024.



Figure 11: A group of 'mafia' mobsters engaged in a fight on the villa rooftop. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Villa Dall'Ava, Saint-Cloud, France, 1991. Hans Werlemann Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann.



Figure 12: Jean Nouvel reading on a fictional library table and against the backdrop of Gulf War news. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Villa Dall'Ava, Saint-Cloud, France, 1991. Hans Werlemann Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann.

choice to include Nouvel, an antagonist of Koolhaas in the definition of contemporary architecture, in the short film implies the idea that the architecture of the villa is so strong and universal that the villa can be inhabited by architects with a different vision.

Another prominent figure in the short film and in some of the photographs is a white ovoid shape that also appears in paintings and photographs of Man Ray.³⁴ This shape, rendered as an element extraneous to the domestic context of the villa, is at times represented next to a black figure — an effect Werlemann was able to produce by merging the tongue chair and a seated person (AHW LAVA6×6404) (**Figure 13**) — that again evokes the veiled characters of *Les mystères du château de Dé*.³⁵ The completely white and smooth strange shape that suddenly appears in the short film as if from an alien world, in perhaps another allusion to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, seems analogous to the mysterious monolith, shiny and black, that falls from the sky in another scene in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and that reveals a new way to live to the villa's inhabitants. The ovoid shape, which functions as a monolith in the film representing the villa's domestic avant-garde, was the model for the competition project for the Zeebrugge ferry terminal that OMA exhibited at the Institut français d'architecture in Paris in 1990. It was brought to Saint-Cloud to be integrated in the short film, and for Werlemann, it likely harked back to the egg in OMA's 1975 founding manifesto. Werlemann's determination to include ovoid shapes in the recording, also reflected in a still from the film of a white motorbike



Figure 13: Two enigmatic figures, one veiled in black and the other in white, materialize in the villa's living room. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Villa Dall'Ava, Saint-Cloud, France, 1991. Hans Werlemann Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann.

helmet (AHW LAVA6×6493), stems from his interest in the origins of that Koolhaasian theory that aimed to redefine the foundations of domesticity, a theory that found one of its first concretisations in Villa Dall'Ava in Saint-Cloud.³⁶

The night scenes in the short film offer another demonstration of the authors drawing on Man Ray's work through the 'memories' Werlemann formed by his immersion in the Koolhaasian 'academy' (AHW 31/03/1992). In a video art scene, the illuminated roof of the villa emerges against the backdrop of Parisian darkness. Powerful spotlights light up only the swimming pool and the parapet, reducing them to two precise geometries: a blue trapezium and an orange semicircle that stand out against the night's blackness and accost the only other luminous shape, the yellow triangle of the Eiffel Tower, capturing the Koolhaasian confrontation between the villa's abstract geometries and the symbolic charge of the metropolis (**Figure 14**). In other nocturnal scenes, the villa finds itself immersed in darkness, animated only by trails of light that call to mind the network of its electronic brain. These luminous geometric constructions can be traced back to Man Ray's work, from the nocturnal filming of carousels in *Le retour à la raison*

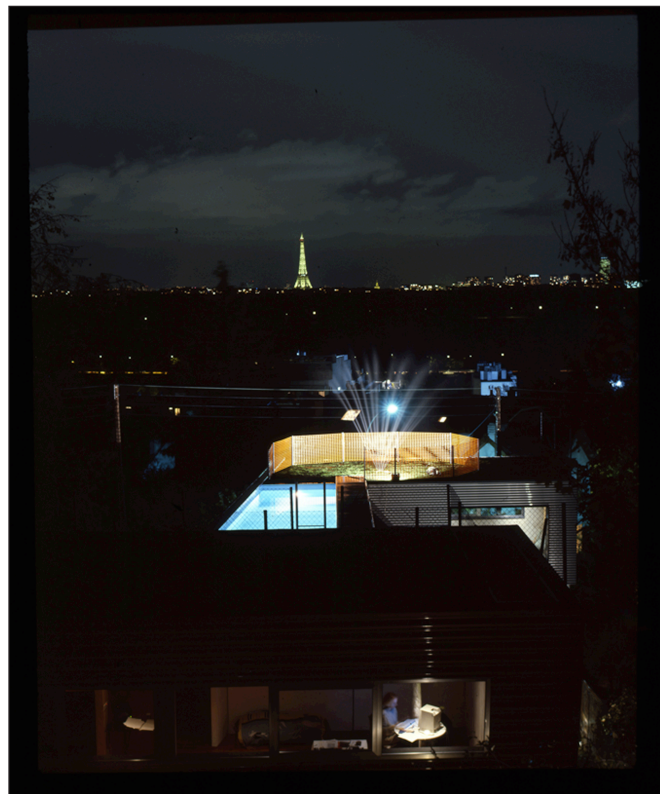


Figure 14: The villa with swimming pool, parapet, and irrigation system illuminated at night, against the backdrop of the Eiffel Tower. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Villa Dall'Ava, Saint-Cloud, France, 1991. Hans Werlemann Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann.

(1923) to the series of photographs–radiographies (*rayographies*) entitled *Électricité* (Figures 15 and 16) transforming the street into the ‘Boulevard Saint-Germain’ invoked by Werlemann’s script (AHW 16/10/1991). Animated by this energy and ‘technology of the fantastic’, the villa finally seems to turn into a living being, like the buildings that Koolhaas had only so far described in his texts and that Madelon Vriesendorp had portrayed as alive in her paintings (Koolhaas 1978).

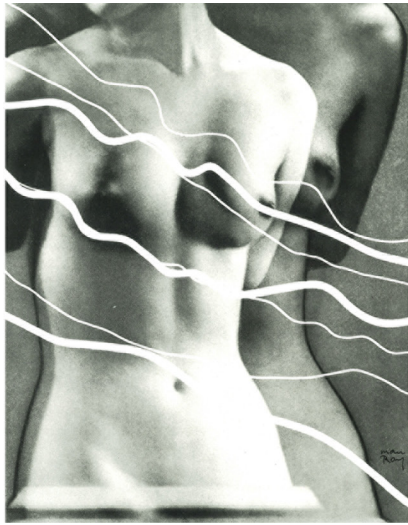


Figure 15: Man Ray, *Electricité*, 1931. © SABAM Belgium 2024.

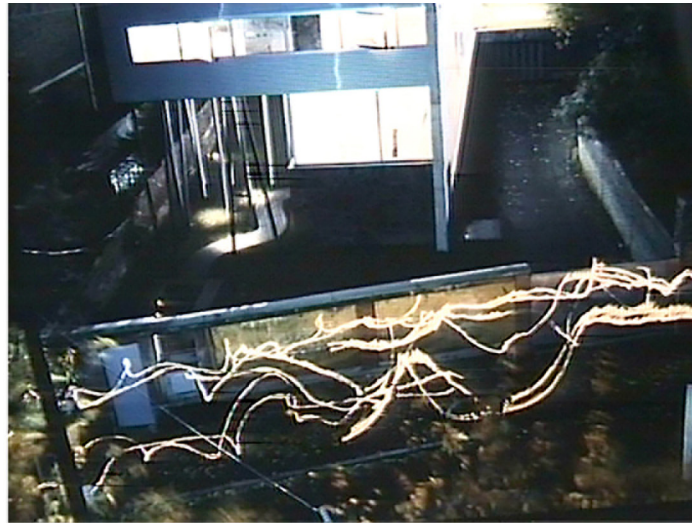


Figure 16: Long exposure photograph depicting light trails in front of the villa. Still frame from Hans Werlemann and Claudi Cornaz 2042: *The Villa Dall’Ava*, 1992. Claudi Cornaz Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann, © Claudi Cornaz.

The Representation of OMA’s Buildings and Koolhaas’s Rejection of the Short Film

2042 was shown just once, in April 1992 at the *Fotografie in opdracht* exhibition; similarly, the stills derived from it were published in just a few magazines between January and March 1992, and were never provided to the press again, and were subsequently used by Koolhaas only on rare occasions. The fates of the short film and of the photographs may be tied to the fact that Koolhaas, whose interest in the medium of film is well documented, wanted to play a larger role in developing 2042 than Werlemann ultimately allowed him to play.³⁷ When images were published in 1992 without his having been consulted about the selection, a dispute arose between him and Werlemann, as Werlemann himself recalls.³⁸ According to Werlemann, it was Koolhaas’s feeling of a lack of control over the outcome and dissemination of the 2042 project that led to its repression.³⁹

Koolhaas was also concerned that the seductive power of the film images might overshadow the architecture of the villa, and he had mixed feelings about the way the

short film and photographs represented it. In particular, he was intrigued by the giraffe, which he still considers ‘retrospectively interesting’, perhaps because he recognised that it, like the other wild animals in the script, could enhance the meaning of architecture, much like the famed gorilla in *King Kong* did for the Empire State Building (Biló and Koolhaas 2004, 114).⁴⁰ That he thought wild animals could do as much is suggested by OMA’s use of animals like gorillas and kangaroos in the villa’s collages to transform the *pilotis* into a forest and the driveway into a plain, thereby turning the villa into an architecture capable of integrating itself into ever-changing landscapes, as if undertaking a journey with different stages. These animals would continue to appear in OMA collages (Lampariello 2011). Yet Koolhaas did not approve of the apparent domestication of the giraffe that was suggested by its having been kept on a leash in the film (see **Figure 1**), and the only photograph of the giraffe he used in *S, M, L, XL* (OMA, Koolhaas, and Mau 1995, 150–151) depicts it as an enigmatic and elusive figure behind the glass giving it the appearance of a dream-like presence intended to evoke the villa’s unconscious personality.⁴¹ The choice to stage the giraffe in the driveway, where Le Corbusier would have placed one of his modern automobiles to express his vision of architecture as a *machine à habiter*, clearly reveals Koolhaas’s ambition to devise a new form of modern architecture, now unexpectedly animated by fantastical wildlife.⁴²

One of Koolhaas’ primary criticisms of the film was that Werlemann’s explicit and highly prescriptive narrative scenes limit the range of interpretations that a more abstract depiction could have made possible. Koolhaas disapproved of scenes such as those featuring the lifeguards dressed in 1920s style and those showing the mobsters, which, in his eyes, were ‘embarrassing’ — despite his having embraced such lowbrow imagery earlier in his career.⁴³ This new aversion to narrative, nostalgia, and revivalism reveals a decisive aspect of Koolhaas’s theoretical stance between the 1980s and the early 1990s against the excesses of postmodernism.

Another aspect of the film that no doubt bothered Koolhaas was the fact that the most important scenes — the physical exercise session of the lifeguards and the clash between the mobsters — were staged on the roof of the villa against the backdrop of the Eiffel Tower, undermining Koolhaas’s vision for the design of the villa. Although the view of the tower that the villa’s roof offered could be seen as defining the building, Koolhaas saw the roof as a way to construct a moment of intimacy in which the inhabitants could swim naked without being overwhelmed by the scale of the metropolitan (**Figure 17**).⁴⁴ The collision of heterogeneous characters and scenes on the roof conveys the image of a villa pervaded by dissonance, conflict, and tensions, but in his work, Koolhaas sought to avoid tensions “to be too apparent in the end.” He wanted them to be as “subdued and sublimated” as possible, as he “attempted to do ... in the Dall’Ava house in Saint-Cloud” (Chaslin and Koolhaas 1992, 163).

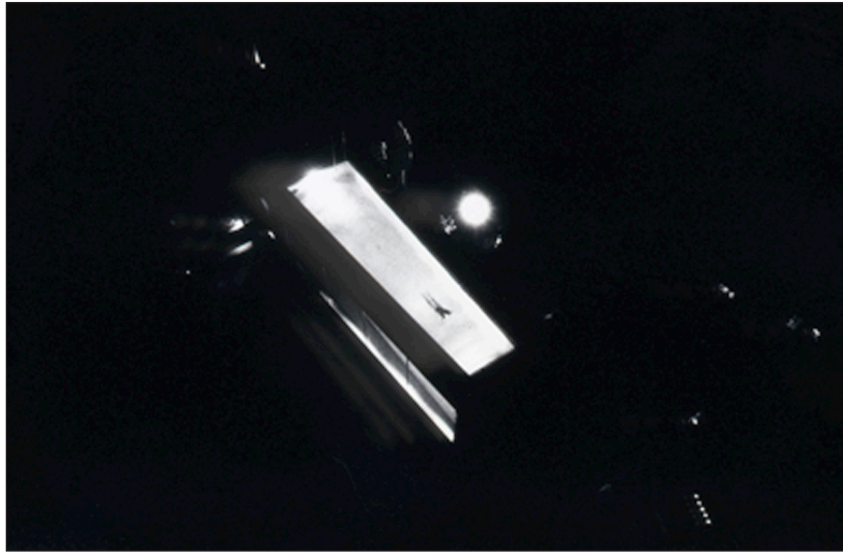


Figure 17: The pool's illuminated rectangle pierces the darkness; a solitary figure swims in the water. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Villa Dall'Ava, Saint-Cloud, France, 1991. Hans Werlemann Archives, Rotterdam. © Hans Werlemann.

Finally, Koolhaas did not want certain aspects of his conception of the villa that had been crucial in the early stages but that had lost relevance over the course of the eight-year design process to be disclosed, aspects that the short film draws attention to, such as the connection between the pool and Koolhaas's *The Story of the Pool* and the spectacular nature of the villa's materials that had now been toned down and made more sober. In this sense, the history of the villa shows affinities with the evolution of OMA itself, which in the early 1990s, began turning its interest from the 'revision' of the language of modern architecture (OMA, Koolhaas, and Zenghelis 1980, 241) to 'anonymity' and the scale of 'bigness'.⁴⁵ Koolhaas's proposal for the 1992 *House with No Style* competition, written during the same period in which Werlemann's photographs were being published, seems to capture OMA's evolving trajectory: 'The house with no style should fit in the designer-free zone, anonymously. Its designer should impose massive constraints; avoid all recent clichés, avoid nostalgia, avoid the '50s and the '60s, avoid swimming pools, avoid curves, avoid palm trees, avoid (almost all) angles that are not 90°; avoid color, avoid...' (Koolhaas 1992).

Conclusions

From the 1970s onwards, Koolhaas and his contemporaries, including Nouvel and Bernard Tschumi, began exploring a cinematic approach to space (Fillion 1997; Stierli 2019, 30; Tschumi and Merlini 2015;). These architects navigated a crucial transition in the representation of architecture, from drawings in conceptual phases to photographs

of it once it was realized. They rejected the stereotypical modernist representation of architecture that showcased comfort and an aspirational lifestyle and sought to convince the broader public of the quality of modernist architecture — as seen, for instance, in Julius Shulman's photographs (1962) of Neutra's buildings — which had the effect of turning architecture into a 'simulacrum' (Nouvel 1999), a polished image designed to be contemplated and even idolized. The new generation of architects instead represented their works bare, without any sign of life, no objects or people that could distract from the eloquent charge of structure, cladding, and details. They sought out a kind of photography capable of conveying the narrative the drawings of their theoretical projects told. Nouvel hired Valérie Jouve to photograph the model apartments of his Nemausus project that artist Anne Frémy been commissioned to decorate with interiors inspired by rock music, popular shows, and comic strips (Debarre 2013, 97–98; Debarre 2017); Tschumi collaborated with lighting designer Georges Berne (Armengaud 2013, 268) to enhance, through red tubes, white neon signage and blue beacons, the reflections and the futuristic atmospheres generated by the complex metal geometries of Tschumi's Parc de la Villette's folies documented in Jean-Marie Monthier's nocturnal photographs (Rolin 1989, 286; Armengaud 2013); and OMA, having previously contracted with Vriesendorp and Zoe Zenghelis to produce architectural drawings, entrusted Werlemann to photograph the tension between expressive representation and a 'new sobriety' (Rosellini 2019a; OMA, Koolhaas, and Zenghelis 1980), in buildings such as the Nederlands Dans Theater (1987) for which they engineered a 'pre-occupancy' atmosphere (Koolhaas and OMA 2006) enhanced by lights, vivid colours and sometimes everyday objects that created the impression the building was ready to be lived in.

The photographs of the Nederlands Dans Theater may be seen as the prelude to the more radical Villa Dall'Ava project. The combination of video and photography in the film is critical to transforming the villa into a 'personality', with a life of its own. The villa comes alive, as it engages in dialogue with its human and non-human inhabitants; alive, as the moving images of the film and the correspondences with the works of Man Ray render its various parts limbs, brains, and animated hearts; alive, as it confronts the changing political, climatic, and metropolitan events that shape its context. Through the film, it reveals its latent intentions, its hidden references, and its secret life made up of the dreams of architecture that Koolhaas was called upon to condense into the project. These dreams undermined the bourgeois domesticity of Saint-Cloud, constructing an oneiric and fantastical modernity allowing one to live in an atmosphere of reverie.

The medium of film also makes it possible to transcend the two-dimensionality of drawing and photography. 2042 immerses the viewer in the life of architecture to the

point of constituting the cinematographic alternative to Vriesendorp's watercolour series *The Secret Life of Buildings* (Koolhaas, Zenghelis, E, Vriesendorp, Zenghelis, Z 1976; Rosellini 2019b). Superstudio similarly moved beyond photomontage in its representation of the *Continuous Monument* in a film dedicated to life (*Supersurface: An Alternative Model for Life on the Earth*), screened at MoMA in 1972 when Koolhaas was in the United States after visiting the group in Florence (Gargiani Lampariello 2019). Like Superstudio's film, *2042* lets the audience to enter the villa using all of its senses and discover all its hidden mechanisms and drives. Through this engagement with the audience, the film makes concrete the radical dream of an 'expanded architecture' (9999 and Superstudio 1971), as it allows architecture to integrate with art and cinematography, thereby breaking out of its traditional disciplinary limits, and represents a building that has become the personification of a living being. Other photographs that did not end up being used in the film would have further contributed to its representation of life: naked men showering (AHW villa0004, LAVA6×6406,6444), everyday objects such as suitcases, document binders, bags, hats and apples arranged as a still life (AHW villa0021, villa0028, LAVA6×6455), and Koolhaas himself presented as the *deus ex machina* of contemporary architecture (AHW villa0041), anticipating the fashion shoots that would take place in the villa from the early 1990s onwards.⁴⁶

Werlemann's *2042* is undoubtedly the definitive representation of the secret life of Villa Dall'Ava. It demonstrates how a short film can serve as an ideal tool for animating architecture and at the same time risk overshadowing buildings themselves. However, despite the fact that in *2042* the villa ultimately dissolves into representation and fragment to the point where architecture disappears beneath the weight of its surreal imagery, the film accomplishes a decisive objective Koolhaas had set for his practice beginning with the 1972 "Exodus" project: to demonstrate how architecture is, above all, the backdrop for life, whether rooted in reality or imagination.

Notes

- ¹ 'Mon objectif est simple. Trouver l'architecte qui puisse enfin satisfaire un désir fou d'architecture' ('My goal is simple. Find the architect who can finally satisfy a wild desire for architecture') (AOMA 11/04/1984); 'Acceptez-vous cette mission qui me paraît impossible, de ressembler [dans] un petit édifice toute votre science de l'espace, d'y multiplier les plaisirs de lumière ou d'ombre, de pleins et de vides, d'y concentrer tous vos rêves d'architecture?' ('Do you accept this mission, which seems impossible to me, to bring together [in] a small building all your knowledge of space, to multiply the pleasures of light and shadow, fullness and emptiness, to concentrate all your architectural dreams in it?') (AOMA 26/05/1984).
- ² 'Un si petit projet peut vous intéresser?' ('Can such a small project be of interest to you?'), Boudet asked when he first approached Koolhaas about designing the villa. 'Il peut aussi être comme un laboratoire d'architecture;' 'et si l'architecture moderne, celle qui correspondrait à nos temps, c'était celle que montrent vos dessins?' ('It can also be like a laboratory of architecture;' 'what if modern architecture, the one that would correspond to our times, is the one your drawings depict?') (AOMA 11/04/1984).
- ³ The only image featuring enigmatic figures that Koolhaas ever published appears to be a photograph of the giraffe, which is included in *S, M, L, XL* (OMA, Koolhaas, and Mau 1995).
- ⁴ This research consists of a series of extensive archival investigations conducted by the author in public institutions and private collections, such as the archives of Werleemann, Cornaz, and the OMA office, between 2019 and 2025.
- ⁵ Most critics don't even mention the film. The only scholars who reference it alongside the photographs are Bart Lootsma (2014), Marco Biraghi (2024), and Françoise Fromonot (2025).
- ⁶ After being buried in the Cornaz Archive for years, the short film was screened on 2 December 2020 during an online event organised by Stephan Trüby and Zsuzsanna Stánitz (<https://archplus.net/de/archplus-features-stoa-expanded-photography-the-work-of-hans-werleemann>). The film is currently viewable at <https://www.facebook.com/archplus/videos/387563582508824>.
- ⁷ Werleemann, interview with author, 28 August 2023; Koolhaas, interview with author, 3 November 2021.
- ⁸ Fromonot (2014, 2020, 2025) discusses a possible connection between the bathers photographs and Man Ray's work, describing it as one among a cluster of other influences and ultimately aligning these photographs with a surrealist and Daliesque interpretation of Werleemann's images in general, an interpretation that is tied to Koolhaas's interest in Dalí.
- ⁹ The series of photographs of the Nederlands Dans Theater are an example of such experimentation. They were not directly taken at the building but were filtered through a monitor connected to a fixed camera and a 'colour generator' built by Cornaz. Using this equipment, Werleemann and Cornaz altered the colour of the images to generate disturbances and different atmospheres (Werleemann 2010; Werleemann and Cornaz, interview with author, 24 October 2021; ACC n.d.). Werleemann and Cornaz also used this colour alteration technique with some photographs of Villa Dall'Ava (AHW LAVA340-357).
- ¹⁰ Werleemann proposed the idea of shooting a short film in the application he submitted the Fonds BKVB, mentioning a 'video recording' to which he intended to dedicate a substantial part of the budget (AHW 04/10/1991).
- ¹¹ The script was drafted on 4 October 1991 and expanded on 16 October. In the first version, Werleemann spoke of 'building analogies' (AHW 04/10/1991), while in the second he stated that the villa was 'analogous to many forms' in his 'memory' (AHW 16/10/1991).
- ¹² The initial complaint, lodged on 15 November 1985, triggered a protracted legal back-and-forth lasting over three years, ultimately enabling the construction of the villa. See, for instance, judgement no. 61320/7, 3 February 1987, Archives du Tribunal administratif de Paris.
- ¹³ Werleemann had experience with filmographic narratives of this nature, having created photographic special effects for Bob Visser's film *Plan Delta* (1989), set in a dystopian future (AHW 04/10/1991: 3).
- ¹⁴ Although the Gulf War began in August 1990 and officially ended in February 1991, military and diplomatic operations continued to be carried out for months afterward, which resulted in it assuming unprecedented prominence in the media and the collective imagination. In one series of film stills from 2042, CNN footage is projected on the translucent walls of the villa's living room (AHW JN03-JN04).
- ¹⁵ This invitation was extended to Werleemann by underground film director Frans Zwartjes and his assistant Floor Peters, Werleemann's teachers at the Vrije Academie-Psychopolis in The Hague.

- ¹⁶ Today, 60,000 guilders, taking inflation into account, corresponds to about 56,000 euros.
- ¹⁷ Plans to use 'expensive models', to rent of a helicopter, and to include animals like a panther and a wolf had to be abandoned (AHW 31/03/1992).
- ¹⁸ Blaisse, who had gained experience in the early 1980s as an exhibition designer for the applied art department of the Stedelijk Museum, had been working with OMA for some time and had collaborated with Werlemann and Cornaz on various exhibitions, including O.M.A. *Fin de Siècle* held at the Institut français d'architecture in Paris in 1990, and on the interior design of the Nederlands Dans Theater in The Hague (1987–88). See Blaisse 2007.
- ¹⁹ The agreement also aimed to protect the 'normal family life' of the Boudet family by requesting that no photographs that were 'too personal' be taken and requiring that photographs be approved by the Boudet family before publication.
- ²⁰ Blaisse, Koolhaas, and De Geyter sometimes accompanied the Boudets to choose furniture and textiles in Paris (Blaisse, interview with author, 3 November 2021; De Geyter, interview with author, 24 February 2023).
- ²¹ Among the other elements chosen at first by Blaisse but not used were other pieces of furniture that shared the same sensual and fantastic charge: Starck's 'Luci fair' lights; Serge Mouille's spider-shaped *Lampadaire 3 Bras*; Ballardini's Ribalta sofa; half-naked models and cars; and a wedding dress for the cleaning lady. Photocopies of pages devoted to Neutra's private houses from the catalogue of the Neutra exhibition held at MoMA in 1982 (Drexler, Hines and Neutra 1982) and photographs of Frank Gehry's house in Santa Monica can be found in the OMA archive section on Villa Dall'Ava (AOMA 8403-Z03-04).
- ²² The Boudet family, which already owned furniture such as Poul Kjærholm's PK22 armchair and Corbusian LC8 stools, decided to expand its collection of chairs and tables with the purchase of the LC1 and LC2 armchairs and the LC6 dining table (Blaisse, interview with author, 3 November 2021).
- ²³ Cornaz was trying to evoke the opening scene of Tarkovsky's *Zerkalo* (*The Mirror*, 1975) in which the camera approaches the head of the protagonist sitting on a fence and then, thanks to the camera zoom, gives the impression of physically crossing the same fence (Cornaz, interview with author, 30 August 2023).
- ²⁴ One OMA client featured in the films, as evidenced by the titles of certain stills extracted from the footage (ACC 1992b), is the entrepreneur Jan Geerlings, for whom Koolhaas was designing a villa in Holten. The mysterious atmosphere of the short film turns Geerlings into an enigmatic figure. He engages in mysterious activities, handling a briefcase without ever showing his face.
- ²⁵ Beat had worked with Cornaz on other films, including *Sesam Open Ik Wil Er Uit* (Open sesame I want to come out), which combined photography and sound, and always embraced the minimalist approach Glass used for Godfrey Reggio's films (Cornaz, interview with author, 30 August 2023). See also issue *Wrath* 36 (February 1983), available at <https://www.gramschap.nl/gr36/grs36.html>.
- ²⁶ Werlemann's 'memories', like those of the other project protagonists from Boudet to De Geyter and Blaisse were bound up with the OMA universe. They all came to know OMA through Koolhaas's writings and his early projects, which reflected his theories and obsessions (Boudet 2007; De Geyter, interview with author, 24 February 2023; Werlemann and Cornaz, interview with author, 24 October 2021). In fact, Werlemann defined himself as 'addicted' to what he considered a real school (AHW 31/03/1992).
- ²⁷ Koolhaas's interest in Man Ray's oeuvre is evident in the inclusion of many of his works in *S, M, L, XL*, the book that recounts and illustrates the office's work from its inception (OMA, Koolhaas, and Mau 1995). Although the photograph was not preserved in the dossier, it seems traceable to a photographic artistic self-portrait titled 'Ohne Mann' that Werleman created by delaying the shot with a self-timer and then throwing the camera into the air the same way Man Ray in *Emak Bakia* throws the camera to simulate a car crash. The inclusion of this photograph in a list that otherwise exclusively reference photographs he took of OMA projects — from the Casa Palestra installation to the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe — shows that Werlemann had Man Ray's work in mind when writing the script. It is likely that Werlemann had the opportunity to see Man Ray's work as early as 1971, thanks to the dissemination of his works in the Netherlands through the retrospective dedicated to him held at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam (Hammacher-Van Den Brande 1971; Vallora 2018, 96). Werlemann also referred to Man Ray's works in his lectures at Akademie voor Kunst en Vormgeving St. Joost in Breda, where he had begun teaching in 1986 (Werlemann, interview with author, 28 August 2023).
- ²⁸ *Kranenballet* is undoubtedly indebted to *Ballet Mécanique* (Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy, 1924), to which Man Ray had also contributed (Bouhours and De Haas 1997). Man Ray, who like Werlemann started out as a photographer

before also turning to film, claims that what motivated him to take up film was his desire to 'put[] into motion some of the results ... obtained in still photography' (Man Ray 1963, 259).

- ²⁹ The collection of the Centre Pompidou in Paris has several Man Ray photographs featuring lions, chameleons, and horses. Numerous critics have connected Werleemann's use of such figures to the fact that Koolhaas's father authored stories featuring animal protagonists (Fromonot 2014, 2020, 2025; Lootsma 2014). Among Werleemann's sources of inspiration for the giraffe might be considered also a story by Frans Kellendonk that appeared in *De korste verhalen* (Amsterdam, Tabula, 1986). This story centers on a giraffe that having been gifted to King Charles X by a pasha of Egypt travels from Egypt to Paris. Despite the strong affinity between Kellendonk's narrative and that of 2042, Werleemann only learned of this story in early 1992 when it was published in the collection *Het complete werk* (Kellendonk 1992, 683–686; Werleemann and Cornaz, 2021, interview with author, 24 October 2021).
- ³⁰ The costumes chosen by Werleemann, with identical fronts and backs, precisely match Koolhaas's description of 1950s Russian bathing suits: 'One of the most incredible things about Russian bathing suits is that they are absolutely symmetrical; there is no difference between the back and the front. They are theoretical costumes; there is no place for anatomy' (Raggi and Koolhaas 1983, 28). That the identity of the lifeguards is concealed and that according to a number of critics OMA architects are among them has contributed to the mystery surrounding the origin of the characters in Werleemann's film.
- ³¹ Werleemann and Cornaz, interview with author, 24 October 2021.
- ³² Blaisse, interview with author, 3 November 2021; Werleemann and Cornaz, interview with author, 24 October 2021. On the subject of Werleemann's inclusion of erotically charged figures, see also the photographs of a group of men in the shower (AHW villa0004, LAVA6×6406,6444).
- ³³ Werleemann, interview with author, 28 August 2023. On this occasion, Werleemann was intent on finishing a model for the following morning's shoot and welcomed the French architect who, while waiting for Koolhaas, fell asleep in the studio (Werleemann and Cornaz, interview with author, 24 October 2021).
- ³⁴ See Man Ray's countless solarisations and paintings centred on eggs along with the ovoid white tombstone above his grave in Paris.
- ³⁵ Man Ray likewise frequently employed techniques to obscure portions of photographs to influence the way they were interpreted. See, for instance, the two black fs on the bare back of Kiki de Montparnasse in the well-known photograph *Violon d'Ingres* and the erasure of the forearms from other female figures pictures transfigured into busts of classical statues.
- ³⁶ The figure of the egg is also at the centre of Georges Bataille's novel *Histoire de l'oeil*. In it, ovular forms such as eggs and eyes are charged with subversive and perverse meanings (Barthes 1963), meanings that likely resonated with Koolhaas, who describes Bataille's writings and stories as depicting the "profane" human world of order vs. "sacred" animal world based on disorder, cruelty, excess' (OMA, Koolhaas, and Mau 1995, 232).
- ³⁷ Koolhaas had been interested in film from a young age, thanks to the activities of his father (writer, film critic, and screenplay professor) and had experimented with it through the filmmakers' collective 1, 2, 3 Groep before he turned to architecture (Lootsma 1999, 2001). These experiences significantly influenced his professional career, even leading him to consider naming his architectural practice the Cabinet of Dr Caligari (Davidson and Zenghelis, 2014, 84) and to experiment with the montage technique in architectural projects (including the Villa Dall'Ava, Davidson and Koolhaas 1993, 43; Koolhaas 1978; Stierli 2019). Koolhaas did play a large part in an earlier OMA short film produced for the installation *Casa palestra* (gym house) at the Milan Triennale (ACC 1986), writing the script for it. This pavilion, conceived as a stage for imaginary gymnast inhabitants, represents one of Koolhaas's strongest attempts to reveal the secret life of modern architecture by exposing the athletic and sexual activities taking place within it (OMA 1986).
- ³⁸ Werleemann, interview with author, 28 August 2023.
- ³⁹ Werleemann and Cornaz, interview with author, 24 October 2021. When the magazines requested photographs of Villa Dall'Ava in early 1992, Koolhaas directed them to Werleemann, who was responsible for choosing images to send to the press (Werleemann interview with author, 28 August 2023).
- ⁴⁰ Koolhaas, interview with author, 3 November 2021.
- ⁴¹ Werleemann and Cornaz, interview with author, 24 October 2021. In light of Koolhaas's comment, Werleemann erased the leash from one photograph of the giraffe as part of a series of posthumous operations carried out in Photoshop

to enhance the evocative power of photographs (AHW villa0003). Koolhaas was so fascinated by the possibility of unspoilt nature free from human influence that he even suggested conducting 'safaris' in the green areas between the islands in the proposal for Berlin Green Archipelago (1977). See the project manuscript published in Hertweck and Marot 2013.

⁴² The ambition to reanimate modern architecture with 'patterns of human activity in unprecedented juxtapositions and catalytic combinations' was formulated by Koolhaas as early as the manifesto *Our New Sobriety* (OMA, Koolhaas and Zenghelis 1980).

⁴³ Koolhaas, interview with author, 3 November 2021. These figures evoked stories such as that of the floating swimming pool, which had been crucial at the beginning of the project for all its protagonists, but now Koolhaas wanted to put it, along with film scripts such as *Hollywood Tower* and *De Blanke Slavin*, aside.

⁴⁴ 'I could have been exasperated by the fact that the house is perfectly aligned with the Eiffel Tower, but it is also a unique opportunity to be in an intimate situation, swimming almost naked, and at the same time being confronted with the scale of a big city, the symbol of the metropolis. A moving situation. I have done everything to ensure that this moment does not become the apotheosis of home. The house is not a corridor leading to this sublime moment', Koolhaas explains (Copans 1995).

⁴⁵ 'The most important *internal* mechanism" shaping OMA recent projects, Koolhaas notes, was "an autocratic reaction on our own development in the 1980s: I thought that some of the work we did was much too dependent on precedents in modern architecture. Amidst the rise of postmodernism in the early '80s that was perhaps a courageous attitude, but it became very boring when modernism "triumphed" everywhere in Europe. It was also an uncreative attitude in terms of not exploiting certain influences that could generate "newness"' (Koolhaas and Zaera Polo 1992, 7). In 1990 OMA decided to present six projects on the theme of the 'grande masse' for an exhibition of its work at the Institut français d'architecture (Koolhaas, OMA, and Goulet 1990, 9), laying the foundation for the subsequent theorisation of 'bigness' (Koolhaas 1994).

⁴⁶ The nude photographs were not used at the explicit request of the Boudet family (Werleemann and Cornaz, interview with author, 24 October 2021).

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