

ARC 386K—Theory I

NOTES ON *DELIRIOUS NEW YORK* BY REM KOOLHAAS

I. On Congestion/Density/Radical Mixed Use

- p. 7 "This book is a blueprint for a 'Culture of Congestion.'"
- p. 224 "Le Corbusier's 'solution' drains Manhattan of its lifeblood, congestion."
- p. 239 "The genius of Rockefeller Center is that it is at least five projects at the same time. In postwar Manhattan, Lincoln Center is doomed to be one project only. It has no Beaux-Arts basement, no parks on the 10th floor—no 10th floor—and missing most of all are the commercial superstructures of the Skyscrapers. The munificence of its culture-loving patrons has finally made possible the subsidized existence of an opera *only*, a theatre *only*, a Philharmonic *only*. Culture lovers have paid for the dissolution of Manhattanism's poetic density. Through its amnesia, Manhattan no longer supports an infinite number of superimposed and unpredictable activities on a single site; it has regressed back to the clarity and predictability of univalence—to the known."
- p. 242 "The metropolis needs/deserves its own specialized architecture, one that can vindicate the original promise of the metropolitan condition and develop the fresh traditions of the Culture of Congestion further

II. On Luxury/Sensuality/Pleasure/Physical Culture/Relaxation

- p. 225 "The materialistic philistines of New York had invented and built an oneiric field devoted to the pursuit of fantasy, synthetic emotion and pleasure, its ultimate configuration both unpredictable and uncontrollable."
- p. 264 Of his own work, "Dedicated to physical culture and relaxation. . . . A glazed screen divides the pool into two parts: indoor and outdoor. . . . A spectacular view of the city can be enjoyed from the small open-air beach. Waves made in the outdoor part of the pool crash directly onto the pavement. The ceiling over the pool is a planetarium with suspended galleries for the audience and a semi-circular bar forms the crown of the Sphinx; its patrons can influence the planetarium's programming, improving new trajectories for the heavenly bodies. Below the pool is a floor for games and gymnastics . . . steam baths, saunas and massage parlor. . . . In the beauty parlor . . . the chairs face the perimeter wall which is clad in mirror glass. Below the part reflecting the face from a sitting position, a small porthole affords a view out towards the city below."

III. On the Value of the Conceptual/Mental/Man-Made over the Natural/Real

- p. 6 Speaks of an entire city becoming, "a factory of man-made experience, where the real and the natural cease to exist."
- p. 8 Admires "Manhattan's determination to remove its territory as far from the natural as humanly possible."
- p. 15 "The grid, in its indifference to topography, to what exists, claims the superiority of mental construction over reality. . . . It announces that the subjugation, if not obliteration, of nature is its true ambition."
- p. 242 "The Metropolis strives to reach a mythical point where the world is completely fabricated by man, so that it absolutely coincides with his desires."
- p. 243 Seeks to create, "the capital of Ego, where science, art, poetry and forms of madness compete under ideal conditions to invent, destroy and restore the world of phenomenal Reality."

IV. On Aggressiveness/Ambition/Progress

- p. 6 "Why do we have a mind if not to get our way." (quote from Dostoevsky)
- p. 7 Seeks "a formula for an architecture that is at once ambitious *and* popular."
- p. 10 "What is refinement one moment will be barbarism the next. . . . Creativeness and destruction are irrevocably interlocked, endlessly re-enacted. The only suspense in the spectacle comes from the constantly escalating intensity of the performance."
- p. 242 "It is the arduous task of the final part of this century to deal with the extravagant and megalomaniac claims, ambitions and possibilities of the Metropolis *openly*."
- p. 244 "The essence of metropolitan culture is change—a state of perpetual animation. . . . The changes will be rapid and continuous: a rich spectacle of ethical joy, moral fever and intellectual masturbation."

V. On the Paranoid Critical Method

- p. 200 "I believe that the moment is at hand when by a paranoid and active advance of the mind, it will be possible to systematize confusion and thus help to discredit completely the world of reality." (quote from Dali)

- p. 201 Paranoid Critical Method described as, "a tourism of sanity into the world of paranoia . . . part of a tapestry of delusion . . . a delirium of interpretation. . . . The essence of paranoia is this intense—if distorted—relationship with the real world: The reality of the external world is used for illustration and proof . . . to serve the reality of our mind."
- p. 202 "Paranoid-Critical Method is a sequence of two consecutive but discrete operations: (a) the synthetic reproduction of the paranoiac's way of seeing the world in a new light—with its rich harvest of unsuspected correspondences, analogies and patterns; and (b) the compression of these gaseous speculations to a critical point where they can achieve the density of fact: the critical part of the method consists of the fabrication of objectifying 'souvenirs' of the paranoid tourism, of concrete evidence that brings the 'discoveries' back to the rest of mankind."
- p. 202 "Paranoid-critical activity is the fabrication of evidence for unprovable speculations and the subsequent grafting of this evidence on the world, so that a 'false' fact takes its lawful place among the 'real' facts. These false facts relate to the real world as spies to a given society: the more conventional and unnoted their existence, the better they can devote themselves to that society's destruction."
- p. 203 "Paranoid-Critical activity is like cheating with the last moves of a game of solitaire that refuses to come out, or like banging a piece into a jigsaw puzzle so that it sticks, if not fits."
- p. 206 "Architecture is *inevitably* a form of Paranoid-Critical activity."

VI. On Globalization

- p. 205 "Any process of colonization—the graft of a particular culture onto an alien site—is in itself a Paranoid-Critical process."
- p. 205 "New Amsterdam is settled in an operation of conceptual cloning: the transplantation of Amsterdam's urban model onto an Indian island."
- p. 12 "Since their whole country is man-made there are no 'accidents' for the Dutch. They plan the settlement of Manhattan as if it is part of their fabricated motherland."
- p. 224 "Sometimes a tourist returns from foreign lands unrecognizable. This has happened to the Skyscraper on its paranoid-critical trans-Atlantic excursion. It left as a hedonistic instrument of the Culture of Congestion; it returns from Europe brainwashed, instrument of an implacable Puritanism."

VII. Inside-Out/Outside-In

- p. 244 "By separating exterior and interior architecture, and developing the latter in small autonomous installments—structures can devote their exteriors *only* to formalism and their interiors *only* to functionalism. In this way, they not only resolve forever the conflict between form and function, but create a city where permanent monoliths celebrate metropolitan instability."

VIII. Consumption/Commerce/Utility

- p. 14 "Manhattan is a utilitarian polemic."
- p. 13 "The Manhattan grid is, a hundred and fifty years after its superimposition on the island, still a negative symbol of the shortsightedness of commercial interests."
- p. 16 "The city becomes a mosaic of episodes each with its own particular life span, that contests each other through the medium of the grid."
- p. 202 "Facts wear, reality is consumed. The Acropolis disintegrates, the Parthenon is collapsing due to the ever-escalating frequency of tourists' visits. As the big toe of a saint's statue gradually disappears under the onslaught of his devotees' kisses, so the Big Toe of reality dissolves slowly but inexorably under perpetual exposure to the continuous kiss of mankind. The higher the density of a civilization—the more metropolitan it is—the higher the frequency of the kiss, the faster the process of consumption of the reality of nature and artifacts. They are worn out so rapidly that the supply is depleted. That is the cause of the Reality Shortage. . . . The Paranoid-Critical method is both the product of and the remedy against this: it promises that, through conceptual recycling, the worn, consumed contents of the world can be recharged or enriched like uranium, and that ever-new generations of false facts and fabricated evidences can be generated through the act of interpretation."
- p. 236 "Manhattan's knowledge was stored in the brains of architects who made the businessmen foot the bill—ostensibly for their own myths of hyper-efficiency, but in fact for the creation of a Culture of Congestion, distilled by the architects from the desires of the population. . . . No longer can architects count on the businessmen's phantom calculations that make the impossible inevitable. The postwar architecture is the accountant's revenge on the prewar businessmen's dreams."

IX. On History (and Creating History)

- p. 244 In his own work, "Each Skyscraper—in the absence of real history—develops its own instantaneous 'folklore' through the double disconnection of lobotomy and schism."

- p. 250 In his own work, "The materials of the fragments are as diverse as possible—marble, steel, plastic, glass—providing the hotel with the history it would otherwise lack."
- p. 255 On reacting to his own work (conjectural): "The architects of New York . . . were all against Modernism now; ignoring the spectacular decline of their profession, their own increasingly pathetic irrelevance, their desperate production of flaccid country mansions, the limp suspense of their trite complexities, the dry taste of their fabricated poetry, the agonies of their irrelevant sophistication, they complained that the design was so bland, so rectilinear, so unadventurous, so boring; there were no historical allusions; there was no decoration; there was no shear, no tension, no *wit*—only straight lines, right angles, and the drab color of rust."