

Rapturous South: A Retroactive Manifesto

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GHOSTWRITER: Movie stars who have led adventure packed lives are often too ego-centric to discover patterns, too inarticulate to express intentions, too restless to record or remember events. Ghostwriters do it for them. In the same way I was Manhattan's ghostwriter.

From DELIRIOUS NEW YORK: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan

Rem Koolhaas, 1978

RAPTUROUS SOUTH: A RETROACTIVE MANIFESTO (or how eating pork rinds can be a complex social experience) embraces the region of the South as a vibrant cultural and historical artifact, one that possesses a valuable FUTURE TENSE. The design studio scoured the South looking for dead bodies and searching for any evidence that could yield a new cultural theory.

The stories told in the nine unique investigations began with the bone pine porches of James Agee, the rabbit traps of Cormac McCarthy, and Mark Twain's midnight trips along the Mississippi. These propositions evolved into a series of spatial constructs that portrayed the South and its many unique faces from a new vantage point. With each stance a presupposed history was challenged that either reinforced or distanced the design student from their inherent biases of place as defined by personal experience. The new stories told became forgeries in the purest

sense of the word. Engaging Dali's Paranoid Critical Method (PCM) as described by Rem Koolhaas in his seminal work *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (1978), students engaged a process of conceptual recycling, one that promised to recharge the worn consumed contents of the world. Working within Ernst's plane of non-agreement, the studio's process of design embraced methods that privileged inversion and accident.

The unique proposals generated by students over the course of the semester covered a wide range of topics that positioned themselves outside mere quantitative forms of traditional site analysis. They embraced the sounds of locusts, the smell of chicken, whispers, the personalities of place, as well as its various characters. This search for a kind of hyper-reality, one that looks so closely that it seems as if one is on the verge of insanity exposed the true potential of designer as ghostwriter.

In the introduction to *Concerning Architecture* by David Greene (1999), he writes, "If we consider for a moment Christo's seminal work – the 'wrapped cliff' – we might see it in one of two ways: as a wrapped cliff or; preferably, as the point at which all other cliffs are unwrapped." The true success of this research studio lays in its ability to wrap the cliffs and scrape, stretch, consume, and subvert the stereotypical image of the South in search of its alter ego. In so doing, a series of themes ripe

for discussion and speculation with regard to the future of architecture and its multivalent soul are exposed.

