

Koolhaas is a Paranoiac

[Dissecting “Europeans: Biuer! Dali and
Le Corbusier Conquer New York”]

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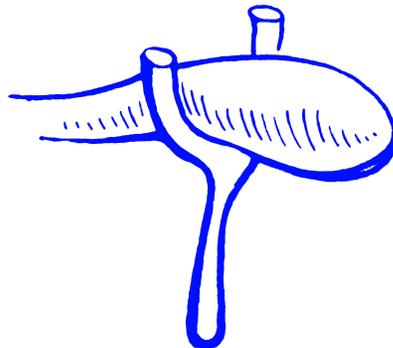


Diagram of the inner workings of the Paranoid-Critical Method: limp, unprovable conjectures generated through the deliberate simulation of paranoiac thought processes, supported (made critical) by the “crutches” of Cartesian rationality.

Delirious New York is a vigorous mythology, a love poem to Manhattan, a script of a spectacular show, and a severe symptom of a paranoid activity; all masquerading as architectural theory. Published in 1978, it had the goal of writing a retroactive manifesto of Manhattan's architecture as a "paradigm for the exploitation of congestion" [Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p10]. Rem Koolhaas, as a *ghostwriter*, aspires to save the wasted potential of the existing modern metropolis, first by recognizing its necessary rapture from the generative urbanisms and then by celebrating its delirium. Throughout the book, Koolhaas closely observes the cannibalistic tendencies that New York has against its past and its fecund instincts to its future potential. This urban inquiry from speculation to realism tries to comprehend Metropolis as 'an unformulated theory' and its cathartic realization. Selected chapter, "Europeans: Biuer! Dali and Le Corbusier Conquer New York" is about two contradictory protagonists of the era, consumed by a fervent obsession for Manhattan, intriguingly using the same method, the Paranoid Critical Method, to conquer it. This chapter is critical considering not only to define the underlying method behind the metropolitan condition epitomized by Manhattan through Dali and Le Corbusier, but how Koolhaas works, as an architect, an urbanist, and a theorist. As a matter of fact, what makes *Delirious New York* provocatively mythical is how its content and method are seamlessly intertwined.

The chapter "Europeans: Biuer! Dali and Le Corbusier Conquer New York" can be counted as one of many reasons that *Delirious New York* has its distinctive, fundamental position in the history of architectural theory. Through narrating two faces of the avant-garde European Modern Movement and trying to comprehend the methodology behind their thought process, Koolhaas delicately creates the base for next chapter where the audience faces the same

interpretation through series of his architectural projects, “Appendix: A Fictional Conclusion”. Explaining the methodology behind two protagonists of the era, Dali and Le Corbusier, behind Manhattanism and behind his work (including this particular book as well) right before the conclusion helps the audience to position themselves in the theory itself. The intended audience of the book, can be seen as urban “thinkers” in general. However, this specific chapter can be seen as some kind of confession or clarification. In other words, Koolhaas does not dedicate this chapter neither to the audience nor to the questionably “admired” protagonists of the era, Dali and Le Corbusier, he dedicates it to himself. Different from other chapters, this chapter can be seen as self-explanatory. Through the language of the chapter its clear that he aspires the way of thinking the Paranoid Critical Method promises. He actually confesses his own method of creating through describing Dali’s and Le Corbusier’s method. It is a camouflage to allow the audience into his own way of thinking and working. To recapitulate, the chapter serves Koolhaas as a methodological lens, revealing his own operation to his audience. As he reveals, he also records the “interpretive delirium [which] begins only when man, ill-prepared, is taken by a sudden fear in the forest of symbols.”^[Andre Breton, L’Amour fou]

As architecture never became an integral part of Surrealism, Surrealism always stayed oblivious to architecture even though it would seem to be the most effective and prolific of all media. For surrealists as the lines between mental and physical blurred, the intersection between building and psyche, architecture and hysteria, order and desire seemed interesting, however, it never went beyond the surface. Was it because for surrealism “real spaces were less important than the symbolic images they contained” ^[Bernard Tschumi, Architecture and It’s Double, p112] ? The reason behind this actually best answered by Vesely: ‘Surrealism does not represent another artistic or

political avant-garde, but a sub-stratum of the whole modern culture.’ [Vesely, Surrealism, Myth and Modernity, p 91]. That can be one of the most strong reasons why it stayed more like a technique than an actual spatial projection in the realm of architecture. However, surrealist techniques do not guarantee a surrealist experience. Their primary purpose is to resist the hegemony of reason to allow dream (Andre Breton); myth (Lars Lerup); magic (Fredrick Kiesler); otherness (Bernard Tschumi); paranoia (Salvador Dali) seek into the real world. It is crucial to understand that Surrealism -right from the beginning- immensely depends on reality. Andre Breton in his lecture “What is Surrealism?” in Brussels in 1934 described the fundamental “unification” with reality as: "This final unification is the supreme aim of surrealism: interior reality and exterior reality being, in the present form of society, in contradiction, we have assigned to ourselves the task of confronting these two realities with one another on every possible occasion, of refusing to allow the preeminence of the one over the other, ... of acting on these two realities not both at once, then, but one after the other, in a systematic manner, allowing us to observe their reciprocal attraction and interpenetration and to give to this interplay of forces all the extension necessary for the trend of these two adjoining realities to become one and the same thing.” What Koolhaas takes from the surrealism is the core of its existence, this idea of unification where he overlays two realities so that no one can differentiate at the end. He learns how to systemize his confusion to produce a hyper-rationality.

Salvador Dali as the most eccentric artist of the twentieth century, believed that through paranoia we can reread the world around us and create a new sense of reality that is only real with every contradiction within. In mid-30s Freud used the psychoanalytic device of free association to trace the symbolic meaning of dream imagery to its source in the unconscious.

Freudian theory in that sense helped Dalí's attempts at forging a visual language capable of rendering his dreams and hallucinations. Based on psychoanalytic studies of paranoid dementia, Dalí introduced the method to conduct paranoia. His images, based on readings in psychiatry, eventually began displacing experiences drawn from his own psyche. Paradoxically defined by Dalí himself as a form of "irrational knowledge," the method is used to "see" the true terrestrial quality of imagination that then he would convey his delirium to a canvas. This delirium is injected in his subliminal geographical mind such in a way that every contradiction clashes for irrational realities. In an interview in 1963, he defined the Paranoid Critical Method as "one spontaneous method of knowledge based on the instantaneous association of delirious material." He continues explaining this instantaneous association: "Everything that appears in my life delirious, antagonistic, impossible, which together, my method, instantaneously create this miracle." In other words, miracle -in this case higher irrational reality-, is seeking to expose the impossible by feeding out of the antagonistic through a delirious state of mind. One of the major techniques he used to convey the idea of the Paranoid Critical Method is the *double image* technique that undermines the notion of rationality. *Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire* (1940) is an excellent example of understanding the notion of creating a double image and paranoid-critical hallucinations. In the composition, two Dutch women in the market place re-create *The Bust of Voltaire* (Jean-Antoine Houdon, 1778). Here not only he uses the technique to portray a delusional state of mind but also he criticizes the rational philosophy that Voltaire represents as an enslavement to the mundane. Double image technique helps Dalí's ability to see not just the positive space we see but the negative space and how they can be interchanged and create their own contradictory reality. His work imitates paranoid conditions,

simulates the illness to see things simultaneously, both as rational and irrational objects. So with the self-induced paranoid-critical activity, he becomes both an actor and a spectator.

In order to fully comprehend the described methodology, first one should be *conscious* of what paranoia is. Paranoia, (etymologically: *para*, meaning alternate, *noia* meaning mind) can be basically defined as an instinct or a successive thought process that generates a higher state of awareness. It is a mental disease characterized by delusions and projections of inner conflicts. Thinking every possible - even contradictory- events at the same time creates a delusional irrationality. Within that irrationality one starts to question everything, thus builds up a general distrust of others. Producing all kinds of beliefs of conspiracy simultaneously creates an impenetrable fortress of depression where one hides behind the rationalized yet unrealized speculations. From one point, those perceptions supersede reality and cause an ambivalent state of mind where it instigates exhaustion of congestion. Within the apparent randomness of this chaotic disposition, one can also start to see underlying patterns and self-similarities by analyzing irrationalities. So this hyper-sensitive and hyper-vigilant state of mind makes paranoiacs eager observers. And if one can critically observe and distill the clouds of delirious possibilities that exist all at the same time, then s/he can reach to another level of reality. What Dali proposes with Paranoid Critical Method is exactly this critical distillation process after simulating an “alternate mind”.

After Salvador Dali, the Paranoid Critical Method can be reduced into two steps: first simulating the paranoiac’s delusional, irrational way of seeing the world, then condensing those speculations to a critical point that they now solidify as the actual reality. What he is trying to

suggest is a rational person who can slide into a paranoid mindset and recreate irrational visions and type of understanding of the world, then stepping back and critically analyzing that subconscious experience. Actually different from Freudian theory, he proposes to have both subconscious and conscious state of mind simultaneously, to be the patient and the analyst at the same time. In a letter written to Gala Eluard, he highlights "...paranoiac activity always employs materials admitting of control and recognition... Paranoia uses the external world in order to assert its dominating idea and has the disturbing characteristic of making others accept this idea's reality. The reality of the external world is used for illustration and proof, and so comes to serve the reality of our mind."^[Salvador Dali, Stinking Ass] External world's presence as an input in the theorem is fundamental. It is crucial to comprehend that, it is not about dreams, hallucinations or fantasies but the method always founds itself to the existing reality and always maintains its relationship with the existence balanced. It does not only depend on the reality but feeds out of the contrast between rational and irrational and projects itself to reality for justification. Reality becomes the tool (input) that triggers the need for a higher reality and the proof (output) that helps to solidify the delirium. This approach is critical to understand how Manhattanism works as a theory and how the selected chapter "Europeans: Biuer! Dali and Le Corbusier Conquer New York" works as a piece of theory within Delirious New York.

Assimilated notion of the Paranoid Critical Method, "The Conquest of the Irrational", is inherent in the both production and the context of Delirious New York. The book, itself, can be seen as a paranoid critical activity. Right at the beginning of the book, how Rem Koolhaas states the manifesto of the book can be considered as a pure act of paranoia: "This book is an interpretation of that Manhattan which gives its seemingly discontinuous - even irreconcilable-

episodes a degree of consistency and coherence, an interpretation that intends to establish Manhattan as the product of an unformulated theory, Manhattanism, whose program - to exist in a world totally fabricated by man, i.e., to live inside fantasy - was so ambitious that to be realized, it could never be openly stated.”^[Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, p 10] Writing a theory about an unformulated theory is purely paranoid. The adjectives that he uses to describe Manhattan “discontinuous”, “irreconcilable”, “unformulated”, “ambitious” can be all projected on the theory itself. If the theory is based on those characteristics of a condition, theory has to own the same identity in order to be this persuasive. The book itself becomes ‘...an investigation undertaken with the explicit intention of avoiding its logical conclusion.’^[Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, p 119] There is no rational explanation to Manhattan as it is the Capital of Perpetual Crisis or Culture of Congestion. If “New York has invented and built an oneiric field devoted to the pursuit of fantasy, synthetic emotion and pleasure, its ultimate configuration both unpredictable and uncontrollable”^[Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, p 271], thus consciously analyzing this particular deliriousness is exactly what the Paranoid Critical Method is.

Before going deep into the evidences of Koolhaas’ paranoia through his writing, the notion of “souvenirs” is a consistent idea through out the chapter to understand his interpretation of the Paranoid Critical Method. Souvenirs are basically discoveries or evidences one brings back from the excursion of critical surrender to the subconscious. Koolhaas uses the method to interpret a strategy to reexamine the history of Manhattan. He describes the process of writing a manifesto on Manhattan as “The fatal weakness of manifestos is their inherent lack of evidence. Manhattan’s problem is the opposite: it is a mountain range of evidence without manifesto.”^[Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, p 9] In this sense, he collects the evidence to validate the theory, as one would

bring back souvenirs from the paranoid activity to persuade the reality. However, the goal behind these evidences, is not about producing the truth but endorse its pure existence. This search for "the objectifying souvenirs" will verify experience as real or delusional but the narrative, in this case the theory will always look conspiratorial. By offering convincing counter evidences throughout the book and the chapter, Koolhaas maintains an almost magical realism like narrative where the souvenirs he collects actively serves the conspiracy which then becomes a hyper-reality. Just like paranoiacs being eager observers, Koolhaas's narrates his restless observations in such a way that the audience is left with no choice but to be convinced. The audience doesn't question the imposed "reality" because of the way how he magically transposes his souvenirs of paranoid activity. Consequently, as he writes "Paranoid Critical activity is the fabrication of evidence for unprovable speculations and the subsequent grafting process of this evidence on the world, so that a "false" fact takes its unlawful place among the "real" facts. These false facts relate to the real world as spies to given society: the more conventional and unnoted their existence, the better they can devote themselves to that society's destruction." [Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p 241], he actually refers to his own speculation process. By the time this "fabrication of evidence for unprovable speculations" projects itself to reality, the clash between those two produces a fertile area, where one can harvest something surprisingly unique.

Just as Paranoid Critical Method depends on contradictions, the book itself dwells on oppositions. In the chapter, he does not only narrate the Dalinian approach but also Corbusian way of understanding of Manhattan at the same time. Throughout the chapter, as it goes back and forth between attracting and repelling forces of Dali and Le Corbusier, the audience is constantly exposed to dialectical thinking. Basically, the audience tries to understand Dali's

interpretative appropriation of Manhattan at the same time Le Corbusier is trying to destroy it. Koolhaas develops Le Corbusier's character as the villain that "...creates the urban non-event that New York planners have always avoided... Decongested Congestion." [Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p 257] Le Corbusier's paranoia starts as he realizes that Plan Voisin exists in Manhattan. However, as he searches validity for his own New York City, he is forced to visualize a parallel reality, which becomes an unconscious act of Surrealism. Even going back and forth between Villa Radieuse and Manhattan, Plan Voisin and Paris, Paris and New York, creates an inevitable paranoid activity. However, the underlying difference between Dali and Le Corbusier's paranoia is about their level of resistance. Where Dali self consciously exposes himself to paranoia, "Le Corbusier is a paranoid detective who invents the victims (the lice), forges the likeness of the perpetrator and avoids the scene of the crime." [Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p 253] Even though Le Corbusier tries to repress it, paranoia is triggered by Manhattan. As Dali's delirium leaks into Le Corbusier's reinforced-concrete, the amalgam liquify into a stream of new associations. As the modernist tries to contribute to the making of anew societal image and the surrealist tries to express mental activity as an autobiographical figure of art, Koolhaas amalgamate the political and the personal. With the confrontation of Dali and Le Corbusier, subconscious and conscious, Koolhaas stimulates and simulates paranoid activity through their paranoia. Despite the difference between their level of resistance, how Koolhaas proposes coincidental oppositions encounter at the same plane resolves the staged resistance and reveals that they are ultimately the same.

Koolhaas depicts Europeans as architects who "have tried to design superior costumes" [Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p 253] to a city that already wear costumes. As he portrays Dali's flamboyant

personality and role of mischievous provocateur and Le Corbusier's unachieved dominance and disappointment on New York, Koolhaas uses a teasing language towards Europeans. Looking from this angle, this particular situation also involves a paradox. He emphasizes on the fact that not only every "architecture is inevitably a form of PC activity", but "any process of colonization -the graft of a particular culture onto an alien site- is in itself a PC process, the more so if it occurs the void left by the expiration of the previous culture." [Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p 245] So what does this make Rem Koolhaas as a Dutch architect who uses the reality of the external world, New York, as an illustration to serve the reality of his mind. As he mocks Europeans he actually subjects Manhattan to the Dalinian gaze to find the city as a reflection of his desire. But of course this paradox, just like all the paradoxes he produces, is on purpose. Criticizing Europeans deliberately actually means that he is fully aware of what he is doing. This self awareness, particularly, gives him the right to reflect his own desire to the city. Ultimately, Paranoid Critical Method, at its core, seeks self-awareness not just to analyze the particular state of mind but to dilute the fantasy to reality.

On a broader level, *Delirious New York* is a pure composition of double images. The book constructs a discourse on the postmodern dialectical city that grounds itself on crooked clashes of real and ideal, fact and fiction, physical and immaterial, literal and metaphorical. Maybe inspired by Aldo van Eyck's interest in hidden images and double readings in Dutch Modern architecture, Koolhaas positions himself in this in-between space. It's not only just in the friction between alter egos, buildings, movements but also deep into the utilization of literary devices throughout the book. As Koolhaas elicits the fruitful opposition in paradoxical manifestations, he supports this dialectical thinking also throughout the language. He uses Surrealist montage technique as a

device to justify the critique. He selects, edits, pieces from past and present to form a new composition that now becomes an image of representation that expresses something beyond its fragments and speaks to the unconscious. He thinks, writes and designs in double images, metaphors, analogies, ironies, symbols, and allegories. He uses metaphors as a rhetorical device that superimposes two seemingly unlike things into abstractions. By uncovering the subconscious with metaphors, he actually constructs the foundation of Manhattanism. Metaphors accumulate and proliferate into allegories. With allegories, the meaning is conveyed on more than one level (both story and interpretation) as it is meant to mean something beyond itself. These kinds of verbal conflicts are also strengthened by ironies which the disparity between said and meant fluctuates. Figurative language helps Koolhaas to construct a discourse around "a patchwork of heterogeneous narratives, erecting the disappearance of the architectural place. Here, the city became action, a fantasy narrative, where dream and reality emulsified with a heterogeneous corpus of references." [Marie-Ange Brayer, *Active Narratives*, p 85]

The articulated structure of the book also has glimpses of paranoia. To start with, by labeling it "Retroactive Manifesto", retroaction allows Koolhaas to defamiliarize the history of Manhattan and then rediscover it. With that technique of trapping the architectural spirit, he reveals the unconscious of the architecture. The structure of the text, the ways in which it fragments is analogous to the urbanism it describes. Just like Dali clashes his "discoveries" on his canvas, Koolhaas montages fragments into the book to discover a new reality. When viewed from this angle, one could even say he is using Surrealist technique of Exquisite Corpse where collection of words or images is collectively assembled for a greater composition. Of course the fragmentation of the text has an architectural structure behind it, however, how they are

composed based on contradictions can be considered as paranoid critical activity. One word subtitles in the chapter not only helps the audience to fragment the paranoid composition but also helps to understand how Rem Koolhaas works, how “the words unleash the design”¹[Cynthia Davidson, ANNY, 1993]. In that sense, it has an encyclopedic approach in an abstract way. Its fluidity does not only come from this fragmentation but its script-like projection. The audience takes part in a spectacular theatre -the great show of Manhattanism-, while being exposed to the ugliness of the offstage too, as he constructs this through context, structure, layout etc. As he narrates characters and styles in a drama of New York’s empty flamboyancy, the layout and the structure helps him to convey the theme. Even the chapter’s title starts with a theatrical exclamation: “Biuer!”. It is very interesting yet intentional how Koolhaas gives voice to his character, Dali. He writes this exclamation -probably “Beware!”- according to Dali’s pronunciation which helps the audience to enter the ostentatious scene. Also the images that are always located on the left page not only serves to the fluency of the piece but are necessary to utterly portray the scene. Even the captions of each image assists as a different layer of information. In this case, captions become explanatory tags for the *souvenirs* that he brought back from the excursion to his subconscious.

The underlying intent here is not to claim Koolhaas as a surrealist but a systematic paranoiac. One of the major differences between Dali’s use of the Paranoid Critical Method and Koolhaas’ is the alter motive and the source in their works. Even though Dali’s imagery cannot be reduced to a psychoanalytic framework, there is a great acceptance of and surrender to the value of the subconscious. His source is highly personal and the motive lies in the pure will for creativity. Koolhaas’ delirium interpretation goes beyond a systematic misreading for the sake of creativity. For him to ‘mythologise its past and to rewrite a history that can serve its future’.

[Koolhaas, Delirious New York, 13] is necessary for the advancement of the city. The source of his will to explore and analyze delirium is dictated by the surrounding. He internalizes the existing deep into his delirium to bring out future as if a historical artifact. His retroactive use changes the technique as he reassembles elements from the past to create a new 'image' through a personal interpretative process. Another trigger to critically surrender himself to paranoia can be the glimpses of urban psychosis. It is inevitable that the chaotic nature of metropolis has an imposing effect on its inhabitant's mental health. As a highly prudent yet provocative theorist he accepts and critically approaches to this delusional state of mind that promises to reveal a different kind of reality.

What is most compelling about both Dali and Koolhaas' use of the method is that no matter the difference between their alter motives and sources, the last association and interpretation is up to the audience/reader. It is fascinating how the projection of their paranoia, their souvenirs trigger so much in their audiences' mind. With the interpretation, they give birth to a different mental construct in their audiences' conscious for higher awareness. Architectural theory, in general, is about this mental construct where philosophy is only valid when it embodies metaphor. "The figure [of an edifice] is employed to credit philosophy itself with the unmediated condition exhibited by a building, putting in place the supposed neutrality and authority of the structural and structuring gaze of philosophical argument." [Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt*, 1993] As architecture becomes the physical instrumentation of a metaphor, what makes it visible is the theory that is tightened in-between that liminal space. Koolhaas uses this potential of metaphor to 'get away with his paranoia'.

Aforementioned facts imply how this theory piece works and how Koolhaas involves the Paranoid Critical Method as he systematically creates multiple reinterpretations of the fragments of Manhattan. He actually admits that his own thought process is exactly what Paranoid Critical Method is, right at the beginning as he explains The Appendix : "...a sequence of architectural projects that solidifies Manhattans into an explicit doctrine and negotiates the transition from Manhattanism's unconscious architectural production to a conscious phase." [Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p 11] However throughout his work, as an architect, urbanist and theorist, one can still trace the glimpses of this methodology. As an architect who is famous for seeing authenticity in the most mundane all throughout his career, he depends to this paranoid state of mind. In order to question the hackneyed, the banal, the standard, he has to develop a paranoid critical approach which leads him to higher state of awareness. His work is as a whole full of collision of contradictory correspondences and encounters. Even a brief look at his works reveals his attraction to oxymoron and paradox that triggers his paranoia. *Exodus* (1972) is a condition of *freedom by self imprisonment (voluntary prisoners)*. *The City of the Captive Globe* (1972) is "A theory that works. A mania that sticks. A lie that has become a truth. A dream from which there is no waking up." *Park de la Villete* (1982) is a method that "combines architectural specificity with programmatic indeterminacy" [Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, p 921]. *S,M,L,XL*(1995) produces terms such as *Nietzschean frivolity* and *reverse epiphanies*. It is possible to say that OMA uses Paranoid Critical Method but looking at the end result, it is only legible on conceptual level. Actually looking at Dali's diagram of the inner workings of the Paranoid Critical Method, it is possible to say that; sometimes they produce the limp with speculations, sometimes they produce the crutch with rationality.

“Europeans: Biuer! Dali and Le Corbusier Conquer New York” is a strategically critical chapter in *Delirious New York* to not only comprehend how the theory piece works but ways in which the theorist, Rem Koolhaas operates. If the Paranoid Critical Method proclaims the lost continuity between delusional and rational to retie the knot of their mutual propagation, then through this chapter (including both the context and the structure), through this book, through his works one can trace his paranoid critical activity. He derives his notion of retroaction and Manhattan from the rhetoric of the Paranoid Critical Method. As he writes about the dichotomy based on the personification of delusional irrationality of Surrealism and didactic rationality of Modernism, the audience is exposed to paranoid disposition. By explaining the methodology behind Dali’s, Le Corbusier’s, Manhattan’s and his production, he actually systematizes his own confusion. His tactic, in this case, is to reveal the unconscious of the architecture. In other words, by explaining the Paranoid Critical Method he actually tries to legitimize his discoveries of the subconscious dimension of Manhattan. Believing that “only through the speculative reconstruction of a perfect Manhattan can its monumental successes and failures be read.” [Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p 11] , he consumes the existing delirious reality of New York to reconstruct his paranoid speculation. As Koolhaas “concretize” Manhattanism’s inexplicit theory, he actually consciously maps his own unconscious production. By doing so he also tries to comprehend what transpires in the interval between conspiracy and theory and how they can be coalesced. At the end, it is possible to say that, *Delirious New York* becomes Rem Koolhaas’s souvenir from his journey of *tourism of sanity into the realm of paranoia* [Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, p 237], his own *conquest of the irrational*.