# The Revolutionary (Re)Vision of Modern Architecture:
## Rem Koolhaas, from Surrealism to the Structuralist Activity

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*This paper locates in* Delirious New York *strategies of theoretical and critical production. It examines the implementation of conceptual, pictorial and textual techniques associated with surrealism and structuralism in the work and how such procedures were ultimately used to expose the irrational side of modern architecture, its claims to pragmatism, rationalism and objectivity — aspects which can be grouped under the term* sachlichkeit.[1]

Delirious New York *attempted to address the problem of meaning in the city and the notion of architecture* as a *language*[2] *Biographical aspects related to the viewpoint I elaborate are outlined, an analysis of the principles and intentions of* the *book are made and certain critical issues are identified. Interpretations are referred to as they arise from those frameworks the book originally addressed.*

Koolhaas's ambition was to devise "a theory, practice, strategy and ethic" based on the programs and ideologies that had produced Manhattan.[3] His tactic was to reveal the unconscious of architecture. The Surrealist paranoid-critical method conceived by Salvador Dali would legitimize the "discovery" of the unconscious dimension of Manhattan as the flip side of the Modern Movement. Not only would Koolhaas establish Manhattan as a form of modern architecture while addressing postmodern concern with type, narrative and symbol. While *Delirious New York* is a work of history on the vernacular architecture Manhattan it is also the affectation of paranoia and delirium, using Dali's method of working with the unconscious to ground his work in the framework of the critical avant-garde.

Pcm is basically the systematic encouragement of the mind's power to look at one thing and see another and the ability to give meaning to those perceptions. Think of Dali's paintings that read as double images. Koolhaas subjects Manhattan to the Dalinian gaze to find the city a reflection of his desire. He derives his notions of retroaction and Manhattan from the rhetoric of pcm. With the identification of Le Corbusier as the personification of modern architecture he manifests the conjunction between the Surrealist's revolutionary project and the architect who declared "architecture or revolution" through Structuralism, the revolution of poetic language. Koolhaas posits the architect as poet and modern architecture as a poetic subject.

He moves from Surrealism to Structuralism, the activity that viewed the structure of language as a reflection of the structure of the unconscious, as he assembles his paranoid visions with a structuralist logic to achieve multiple, alternative readings of history. Just as linguistic theory decoupled the basic dual relationship between a word an object where the former stood somehow for the latter, so is Koolhaas's Manhattan a multiple bipolar structure, a language of relations and opposites based on the common denominator of metaphor. *Delirious New York* presents the city between 1840 and 1940 as a fiction constructed from an amalgamation of historical fragments set in new combinations. Manhattan is a model of surreality into which various lineages are inscribed and other discourses are introduced through structuralist logic. The work is a kaleidoscopic constellation in which everything seems to lead to something else that leads in turn to the next thing. The goal is to multiply not diminish associations and categories. The interplay between components is a predominant characteristic. Just as in the studies of language which distinguish between the history and the system of a language, so can we differentiate between the history related by *Delirious New York* and the way in which the discourse is formulated. For

*Left,* Morphologie- City Metaphors, *O. M. Ungers, 1976; right,* SMLXL, *OMA, Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, 1995.*

Koolhaas, the city is a discourse and that discourse is a language, an ''infinite chain of metaphors.''

### 1958-1979

During the sixties Koolhaas wrote fiction as an author of film screenplays, reported contemporaneous cultural events as a journalist and researched the work of Ivan Leonidov. Before he ever began to formally study architecture (his grandfather was an architect) Koolhaas encountered Constructivism and interviewed Le Corbusier and artists identified with Surrealism. Koolhaas engaged simultaneously in subjects that were very different. This would become a hallmark of his capacity to bring together contradictory elements. Koolhaas's writing activities gave him a heightened awareness of the audience and the value of presentation and framing. They provided the foundation for an intereave of assumptions that almost naturally accounted for an affinity to the structuralist investigations that had originated and peaked in France that decade.

At the end of the sixties Koolhaas was in his early twenties embarking on his architecture studies. He would have a fair amount of intimacy with French thought by virtue of being at university in America and England in the seventies. That decade marked the heyday of structuralism in America where it extended into the early 1980s. Koolhaas would direct and formalize the elements and modes of thinking stemming from his writing at the places where he studied architecture, the Architectural Association in London beginning in

1968, Cornell University in Ithaca, New York in 1973-74, and the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in Manhattan until 1979.

In his first year at the AA Koolhaas encountered both surrealism and structuralism in the class of Charles Jencks, whose obligatory first-year course on semiotics and architecture introduced the issues of representation developed from Saussurean semiology. In his exchanges with Jencks, Koolhaas became very aware of Roland Barthes and wrote a paper on pcm. He had not yet connected pcm to architecture. In his 5 years at the AA Koolhaas would design projects for Paris, London and Berlin. His studio subjects included the City of London site where Mies had been commissioned in the 1960s to design a high-rise, the competition for the Museum Beaubourg and the Berlin Wall.
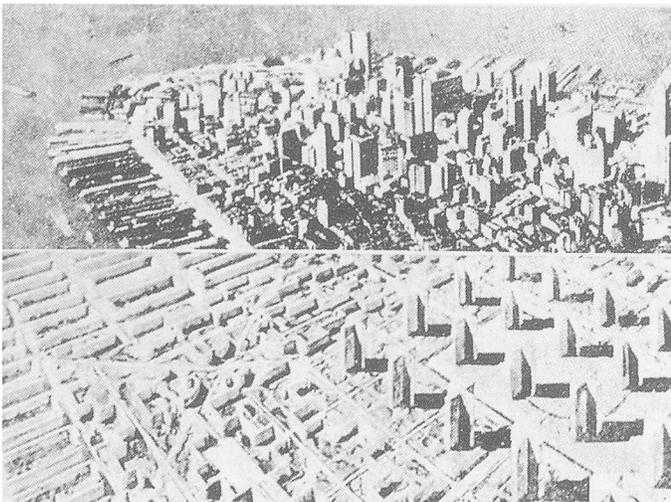
At Cornell Koolhaas studied with O.M. Ungers, whose research into morphology that was influenced by the analogy of architecture to language.[4] Architecture was a set of given elements that could be reassembled at will to create new meanings. The city was made up of assemblages of given elements that were in constant state of typological transformation. It was a kind of grammar where models and images were like letters or pieces of writing. The content of the models and images, their meanings, were expressed as metaphors, models, analogies, symbols and allegories.[5] Through Ungers, Koolhaas learned to ''think'' subjectively, through association. He learned that transformation was interpretation, i.e., that analogical thinking created

meaning through the association or recombination of forms. **(Fig. 1)**

Koolhaas already had the idea to work on a book about Manhattan. At Cornell he was in proximity to structuralist debates. He became friends with Hubert Damisch, a French art historian teaching at the Society of the Humanities who has written on structuralism. Through his friendship with Damisch, Koolhaas met Michel Foucault when he lectured at Cornell in 1972.[6]

### DALI AND CORBUSIER CONQUER NEW YORK

Pcm is explained and its connection to architecture demonstrated in ''Dali and Corbusier Conquer New



*Le Corbusier,* Urbanisme

York.'' *Delirious New York's* fifth chapter recounts the voyages of artist and architect to New York in the 1930s. The relationship of Dali and Corbusier was complex. For Koolhaas, they stand for the encounter between the unconscious, irrational fantasy of Surrealism and the conscious, rational didacticism of Modernism. His story narrates the confrontation of Dali and Le Corbusier, Surrealism and Modernism, only to resolve the staged opposition and reveal that they are ultimately the same. Koolhaas ''discovers'' that Le Corbusier was paranoid: arriving in NY with the Plan Voisin only to discover that his skyscrapers already existed.[7] To justify his work in the face of Manhattan's skyscrapers that were more convincing than his own, Le Corbusier unknowingly used Surrealist techniques: ''The Plan Voisin is planned, it seems, according to the early Surrealist theorem Le Cadavre Exquis, whereby fragments are added to a body in deliberate ignorance of its further anatomy.'' The conflation of New York and the

Plan Voisin recalls Dali's method of alternative reading. Le Corbusier's pairings are evidence that his ''method of operation show(s) many parallels with Dali's pcm,'' the proof that ''architecture is inevitably a form of pc activity.'' **(Fig. 2)**

Koolhaas subjects the architect perhaps most associated with dialectics to further dialecticism.[7] The connection of Le Corbusier to Surrealism and the unconscious was made by Manfredo Tafuri.[8] Already in the late forties the work of Le Corbusier was found to be not so rational, or functionalist, after all by John Summerson.[9]

A retroactive reading of *SMLXL* analyzing the use of images and spatial configurations associated with Le Corbusier by the architect who adopts Dali's pcm resolves the supposed opposition between Dali and Le Corbusier and redirects it as a symbol for the self, i.e. Koolhaas himself. Just as Manhattan is the unconscious side of the modern movement so is Le Corbusier Koolhaas's alter ego. *SMLXL* positions Koolhaas as the point of convergence between the Surrealist artist and the Modernist architect. This aspect remains latent in *Delirious New York,* where Koolhaas denies the moral, ideological and aesthetic baggage inherited from the French/Swiss architect but surfaces fully in *SMLXL*, which visually inscribes principles associated with the work of Le Corbusier in a contemporary context. Koolhaas ironically ''impersonates'' Le Corbusier while attacking him. His technique is to become the thing he attacks. The space between parodist and object parodized disappears, as in paranoia.



*Rem Koolhaas in* El Croquis*, 1992.*

### PARANOIA AS METHOD

Dali's method begins with the simulation of paranoid delirium. The delirium would become critical after the fact — when the subject deliberately subjected the delirious associations to analysis. Thus could Dali elabo-

rate his neurotic complexes, which he called ''irrational knowledge.'' He explained the levels of delirious interpretation he made with painting in his book ''Millet's *L'Angelus*, A Paranoid-Critical Interpretation'' published in 1963. Dali's statement ''The only difference between myself and a madman is that I am not mad'' is echoed by Koolhaas, who ''proposes a tourism of sanity into the realm of paranoia.''

Dali conceived his method as a critique and transformation of automatic writing. While pcm was a kind of dialectical thinking based on the surrealist chance encounter he distinguished paranoia from the hallucination provoked by automatic writing. He was critical of automatism's detachment from real circumstance. Pcm was a visual, voluntary and active mode of interpretation while automatic writing was a passive mental state. While automatism reconciled the contradictory conditions of dream and reality, Dali wanted to substitute the world of his imagination for the real world. Pcm was a concrete method of interpretation as well as a means of circulating those symbolic perceptions in life. It would ''materialise images of concrete irrationality with such precision that the world of the imagination may have the same objective evidence as the exterior world of phenomenal reality.'' The unconscious mind becomes tangible in vision. This is the Dalinian gaze.

Dali declared, ''To look is to invent.''[10] Everything depends upon the ability of the author whose gaze transforms the object. Symbolic associations could theoretically and practically be multiplied, endowing the visual aspects which make up the world with various meanings:

> ''The paranoid mechanism, through which the image with multiple figurations is born, supplies the understanding with the key to the birth and the origin of the nature of simulacra, whose fury dominates the horizon beneath which the multiple aspects of the concrete are hidden.''[11]

Koolhaas makes a double definition of pcm, one abstract, the other ''concrete:''

> ''Diagram of the inner workings of the Paranoid-Critical Method: limp, unprovable conjectures generated through the deliberate simulation of paranoiac thought processes, supported (made critical) by the 'crutches' of Cartesian rationality.''

> ''Dali's diagram of the Paranoid-Critical Method at work doubles as diagram of reinforced-concrete construction: a mouse-gray liquid with the substance of vomit, held up by steel reinforcements

calculated according to the strictest Newtonian physics; infinitely malleable at first, then suddenly hard as a rock.''

Pcm is an architectural metaphor. Reinforced-concrete construction describes the process by which dream images are ''hardened'' — solidified, made tangible — through interpretation. The truly pc moment comes when the calcified images begin to liquefy and a stream of associations flows forth.

Manhattanism is derived from the rhetoric of pcm. Just as PCM aimed ''to systematise confusion and thus help to discredit completely the world of reality,'' so is Manhattanism's ''complex ambition — to stimulate confusion while paying lip service to clarification … undertaken with the explicit intention of avoiding its logical conclusion.'' Just as PCM is the ''conscious exploitation of the unconscious,'' so is his own work ''a sequence of architectural projects that solidifies Manhattanism into an explicit doctrine and negotiates the transition from Manhattanism's unconscious architectural production to a conscious phase.'' Koolhaas will ''concretize'' Manhattanism, the inexplicit doctrine, i.e. ''unformulated theory,'' and consciously formulate its unconscious production.

Pcm is retroactive — it ''existed long before its formal invention.'' Retroaction is when an event is registered only through a later occurrence that recodes it. Through retroaction Koolhaas reads the history of Manhattan as a reflection of his desire. He finds the world is littered with historical artifacts to be subjected to pcm. Just as ''Dali proposes a second-phase Surrealism through PCM'' so Koolhaas proposes a ''second coming of Manhattanism'' through retroaction. Retroaction not only allowed Koolhaas to defamiliarize the history of Manhattan and discover it anew. It was also a manoeuvre that that took neither an historicist nor a tabula rasa approach, that negotiated the use of history and the autonomy required by his desire to be modern.

Retroaction also recalls a technique of scriptwriting called ''plant and payoff.'' This is when a specific object or idea introduced early in a drama becomes an important factor during the final resolution: ''The plant and the payoff are techniques used in all films and in all novels…they also happen all the time in real life. Something you notice, you don't know why, becomes important later… If you learn to recognize and use plants and payoffs in writing and film you will also learn to recognise and use them in so-called real life.''[12]

## DIALECTICAL THINKING

Koolhaas redirects pcm's aspects of signification in order to look at ''modern architecture'' from different angles simultaneously. The notion of double reading central to pcm is interpreted in ''Dali and Corbusier Conquer New York'' as the battle between two opposing forces that attract/repel each other. Elsewhere in the book, Le Corbusier is juxtaposed to Wallace Harrison, whose lack of doubt enabled him to build Le Corbusier's theories at the UN. The structure of multiple binary oppositions in *Delirious New York* occurs also at the level of verbal devices based on analogy (metaphor, allegory and irony), concepts (surrealism and constructivism), symbols (floating pool and raft), and buildings, (tower and sphere).

Koolhaas's book is itself conceptualised on opposition. Both mythological history and manifesto, it posits ''a theoretical Manhattan which in reality can only approximate an ideal state after the fact.'' Koolhaas's aim was to ''mythologize its past and to rewrite a history that can serve its future.'' While the European Modern Movement produced many manifestos but few buildings, in that same period, Manhattan's buildings were being built by American architects who wrote virtually no manifestoes. ''The fatal weakness of manifestoes is their inherent lack of evidence…Manhattan's problem is the opposite: it is a mountain range of evidence without manifestos. This book was conceived at the intersection of these two observations.'' If Manhattan was the flip side of the Modern Movement, the city was itself the acme of paradox. It was a model for Manhattanism, the unformulated theory'' that ''suspends irreconcilable differences between mutually exclusive positions.'' Manhattan was a binary constellation of oppositions; Manhattanism suspended their differences.

## TOWERS AND SPHERES: SURREALISM, MANHATTANISM AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE

In his design for the 1939 World's Fair, Wallace Harrison had unconsciously rediscovered the two archetypes of Manhattanism, the sphere and the tower. These building types appear throughout the later work of OMA.

Towers were ''both architecture and hyper-efficient machines, both modern and eternal…resolving the conflict between form and function… permanent monoliths celebrating instability.'' The quintessential tower, the New York Athletic Club, is a juxtaposition of activities such as apartment, golf course, restaurant whose only relationship is their physical adjacency and each floor is a different ''performance.'' It contains the



*Wallace Harrison Albany.*

Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve and temptation (the apple, mark of knowledge and loss) have been usurped by two boxers eating oysters at an institution dedicated to the body. Koolhaas replaces a Biblical tale with its opposite, a hedonistic scene, just as Dali's readings of *L'Angelus* derives a taboo subject from Millet's painting's religious theme:

> ''From what is at first a 19th-century cliché — a couple on a barren field, saying prayers in front of a wheelbarrow with a pitchfork stuck in the earth and a basket and a church spire on the horizon, Dali reshuffles the contents and fabricates his own tableau in which he discovers hidden meanings of sexual desire: the man's hat hides an erection; the two bags in the wheelbarrow become an image of the couple; the woman, with the pitchfork, becomes (literally) the image of man's desire, and so on.''[13]

Compare Koolhaas's conceptualisation of the NYAC with Dali's *Suburb of the Paranoid-critical Town: Afternoon on the Outskirts of European History*. Dali depicts three separate, self-contained architectural spaces arranged horizontally across the landscape composed like

*OMA, Lille.*



Suburb of the Paranoid-critical Town: Afternoon on the Outskirts of European History, *1936, Salvador Dali.*

creative process manifested as sexual desire. Objects such as eggs, grapes and peas were used as metaphors of the eye that referred to its power to wander. In Koolhaas's work, the Lille Congrexpo (now the Grand Palais) like Harrison's Performing Arts Center at Albany is called ''The Egg.'' Captive Globe is an egg, ''an ageless pregnancy …suspended at the City center…devoted to the artificial conception and accelerated birth of theories, interpretations, mental constructions, proposals and their inflection on the world.''
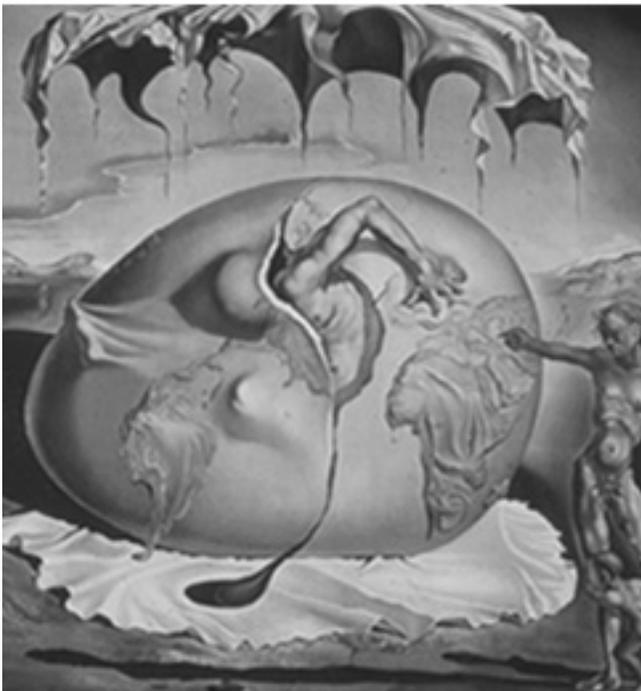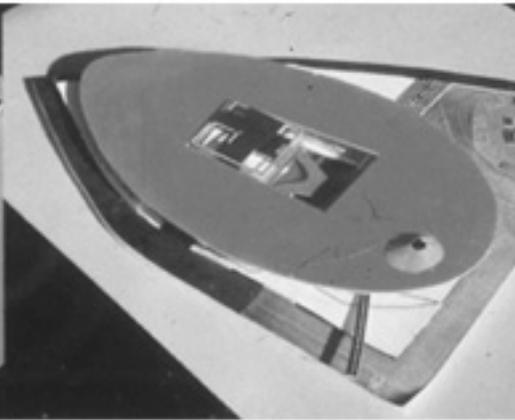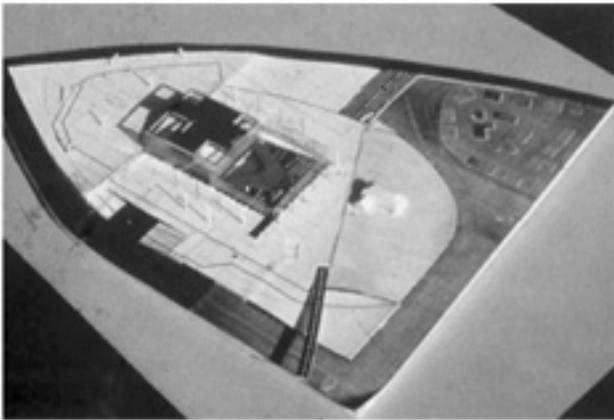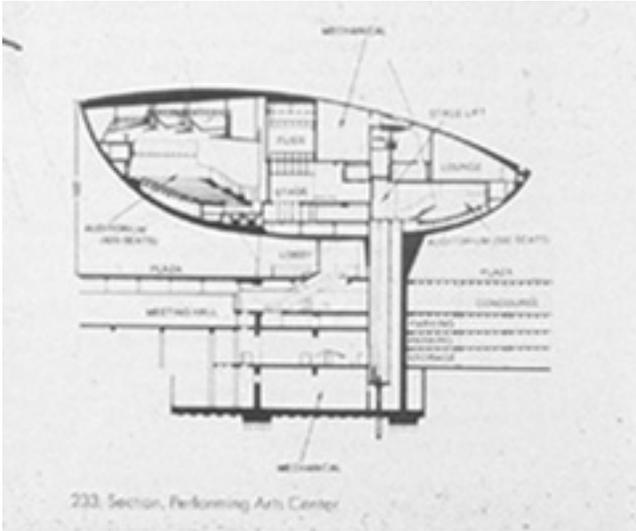
Like Harrison's design for the 1939 Worlds Fair, Lille showcases tower and sphere. The arrangement of skyscrapers at Lille recalls Harrison's project for the Albany skyline. Lille hybridizes Surrealism and Modernism with Manhattanism. An OMA sketch of Piranesean space reflects ''The Cosmopolis of the Future'' postcard reproduced in *Delirious New York*.

three different stage sets. Each portrays a world that represented places Dali knew well. His painting incorporates images from other artists and portays icons meaningful for Dali.

Koolhaas situates the sphere as the formal complement of the skyscraper, one of the two extremes intrinsic to Manhattanism. Spheres exemplifying the questioning of authority and spirit of revolution including Boulleé's Centotaph to Newton and Leonidov's design for the Lenin Institute were associated with the 1939 NY World's Fair. Roland Barthes identified the eyes, eggs, globes, testicles, etc. used by Georges Bataille in his Surrealist work *L'Histoire de l'oeil* with transgression in modern times. Dali thematised spherical objects by in his paintings exploring pcm. The blob represented the
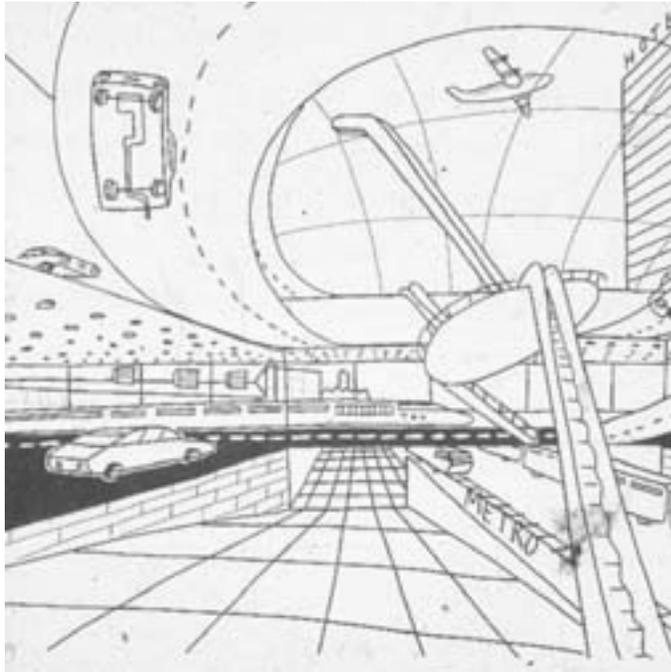
## SURREALISM IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Surrealism is part of the tendency to seek the irrational in modern and contemporary architecture. Koolhaas is a part of this tendency.

In 1978, Surrealism was the topic of *Architectural Design*. A number of articles written by AA unit masters discusssed the visually irrational and stylistically eclectic work of Antonio Gaudi, Frederick Kiesler and the Art Nouveau. Dalibor Vesely announced the publication of a book on Surrealism. Non-visual aspects of Surrealism were addressed by Bernard Tschumi who identified four kinds of surrealist space and Koolhaas who contributed a version of ''Dali and Le Corbusier Conquer New York.''

In Dutch modern architecture, hidden images and double readings interested Aldo van Eyck. Van Eyck discovered Salvador Dali when he came across a book,

*Clockwise from top left: Wallace Harrison, Albany Performing Arts Center, OMA Dans Theater; OMA Lille Congrexpo; Salvador Dali; OMA sketch in* Lotus, *1976.*

*Lille Piranesean space,* SMLXL.

by James Thrall Soby, whose cover showed a reproduction of the *Angelus* by Millet, a painting shown in *Delirious New York* that also appears in Exodus.[14] Soby drew particular attention to Dali's use of pcm to reveal the double image which manifested subconscious desires. Koolhaas explicitly rejected concerns of the Populist movement which originated from the position of Aldo van Eyck and was largely associated with Dutch modern architecture in the seventies.[15]

## A CRITICAL PRACTICE

The notion of a critical practice is one of the primary legacies of the events surrounding 1968. Recent writing articulates the definition and comprehension of a "critical architecture," developed over the last thirty years, as that which "required the condition of being "between" various discursive oppositions."[16] In this sense, it is an exemplar of the critical though its exhaustive dedication to dialectical thinking based on the exploitation of opposition in its various manifestations as paradox and contradiction, odd couples and alter egos.

Koolhaas's work is as a whole marked by the collision of contradictory correspondences. It finds the points of convergence between supposedly exclusive notions, such as indeterminate specificity in *Delirious New York*, voluntary prisoners in *Exodus*, and Nietzschean frivolity



*"Cosmopolis of the Future,"* Delirious New York.

and reverse epiphanies in *SMLXL*, just as Dali's "method" pairs the (ostensibly) incompatible mental states of paranoia and criticism. Koolhaas's dialecticism delineates his attraction to paradox and to literary tropes of opposition. In adopting pcm he rethinks not only the dialectics posited by modernism but also the dialectical way of thinking that is itself defined as modernist. Modernist dialectic thinking involves synthesis and differentiation. Koolhaas invokes the Surrealist double and its blurring of meanings.

## METAPHOR, ALLEGORY, IRONY

Metaphor is rhetorical device that collapses two seemingly unlike things or abstractions. The first publication of *Delirious New York* in 1978 coincided with a number

of conferences and journals in the US that thematised metaphor. It was considered a way of uncovering the irrational or unconscious, of something that was thusfar unthought. Koolhaas would describe the city in new terms through metaphor. ''Metaphors are the foundation of Manhattanism.''

Allegory is metaphor extended and multiplied, ''a description of one thing under the image of another; a veiled presentation, in a figurative story, of a meaning metaphorically implied but expressly stated.''[17] It attributes significance to actions by associating them with abstract ideas. Meaning is conveyed on more that one level, as both story and interpretation. Allegory is an ironical way of speaking because it says something in order to mean something beyond that one thing. Koolhaas allegorises Surrealism and Constructivism in ''Dali and LC Conquer NY'' and ''Story of the Pool.'' The former concerns the verbal conflict of ideas and ideals like *Battle of the Ancients and Moderns*, the latter is an allegory of progress that recounts the quest for a better place like *Pilgrims Progress* or *Gullivers Travels*.

Irony is defined as the perception and oblique statement of the discrepancy between appearance and reality. It occurs when tenets normally in polar contradiction to each other are collapsed together in one single ambivalent statement; where the discrepancy is unresolved, the irony remains. This is the source of Surrealist black humor. Koolhaas's first architectural allegory is ''Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture.'' Produced for *Casabella*'s 1972 competition ''City as Meaningful Environment,'' Exodus is an ironic response to the very idea of the city as ''meaningful environment.'' The Berlin Wall, a tool of exclusion dividing the city in two, becomes an instrument of collectivity, a cure for the urban condition and a talisman for the potential of architecture. It is a limit that is transgressed through a triple inversion, of inside vs. outside, periphery vs. center, desiring imprisonment and escaping inwards. This is ''architecture's true nature:'' both ''heartbreakingly beautiful'' and a ''guilty instrument of despair.''

Koolhaas strives to invest a Surrealist vision of modern architecture with the iconic power of Constructivist art. Exodus was a blend of the Constructivist models developed by Leonidov and the Surrealist monumentality of Superstudio's Continuous Monument. Koolhaas brings together aspects of the Modern Movement that were antithetical in a number of ways. His two fundamental sources for meaning allegorized in *Delirious New York* are contradictory. Surrealism and Constructivism differ aesthetically and take opposing stances to issues of abstraction and representation. The Constructivists pro-

claimed their work as a contribution to the making of a new society. For the Surrealists, their automatist practices were autobiographical figures of art in life, intended to manifest the perfect coincidence between mental activity and the register of expression. With Constructivism and Surrealism, Koolhaas merges the political and the personal.
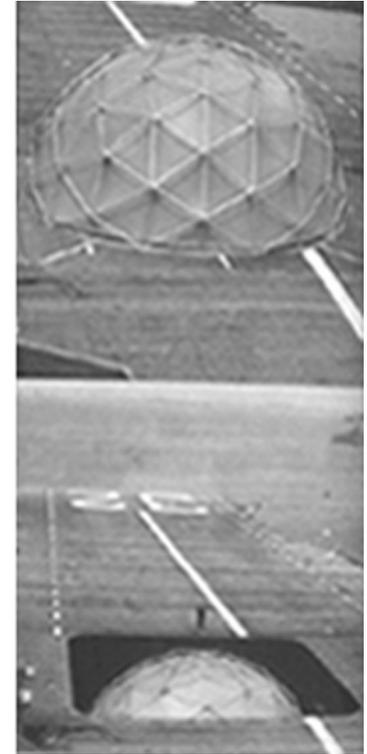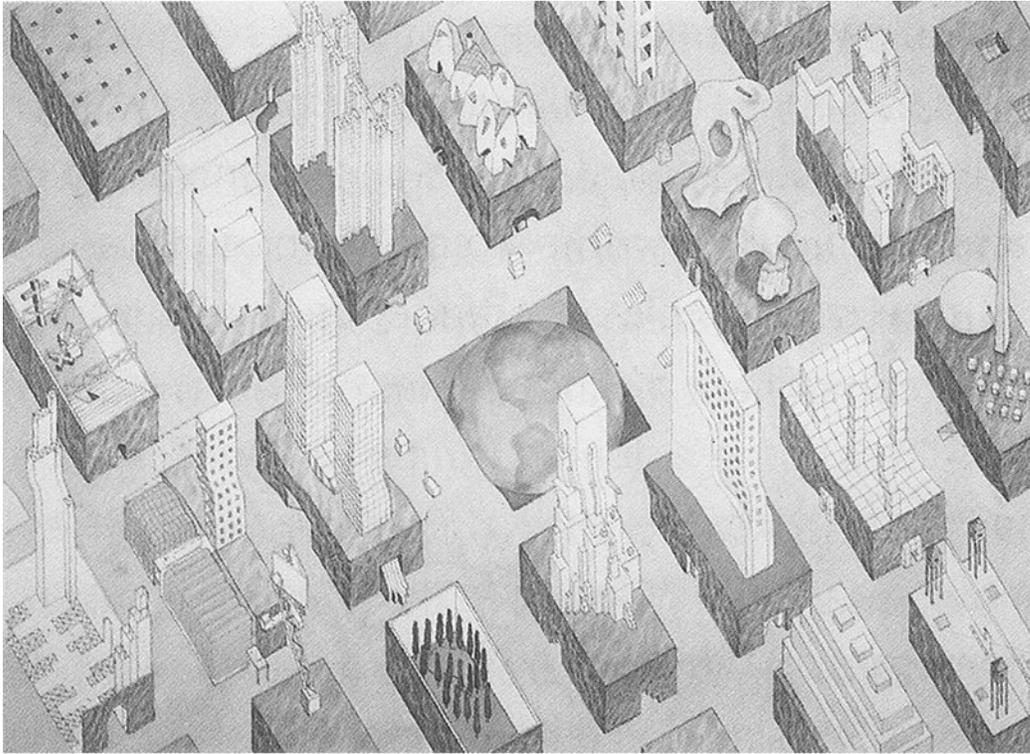
## MAKING THE METAPHORICAL LITERAL

The Empire State Building is paired with an airship recalling Leonidov's project and has the potential to make the metaphorical literal. It is ''a building with no other program than to make a financial abstraction concrete. It is also an airship mooring mast, thus resolving Manhattan's paradoxical status as a city of landlocked lighthouses. Only an airship could actually dock to make the metaphorical literal.'' Manhattan's alter ego, Modernism, also makes the metaphorical literal, i.e. concrete: ''What Noah needed was reinforced concrete. What Modern Architecture needs is a flood. Le Corbusier's Floating Asylum for the Salvation Army establishes [this] metaphor on a literal plane. Bums are the ideal clients of modern architecture: in perpetual need of shelter and hygiene, real lovers of sun and the great outdoors, indifferent to architectural doctrine and to formal layout.'' The Empire State Building is also related to automatic writing. It is a readymade, ''an automatic architecture, the surrender by its collective makers, from the accountant to the plumber, to the process of building taking place at the same time the European avant-garde is experimenting with automatic writing.''

## CAPTIVE GLOBE

Captive Globe was one part of OMA's Manhattan projects, competitions done in the mid-seventies for landfills on the islands surrounding Manhattan, part of the New York Urban Development Corporation's plans for urban renewal. Formulated with a conceptual and a real counterpart, they were intended to show the power of architecture to be both metaphorical and literal. Captive Globe was the conceptual version of the Egg of Columbus Center (1973). Story of the Pool (1976) was the theoretical complement to the Roosevelt Island Housing competition (1975).

Captive Globe contains all of the models and precedents important for Koolhaas-Leonidov, Ungers, Corbusier, El Lissitsky, Leonidov, Malevich, Dali, Superstudio; the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, NYAC. (There are several ver-

*Left, Captive Globe, right, Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome.*

sions of the painting.) It was the evidence that architecture could offer everything to all people at the same time, the only viable form of the public realm in the future. Koolhaas's vision was capable of containing all ideologies. The Captive Globe suspended within a New York city block resembles Buckminster Fuller's 1959 photograph of his geodesic dome being lifted out of a battleship. An exhibition of Fuller's work was held in London and covered in *AD* in 1972, the year Captive Globe was being painted by Madelon Vriesendorp and Zoe Zenghelis.

Captive Globe is the register of jarring Surrealist juxtapositions: just as pcm was ''the shock of recognition that never ends,'' so is Captive Globe ''a theory that works. A mania that sticks. A lie that has become a truth. A dream from which there is no waking up.'' Koolhaas went to great lengths to ground the Captive Globe as a Surrealist reading of the city that like the exquisite corpse, stands for multiple origin. The ''proof'' was a 17th century map of New Amsterdam: ''The city is a catalogue of models and precedents: all the desirable elements that exist scattered through the Old World finally assembled in a single place.'' Just as pcm addresses ''the fact that all facts, ingredients, phenomena, etc. of the world have been categorised and catalogued, that the definitive stock of the world has been taken'' so is Captive Globe ''conceptual recycling,'' a ''delirium of interpretation'' that ''proposes to destroy

... the definitive catalogue, to short-circuit all existing categorisations, to make a fresh start — as if the world can be reshuffled like a pack of cards whose original sequence is a disappointment.''

Koolhaas realises the Surrealist dream of discovering symbols and myths in Manhattan. His book examines Manhattan during the time the Surrealists were there, failing to find icons and symbols that would give meaning to their environment. To Koolhaas, America must have seemed surreal. A European who had dreamed of New York as a child and observed it from afar, he saw many things that a native-born American might never have noticed. It is as if he experienced and recorded the ''interpretive delirium [which] begins only when man, ill-prepared, is taken by a sudden fear in the forest of symbols.''[18]

## HISTORY

''An architectural doctrine is adopted to be inevitably replaced, a few years later, by the *opposite* doctrine: a negative sequence in which each generation can do nothing but ridicule the preceding one. The effect of this succession of yes-no-yes is *anti-historical*, because it reduces architectural disc-

ourse to an *incomprehensible string of disjointed phrases.*"[19]

What does *Delirious New York,* a work of history which presents the architecture of Manhattan between 1890 and 1940 as a blueprint for present-day architectural practice and a theory for contemporary urbanism, propose in the place of and anti-historical, "incomprehensible string of disjointed phrases?" I link Koolhaas's own linguistic metaphor to retroaction with the Freudian notion of delayed action and its conceptualisation in the writing of Roland Barthes as the demonstration of opposition and the condition essential for the formulation of historical discourse.

The work of Barthes is structured on a plurality of binary oppositions. Barthes invoked binarism as a way of producing meaning and gauging values. His arguments concerned the binary nature of images that fluctuated between fixed or floating meanings both denotative and connotative. "The figure of opposition" was "the exasperated form of binarism, the very spectacle of meaning."[20] More important that the opposition itself however was the meaning transferred:

> "A new discourse can only emerge as the paradox which goes against the surrounding or preceding doxa... For example, Chomskyan theory is constructed against Bloomfieldian behaviourism; linguistic behaviourism one liquidated by Chomsky; it is then against Chomskyan mentalism that a new semiotics is being developed, while Chomsky himself, in quest of allies, is forced to jump over his immediate predecessors and go back as far as the Port Royale *Grammar*..."[21]

Ultimately, Barthes sought to be "freed from the binary prison." He systematized binary thought in a non-linear fashion,

> "not according to an organic process of maturation or a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation, but, rather, according to a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variation... the activity of associations contiguities, carryings-over concides with a liberation of symbolic energy... a work conceived, perceived and received in its integral symbolic nature is a text."[22]

Barthes' text was a methodological field woven from differences. The text paradoxically denounces totality by being all-encompassing. He used fashion as a model:

> "Let us imagine... a woman covered with *an endless garment*, itself woven of everything said in

a fashion magazine... This imagination, apparently methodical since it merely sets up an operative notion of semantic analysis (the endless text) actually secretly aims at denouncing the monster of totality (totality as monster)."[23]

According to Barthes, the endless garment is one in which "the force of meaning depends on its degree of systematisation: the most powerful meaning is that whose system takes in the greatest number of elements, to the point where it seems to encompass everything notable in the semantic universe."[24] Herein lies Koolhaas attempts to channel history. He captures Manhattan's ideological "disconnections overlappings, variations, associations contiguities, carryings-over." Manhattan is a language of forms with historical meanings and associations, recombined, transformed and distributed throughout the city in *Delirious New York*. Koolhaas's endless garment, an infinite field harnessing the symbolic energy of a world capable of containing all ideologies, is the City of the Captive Globe.

## NOTES

[1] A depiction of the major developments and protagonists of modern *sachlich* architecture is provided by Kenneth Frampton in *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)

[2] My knowledge of language and architectural discourse in the seventies is indebted to discussions with Louis Martin and his 1988 MIT thesis "Architectural Theory after 1968: Analysis of the works of Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas." The problem of meaning in the city had been addressed by Roland Barthes in a lecture as early as 1967. Roland Barthes, "Urbanisme et Semiologie," *L'Archi. d'Aujourd'hui*(No 153, Dec. 1970-Jan. 1971): pp. 11-14. Reprinted as "Semiology and the Urban," *The City and the Sign*, ed. M. Gottdiener and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[3] Pointed out by Hubert Damisch in "Manhattan Transfer," *OMA/Rem Koolhaas*, Electa Moniteur, 1990.

[4] Other approaches included the typological work of Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino that was fundamentally structuralist in nature. Christian Norberg-Schulz's phenomenological approach considered architecture as a language possessing its own symbolic code. Peter Eisenman experimented with Chomsky's linguistic theory and linguistically interpreted the architecture of Guiseppe Terragni

[5] "Thinking and designing in images, metaphors, models, analogies, symbols and allegories is nothing more that a transition from purely pragmatic approaches and a more creative mode of thinking. These are part of a morphological concept understood as the study of formations and transformations, whether of thoughts, facts, objects or conditions as they present themselves to sentient experiences." O. M. Ungers, *Morphologie, City Metaphors*, 1982. (Catalogue to the exhibition "Man transforms" held at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York, October 1976)

[6] Koolhaas, in an interview with the author. Anthony Vidler discusses Foucault-ian themes in Koolhaas's work in *Metropolis,* 1982.

[7] The characterization of Le Corbusier's work as essentially dialectical occurs in Stanislaus von Moos, *Elements of a Synthesis*(1968, Boston: MIT Press 1979). See also Paul Turner, "Romanticism, Rationalism

and the Domino System,'' *The Open Hand, Essays on Le Corbusier* (Boston: MIT Press, 1977) pp. 14-41.

[8] In 1976 Tafuri stated, ''For me, there was a kind of soldering between Benjamin and surrealism … I never believed a word of his attacks against the surrealists … It was easy to understand why … I never speak of him … I was trying to treat problems objectively and to speak of him whould have raised highly subjective problems because it was Le Corbusier who discovered the unconscious, the lyrical, the imaginary, who practically discovered the crisis of the crisis of the object.'' ''Entretien avec Manfredo Tafuri, interview with Françoise Véry,'' *AMC* 39, (June 1996): p. 66. Quoted in Lipstadt and Harvey Mendelsohn, ''Philosphy, History, and Autobiography: Manfredo Tafuri and the 'Unsurpassed Lesson' of Le Corbusier,'' *Assemblage* 22, Cambridge, MIT Press (1994): pp.58-103.

Tafuri associated the aims of the Surrealist movement with specific projects of the French architect in ''Machine et Mémoire, the City in the Work of Le Corbusier,'' *Le Corbusier-Urbanisme, Algiers and Other Buildings and Projects 1930-1933*, trans. Steven Sartorelli, (Garland Publishing: New York and London, 1983). In *Theories and Histories of Architecture,* Tafuri wrote that ''the entire work by Le Corbusier from 1919 to 1938 worked on a complex and multi-valent structuration of architectural images, with the many possible planes of reading and use in mind.''

[9] Summerson found notions of ''reverse logic,'' ''contrariness,'' ''topsy-turvydom'' and ''passion for opposites'' in the work of Le Corbusier. See John Summerson, ''Architecture, Painting and Le Corbusier,'' *Heavenly Mansions* (London: Cresset Press, 1949).

[10] Salvador Dali, ''My Paintings in the Autumn Salon,'' *Oui: la révolution paranoïaque-critique* (1971), trans. Y. Shafir, (Boston: Exact Change, 1998), p. 16

[11] Salvador Dali, ''The Rotting Donkey'' (''L'ane pourri,'' 1930), *Oui: la révolution paranoïaque-critique* (1971), trans. Y. Shafir, (Boston: Exact Change, 1998), p. 117.

[12] William Burroughs, ''Screenwriting and the Potentials of Cinema,'' edited version of lectures given 6/1975 and 7/1977, *Writing in a Film Age*, Keith Cohen, ed. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1991), pp. 47-86.

[13] Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* (New York; Monacelli, 1994), p. 243.

[14] This book ''appealed to Aldo greatly,'' aiding his discovery of Dali and Surrealism, a ''breakthrough'' which gave him ''access to the world of the twentieth-century avant-garde.'' Francis Strauven, Aldo *van Eyck, the Shape of Relativity*, Amsterdam: Architectura + Natura, 1998, pp. 75-76.

[15] A. Tzonis and L LeFaivre, ''The Populist Movement in Architecture,'' *Forum* (No. 3, 1976)

[16] Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, ''Notes around the Doppler Effect and other Moods of Modernism,'' pp. 72-77, *Mining Autonomy,* Perspecta 33, The Yale Architectural Journal, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), p. 73.

[17] Websters Dictionary

[18] Andre Breton, *Mad Love*, 1937.

[19] Rem Koolhaas, *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* (4/1985): p. 22. This statement was used to propose a ''retroactive concept'' for IBA and the Dutch Parliament extension.

[20] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975), p. 138.

[21] Roland Barthes, ''Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers,'' (1971) *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 201.

[22] Roland Barthes, ''From Work to Text,'' *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 159

[23] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975), p. 180.

[24] Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (1970) trans. 1974, p. 160.