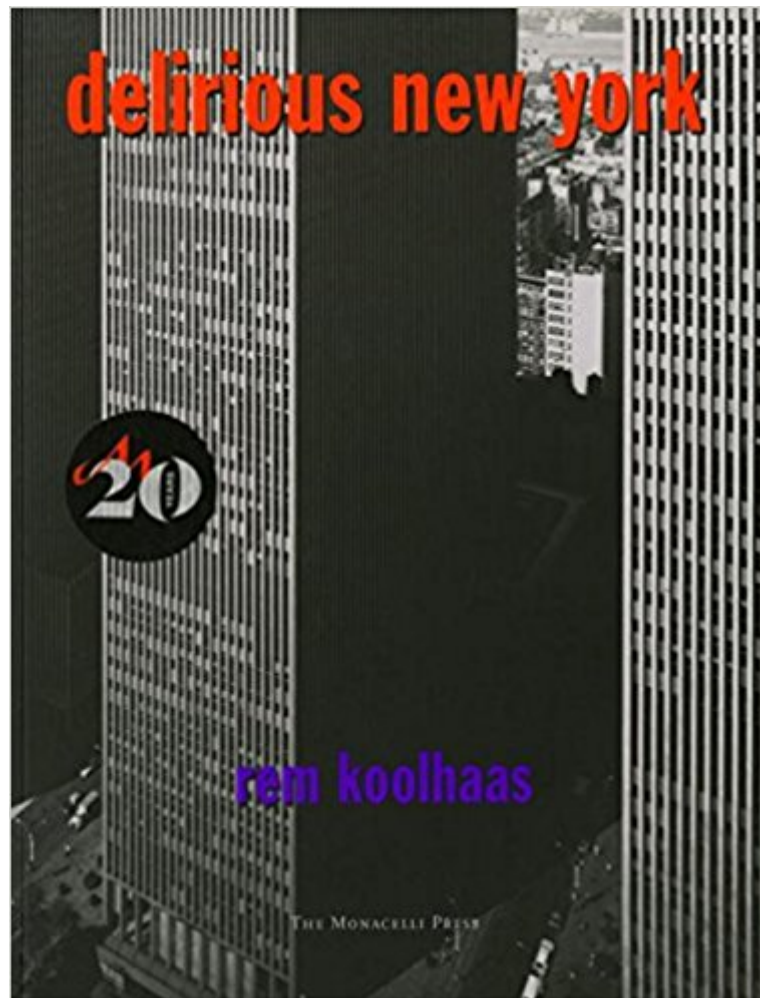




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# Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto For Manhattan



## Synopsis

Since its original publication in 1978, *Delirious New York* has attained mythic status. Back in print in a newly designed edition, this influential cultural, architectural, and social history of New York is even more popular, selling out its first printing on publication. Rem Koolhaas's celebration and analysis of New York depicts the city as a metaphor for the incredible variety of human behavior. At the end of the nineteenth century, population, information, and technology explosions made Manhattan a laboratory for the invention and testing of a metropolitan lifestyle -- "the culture of congestion" -- and its architecture. "Manhattan," he writes, "is the 20th century's Rosetta Stone . . . occupied by architectural mutations (Central Park, the Skyscraper), utopian fragments (Rockefeller Center, the U.N. Building), and irrational phenomena (Radio City Music Hall)." Koolhaas interprets and reinterprets the dynamic relationship between architecture and culture in a number of telling episodes of New York's history, including the imposition of the Manhattan grid, the creation of Coney Island, and the development of the skyscraper. *Delirious New York* is also packed with intriguing and fun facts and illustrated with witty watercolors and quirky archival drawings, photographs, postcards, and maps. The spirit of this visionary investigation of Manhattan equals the energy of the city itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this fanciful volume, Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, founder of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (O.M.A.), both analyzes and celebrates New York City. By suggesting the city as the site for an infinite variety of human activities and events--both real and imagined--the essence of the

metropolitan lifestyle, its "culture of congestion" and its architecture are revealed in a brilliant new light. "Manhattan," Koolhaas writes, "is the 20th century's Rosetta stone . . . occupied by architectural mutations (Central Park, the Skyscraper), utopian fragments (Rockefeller Center, the U.N. Building), and irrational phenomena (Radio City Music Hall)." Filled with fascinating facts, as well as photographs, postcards, maps, watercolors, and drawings, the vibrancy of Koolhaas's poignant exploration of Gotham equals the heady, frenetic energy of the city itself. Anyone who loves New York will want to own this book.

"Koolhaas's retroactive manifesto explains Manhattan's architecture as the physical embodiment of a 'culture of congestion,' " said LJ's reviewer of this mixture of architectural theory and social commentary (LJ 3/15/79). Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

An insightful and original history of the coming into being of Manhattan, New York as a metropolis, by a great writer and (now) internationally revered Architect. Reading this, as an Architect, almost four decades after this has been put together for the first time, and being somewhat familiar with some of the works of the office he started (OMA), makes its' reading not without expectations in regards to learning about the practical applications of the lessons learned here. And to fast-forward to a tentative conclusion; these kind of expectations are not full-filled. The book, as a study is an exploration first and foremost; anything beyond is (and was) future, which we can now 'measure' or compare against actual production (of the author as Architect). The book itself then and its' structure; it starts off with a chapter on Coney Island, as being the laboratory for Manhattan; if one can make it through this first chapter, one is well positioned for the next chapters dealing with Manhattan's development, until the last one, where the author shifts gears suddenly, to get into the heads of two European celebrities of the Art & Architecture community, and basically finishes off the 'Manhattanism' process/period described in the previous chapters, thru the tales and eyes of these two. In terms of reading, a somewhat discontinuous experience, and asking the reader (once more), to find his/her bearing on a new 'platform' of thought(s) / thinking, this time centered around a newly introduced idea of a so-called 'Paranoia-Critical-Method', and the aspects of Paranoia itself. It is not quite clear why this shift is needed in view of the preceding chapters and history, and does not contribute to its core story, imho. The book is an intellectual and theoretical approach to Planning and Architectural history, where an objectivity has been maintained most of the time, albeit one cannot miss the at times sarcastic/sceptical/comical tones, when describing rather bizarre moments and ideas in the history of Manhattan. Almost every paragraph, headed by a short keyword of its

content/subject, is concluded with a transcendental thought, a 'one-liner' providing a philosophical condensation of the evolving step in the process, which in themselves are the little pearls the writer adds on a string (of the story-line). One of the main values of the approach is that it puts Architecture, Planning and Design in an historical context that's including cultural, socio- and economic forces, as much, and most of the time, more than the Architecture, Planning and Design itself. What it tries to convey is a sense of processes beyond any one's control, where the Architect, Engineer and Designer are merely the ones providing the means to the forces that are occurring and shaping the processes. Their 'ideas' appear as makeshift, when seen against a 'bigger picture' background, their particular 'Architectural' approach or style more or less irrelevant. The book does include at the end, design proposals for Manhattan by the author / Architect around the time of writing / conception of the book (mid-seventies), that are presented as visual illustrations of the principles discovered and described in the book. However, partly due to the scale of the graphics included (small singular conceptual 3D images) and in part due to a listing of programmatic characteristics that one has been inundated with already a lot in the book, it doesn't really add to the story-line, imho. It seems that what one would expect, based on knowing what we know now in regards to the author and his career, that is a summarizing and a valuation of the principles in terms of how they would be made to guide one in projects for the future, is a missing stepping stone. As such, the shown projects in a way act more as a 'smoke-screen' than an unveiling of a future 'manifesto' (or set of rules), since it is not clear what is 'different' than what one has come to see before, nor what value, rejection or acceptance, is placed upon it. The Architect did not come out and value what the author has distilled. Perhaps that had not happened to the point of conclusion yet, but instead what is presented seems to represent a phase of mesmerizing and fascination with the subject. As such, the Architect and the subsequent work of the office remains a subject of study for me. One has to start somewhere, and this is most likely an obligatory starting point.

He goes into rigorous detail in describing the evidence for his "manifesto" but without losing the reader. If you have ever read any art theory style writing then this will be understandable. It's not a totally normal style of writing but it's still very interesting and understandable if you can pay attention. One of my favorite reads. There are moments of wonder (did that really happen in New York?), moments of enlightenment, and plenty of humor and irony, and even some heroes and villains (Le Corbusier as the tyrant who seeks to destroy New York, Dali as the out of place European in America). Very enjoyable, I have read this more than once. Highly recommend to anyone interested in architecture, design, or art history (and New York of course).

Fascinating from start to finish. This is a gripping history of the city of New York, tracing its architectural evolution from the Dutch's rational plotting the grid of Manhattan to Coney Island's early extravagance as a showcase for the bizarre to the manical explosion of sky scrapers. Intriguing is the story of Coney Island serving as an incubator for Manhattan's themes and personality of forms. Koolhaas, now a starchitect, wrote this gorgeous work decades before he would create his own masterpieces of architecture such as the Seattle Library or Casa de Musica. In a word brilliant.

Here's an undergraduate architecture student's perspective: I really enjoyed this book! It's not difficult to get into but be prepared to venture into some pretty fantastical theories about New York. I couldn't help but think that some of the explanations and narrative were a bit forced to fit into some very memorable lines and titles. Just go with it though and you'll be glad you did; it's a captivating interpretation of New York that is certainly at least as valuable as whatever you'll find in a history book.

Koolhaas doesn't need to the presentation. He is a genius of the American and global architecture. The importance of this book is related to consider the history of the development of Manhattan. What is the function of the skyscraper? During the economic boom of Reagan cycle, it is the symbol of the financial success, next the last crisis every skyscraper must give us a proper value. That is true, but it can mean a return to the original sense of the City, and to an architectural function of the open spaces.

This classic is a must read for every architect, urbanist and New York aficionado. Although written many years ago, the essence of the city, which Koolhaas correctly sensed and wrote on its pages, make it one of the most quoted and talked about books about the urbanism and architecture of this unique city.

Fragmented yet cohesive, this book captured the essence of New York City's complicated architectural and urban planning journey up to the 70s in a poetic narrative.

Lucidly written, it manages to be simultaneously clear yet poetic. The book manages to be cynical of the phenomenon that is New York while at the same time clearly being in admiration of it. Well worth

a read for the romantics and the sceptics.

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