

The lost history of the City of the Captive Globe Project

Architectural myths and a forgotten heroine

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Abstract

In 1972, while still a student, Rem Koolhaas moved to New York with artist and wife Madelon Vriesendorp. There, they started their research, which would later become the “Appendix: A Fictional Conclusion”, the final section of the book “*Delirious New York - A retroactive manifesto for Manhattan*”, where Koolhaas combined ideas from the text to shape a fictional city, *The City of the Captive Globe*.

At the same time, Madelon Vriesendorp was producing what would be her *New York Series*, a collection of paintings illustrating her impressions of the city, the most famous of which is *Flagrant Delit*, the iconic cover of the 1978 first edition of *Delirious New York*.

The aim of this article is to explore the project *The City of the Captive Globe*, the main illustration of the text *Delirious New York*, analyse the pictorial representation of the project while focusing on its story in order to better understand the process that led to its drafting, who were the people involved, its meaning and again discuss the question of its authorship.

Keywords: Rem Koolhaas, Madelon Vriesendorp, *Delirious New York*, Drawing, Authorship

The lost history of the City of the Captive Globe Project. Architectural myths and a forgotten heroine¹



Figure 1 - The city of the Captive Globe (KOOLHAAS; ZENGHELIS, 1994: 295)

It has been said that “History is often overtaken by myth and speculation”² - this is the way of the world. Architecture, as every discipline strongly related to people and pop culture, is no exception to this rule. The fact that we come across a building, a book, or a theory so often may lead us to start to believe we know everything about it. Our familiarity with the building, the book or theory may trick us into believing that there would be nothing more to learn about it. That is the case of a book as famous as Rem Koolhaas’s *Delirious New York - A retroactive manifesto for Manhattan* (KOOLHAAS, 1994).

Delirious New York was first published in 1978 by the Oxford University Press with Madeleine Vriesendorp’s *Flagrant Délit* painting on the cover. It was republished in 1994 by the Monacelli Press and 010 Publishers. The Monacelli Press later printed three more versions – in 1997, 2005 and 2014 – with no amendment to the text³. The one big alteration really setting the newer editions apart from their predecessors is on the cover: one of the most representative book covers in contemporary architecture history is no more; in its place, instead, we find a nondescript picture of Manhattan. According to Rem Koolhaas, approximately 25,000 copies of *Delirious New York* were sold up to 2007 and the first print run was of around 15,000 copies, “4,000 for England, 10,000 for the USA” (COLOMINA, 2017: 134-135). The dedicated page on the OMA website claims that the book was translated into at least nine languages, amongst which French, Japanese, German and Yiddish⁴.

The books' colourful illustrations are just as well known in the architectural community as the text itself, if not more, and they are deeply intertwined with the theory of the manifesto; still, in the exploration of the work of the Dutch architect, it became clear that there was more to be told about the story behind those drawings.

Focusing specifically on the painting *The City of the Captive Globe* (1972), published on page 295 of the second edition of *Delirious New York* (KOOLHAAS, 1994: 295) (Figure 1), one will come across not one, but four different versions of the illustration (Figures 2, 3 and 4).



Figure 2 - The City of the Captive Globe Revisited (Madelon Vriesendorp Personal archive, 1994). Figure 3 - OMA in der Städtelschule (ZENGHELIS, Drawing Matter Collection, 1978). Figure 4 - City of the Captive Globe (KOOLHAAS, 1977: 47)

But it's not only the range of different versions that raises questions: when it comes to authorship and its correct name, the information about this piece is, again, rather contradictory.

The piece can be found in the MoMA archive under the title *The City of the Captive Globe Project, New York, New York, Axonometric*⁵. Rem Koolhaas himself, in the main body of the book *Delirious New York*, refers to both the painting and the text as *The City of the Captive Globe*, but then removes the definite article in the end credits and calls it simply *City of the Captive Globe*.

Furthermore, all the paintings of the Appendix except *The City of the Captive Globe*, are available in modified versions on the open-to-all *Drawing Matter* website collection. Of the five paintings, this is the only one not available on the website. The only way to find it on the *Drawing Matter* archive is to have a "*Drawing Matter* Collection Login Access": this online version, attributed to Zoe Zenghelis, is a revisited one painted in 1978 and named *OMA in der Städtelschule* still (Figure 3)⁶. Besides the chaos in terms of name and versions, there is also no clarity in terms of crediting in regards to this piece⁷.

On the website of the publisher The Monacelli Press', it is said that in this project Rem Koolhaas is celebrating Manhattan's culture of congestion. Through a clever play on Hermann Bollmann's 1963 New York city map (Figures 5 and 6), Koolhaas composes "different functional programs, breeding philosophies and art movements previously thought as incompatible" (COCOZZA, 2017: 884). Looking into the question of the history and development of the collage illustrating the project *The City of the Captive Globe*, you can see Rem Koolhaas's interest in the interaction of different parts of architecture, how they are combined and how they influence each other⁸.

The painting *The City of the Captive Globe* is based on three "axioms": the grid, lobotomy, and schism. This scene could take place anywhere in Manhattan – it could actually take place anywhere in the world, and it is only by means of association that we connect this picture of a generic grid to of the general idea of New York. The city of New York is, by definition, the flagship of contemporary urbanism, which, in the wake of modernist theories, is identified with a grid layout. Consequently, even though the situation could actually be transferred to "any city", we conclude that it could only be New York, all while Rem Koolhaas's narrative focuses on overturning the city's ordinary "commonplaces"⁹. The whole project is synthesized by one single image: different scenes are composed impartially through the use of parallel projection and the view from a point at infinity¹⁰.

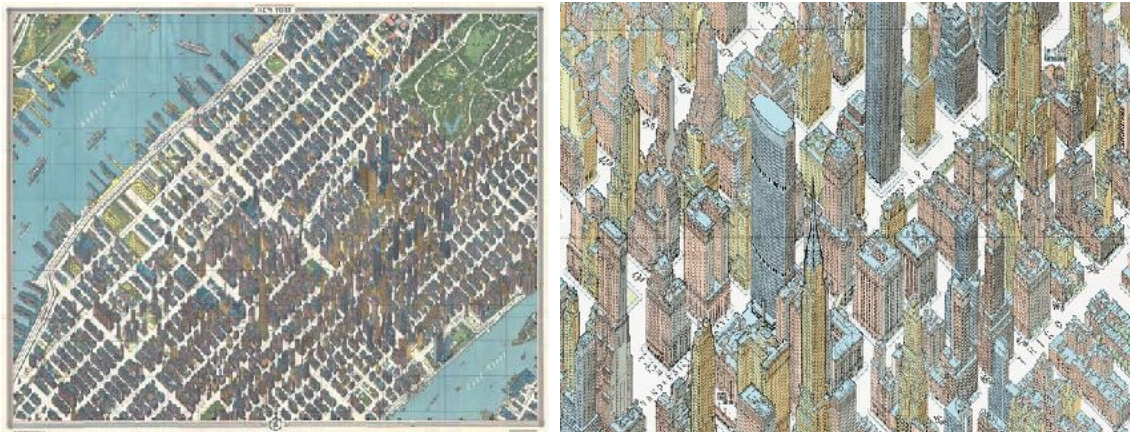


Figure 5 – New York (BOLLMANN, 1962: 179-180). Figure 6 – New York (detail): (BOLLMANN, 1962: 179-180)

The choice of the axonometric representation is not at all casual: this is the language of modernity (COCOZZA, 2017). Until the 1920s axes used to be confined to technical drawings, the Avant-garde movement reintroduced it in the arts field. Theo van Doesburg and Cornelis van Eesteren marked the modern revival of axonometry, making it the aesthetic translation of the Avant-garde theories: the parallel projection represents both a disconnection from the existing tradition as well as the idea of a mechanical space.

Hence, axonometric drawing is directly connected to design thinking - through it, thought takes over space¹¹. Rem Koolhaas is presenting an illustrated theory to the reader.



Figure 7 –The City of the Captive Globe Revisited (Madelon Vriesendorp Personal archive, 1994)

Located in Manhattan, *The City of the Captive Globe* (Figure 7) is actually a compilation of references that exist individually and independently inside the grid, which assumes the connotation of an archipelago rather than of a cohesive city (LUCARELLI, 2014). This image is a catalogue, a collection of ideologies. Rem Koolhaas will later state that through this project he was trying to describe a space in which he could later work¹².

The collage intends to unify different philosophies, expressed through architecture and art pieces and visions, and placed on top of solid granite pillars (LUCARELLI, date 2014). Each block represents a part of Koolhaas's perception of a theoretical Manhattan and, in line with that, different Avant-garde movements and ideologies, such as Futurism, Constructivism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Socialism and Realism find their place in it. Through painting, he is bringing to the theoretic table the dynamism of Futurism and its exposé of the past¹³, typical to the larger family of the Modernist movement, which, from the early decades of the Twentieth Century, sought a new alignment with the experience and values of modern industrial life¹⁴.

If we analyse the elements of the painting in terms of their placing, we realize that the block on the left upper corner of the collage (n.º 1 in Figure 7) shows a grid of excavated minimalistic parallelepipeds. This could represent the Parc De La Villette, the project by Bernhard Tschumi based on his own theory, *The Architectural Paradox*¹⁵. Koolhaas and Tschumi share many similarities when it comes to their personal life, but they also have a lot in common professionally, and they both published manifestos about New York: their shared interest in the definition of a city and all its components would explain the presence of Tschumi in the work¹⁶.

Water (n.º 2 in Figure 7) is a recurring theme and a powerful element in many of Koolhaas's projects and visions. The excavated block is filled up with water and could be seen as a pool, an element that will later be adopted by OMA in many different projects, from the collage *The story of the pool* to the project *The floating swimming pool*. Most probably, also due to his fascination with Salvador Dalí, Rem Koolhaas was intrigued by the power and mysteriousness of water. Dalibor Veselý claims that the fluidity of water – which is also the fluidity of desire opposing the solidity of matter – was and remains a permanent obsession of the Surrealists, with whom Koolhaas would most certainly identify himself¹⁷.

The third of the carved-out blocks in the collage stands for “religion in ruins” (n.º 3 in Figure 0), embodied by a Christian emblem, the cross.

A lot of different ideologies are presented through projects by Koolhaas's personal mentors or idols: a representation of Oswald Mathias Ungers' Roosevelt Island project stands out in the collage (n.º 4 in Figure 7, Figure 08). He had been a huge influence on Rem Koolhaas, who first became aware of his work through the Berlin based projects and chose to study at Cornell to be Ungers' student¹⁸.

Futurism is presented in the collage through the two towers of Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin (n.º 5 in Figure 7, Figure 9). In his younger years working as a journalist, Rem Koolhaas had the chance to interview the Swiss designer who was in Holland to collect a prize¹⁹. Koolhaas was heavily influenced by Le Corbusier when he later decided to study architecture. Some would even say that some of Le Corbusier's statements on the durability of theory and its potential unverifiable character would provide the basis for all the attempts made in *Delirious New York* to “problematize the [very] field of theoretical action” (LUCARELLI, 2014).

The ideology of Expressionism can be found in the painting in a vision of the movie set of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (n.º 6 in Figure 7, Figure 10), which would later on inspire

Rem Koolhaas to form the Dr Caligari cabinet of Metropolitan Architecture, the first embryo of OMA²⁰.



Figure 8 – Roosevelt Island 1 (UNGERS, 1975 in *Controspazio*, Anno VII, n.4, dec.1975); Figure 9 – Le Corbusier, Plan Voisin 1925 (LE CORBUSIER; JEANNERET, 1910-1929. Available at: <http://www.fondationlecorbusier.fr/>); Figure 10 - Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (WIENE, 1920)

Almost hidden in the right corner of the collage, we can see the corner of a building with a very structured facade (n. ° 7 in Figure 7), almost like a vertical grid, which might be representative of a typical New York building from the 1900s, just like the Flatiron building, by Daniel Burnham, famous for its triangular structural composition.

In the painting we can also identify some of the iconic buildings that make up the cityscape of New York City, which have become symbols beyond constructions, and are recurrent throughout the book and in Koolhaas's own personal research.

One of the blocks presents a visualisation of the imprint of the buildings (n. ° 8 in Figure 7), as a kind of a representation and illustration of the pattern of Manhattan and New York, as well as a means of showing the small-scale nature of cities within cities, how individual blocks change the landscape through their footprint.

The Waldorf Astoria Hotel (n. ° 9 in Figure 7, Figure 11) and Empire State Building appear in the painting as a representation of the different periods of Manhattan's urbanism. As Koolhaas writes in *Delirious New York*, the first building constructed on the site, only five stories tall, is a "representative of social climbing" (KOOHLHAS, 1994: 132). Later, a second almost identical building was built on the opposite corner, represented in the painting by two identical parallelepipeds. Over time, the Waldorf Astoria grew obsolete, it lacked modernity and clashed with the rest of the Manhattan grid. In 1931, the construction of the Empire State Building, a skyscraper, was the development that was needed. It constructs a "form of automatic architecture" (KOOHLHAS, 1994: 139), a well-developed and thought-through concept. In regard to the site, Rem Koolhaas observes that "the layers of its past occupancies still exist on the block as an invisible archaeology, no less real for being disembodied" (KOOHLHAS, 1994: 132), making the Waldorf Astoria and the Empire State Building the epitome of the culture and movement of Manhattanism, almost a sculptural memorial to New York City's past.

It is only natural that the *Lakeshore Drive Apartments* by Mies van der Rohe would also find their way into the picture (n. ° 10 Figure 7, Figure 12), as Rem Koolhaas studied his

work his whole life. Many of Mies's projects served as a model template for Koolhaas's first residential projects, often seen as variations of *Farnsworth house*²¹.

Dali's presence is also no surprise, since he is a hero to Koolhaas (LUCARELLI, 2014) and the creator of that paranoid critical method the latter makes use of to develop the theory behind *Delirious New York* (JENCKS, 2008). Dali's surrealism and work is represented by his emblematic *Angelus*, (n.º 11 Figure 7, Figure 13), an obsessive reworking of Millet's homonymous painting that sees life both in the form of a written text as well as in various pictorial reinterpretations.



Figure 11 – Waldorf Astoria (Schultze & Weaver) in 1931, Photographed by Wurtz Brothers (General Research Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations). Figure 12 - 860-880 Lake Shore Drive Apartments (Mies Van Der Rohe, 1951). Figure 13 - *Angelus* architetonico di Millet (Salvador Dalí) (Oil on Canvas, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Fundació Gala, 1933).

Ivan Leonidov and his "heroism"²², another important influence on Koolhaas, are featured in the painting as well: Leonidov's new architecture and modern megastructure, together with his desire to conciliate new social policies with suprematist principles, would influence design throughout the whole of the 20th century and onwards²³. Koolhaas would dedicate his first 1974 architectural article to none other than Leonidov's Ministry of Heavy Industry (MARULLO, 2013), the same building he is choosing to epitomize him by in *the City of the Captive Globe* Painting (n.º 8/12 in Figure 7, Figure 14) – the information on whether it is located on the eighth or twelfth block of the grid is not clear.

It is curious to notice how, to identify the different version of the painting and distinguish the original, more sketchy ones to the piece produced to be exposed at the Pompidou Centre 1994 exhibition, Madelon Vriesendorp chose to "sneak in" a skeleton version of OMA's unbuilt project for the *Grande Bibliothèque* (n.º 13 in Figure 7, Figure 15)²⁴. The project description on the OMA's website states that "the ambition of this project is to rid architecture of responsibilities it can no longer sustain and to explore this new freedom aggressively. It suggests that, liberated from its former obligations, architecture's last function will be the creation of the symbolic spaces that accommodate the persistent desire for collectivity"²⁵ – A concept that encompasses Constructivist and Suprematist

ideals as a whole, as well as presents the idea of architecture to be inhabited: a concept that entirely matches creating an inhabited grid that is at the core of the painting *The City of the Captive Globe*.

As we continue our analysis, we find the depiction of yet another icon of the modernist movement, El Lissitzky's *Lenin Tribune*, designed as a real act of propaganda, in 1924, applying Malevich's theories²⁶ to architecture (n.º 14 in Figure 7, Figure 16).

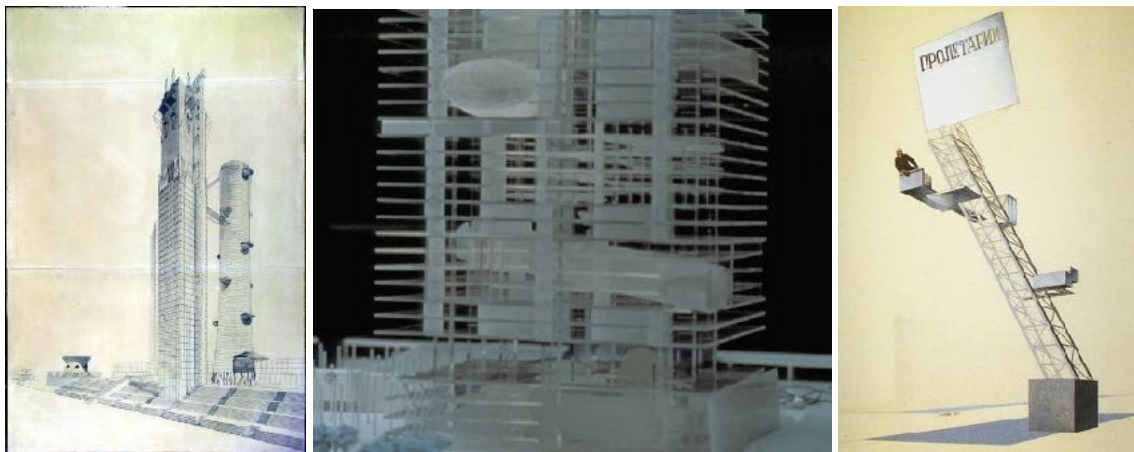


Figure 14 – Proposal for the architectural design contest (Ivan Leonidov, Ministry of Heavy Industry, Moscow, 1934). Figure 15 - Très Grande Bibliothèque. Competition, final model (Rem Koolhaas, 1989, Available at: <https://oma.eu/projects/tres-grande-bibliotheque>). Figure 16 - Lenin Stand (El Lissitzky, Collection State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 1920. Source <https://commons.wikimedia.org>).

In one of the three carved blocks, we see the pictorial depiction of the juxtaposition between nature and manmade (n.º 15 in Figure 7), of the tension between the two, its epitome being New York City's Central Park. According to Rem Koolhaas, "Central Park is not only the major recreational facility of Manhattan but also the record of its progress: a taxidermic preservation of nature that exhibits forever the drama of culture outdistancing nature. Like the (Manhattan) Grid, it is a colossal leap of faith; the contrast it describes - between the built and the unbuilt - hardly exists at the time of its creation" (KOOLHAAS, 1994: 21).

Kasimir Malèvic also appears in the painting through his *Arkitektons* (n.º 16 in Figure 7, Figure 17), a series of experimental architectonic sculptures²⁷.

Rockefeller Centre (n.º 17 in Figure 7, Figure 18), the embodiment of New York City's culture of congestion, rises from its marble base, fulfilling all of Manhattan's desires: the Rockefeller Centre collected different values, the balance of Greek architecture, the retaining flavour of Babylon's magnificence, and Roman qualities of mass and strength (KOOLHAAS, 1994).

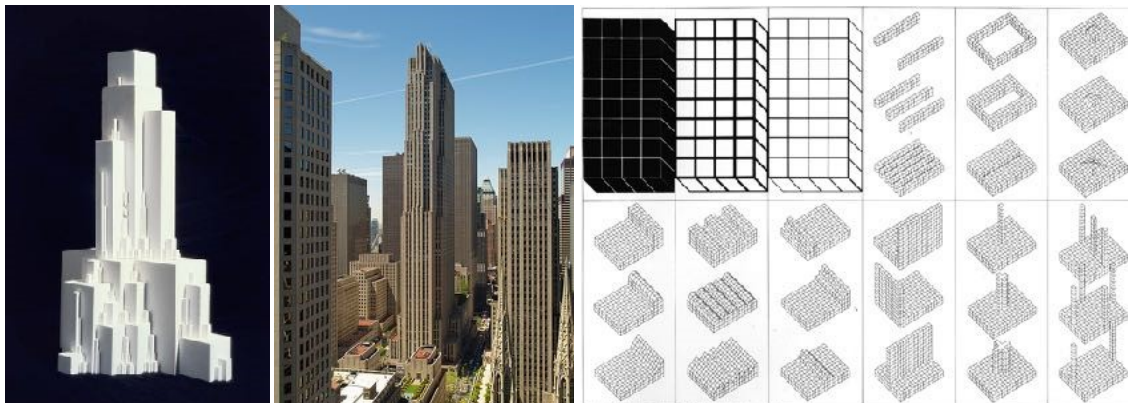


Figure 17 – Gota 2-a. (Kasimir Malèvic, Centre Pompidou, AM 1978-879, 1923-1927). Figure 18 - Rockefeller Centre (Raymond Hood, 1931-1940, Photographed by David Shankbone, February 19 2007). Figure 19 - Istogrammi di Architettura (SUPERSTUDIO, Lithography, Plura Edizioni, Milano, 1972).

Amongst the inspirations of the future OMA, Florence based SUPERSTUDIO²⁸ features on the painting with the iconic grid of the *Istogrammi* (1969) (n.º 18 in Figure 7, Figure 19), the final piece of their explorative research into the realm of a theoretical architecture. Their project was never intended to be built, they aimed to use design as a means of communication and critique, a project that began in the 1960s with *Superarchitettura* and the famous *Monumento Continuo*²⁹. Harrison and Foulhoux's *Trylon and Perisphere* (n.º 19 in Figure 7, Figure 20) were, respectively, a three-sided obelisk and a sphere mounted on five steel pillars that made their debut at the 1939 *New York World's Fair*³⁰ an exhibit that would unconsciously mark the end of Manhattanism (KOOLHAAS, 1994: 275).

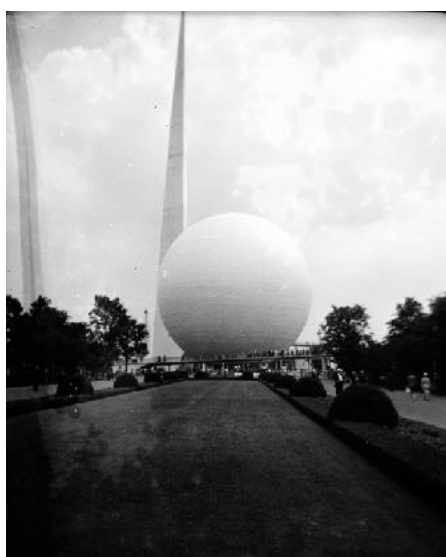


Figure 20 – Trylon and Perisphere (Harrison and Foulhoux, 1939. Photographed by Samuel Gottscho, Met Museum)

Still in the realm of Constructivism, whose main aim was to reconcile industrial science and art in order to enhance both culture and production³¹, and bridging into Suprematism, we can also identify what appears to be a hybrid building combining the different housing experiments fostered during the soviet regime, Moisej Ginzburg's 1930 *Narkomfin Building* (n.º 20 in Figure 7) being the most famous.

Many of the characters and ideologies depicted are connected to Rem's personal history: the bottom right block serves as base for the Berlin Wall [n.º 21 in Figure 07], a recurring theme in his architectural research³².

Furthermore, the choice to represent the theories on top of marble blocks is not at all casual nor without conceptual basis. They are positioned on pedestals made of the most noble material, which has been used to identify deity and god-like figures in history. By positioning them like this, they are elevated beyond their mere nature of buildings or constructions, they become symbols. At the same time, the blocks are constant throughout the painting, creating a shared language that unifies and brings together the different elements. There is no hierarchy between the depicted pieces, none appears to be more relevant, and they all belong to the grid³³.

At the centre of the collage is "the Captive Globe", interrupting the strict grid, and showing that all of the ideologies come together to form one thing: the world. Its role is, firstly, to demonstrate that all theories compose existence and, secondly, to point out the difference between the idea of a city and its reality.

In the end, the Globe is the iconic incubator of that city-sense that Koolhaas identified as the generative origin of the urban condition: an evocation of human nature, in all of its unfathomable ambition³⁴.

It took some time before *Delirious New York* was published. The first drafts originated from a manifesto entitled *The Surface*, written by Rem Koolhaas in 1969, when he was still a student at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London³⁵.

It was only in 1978 that he published the book in its closest-to-final form. In its introduction the author presents his intentions in writing a Manifesto about Manhattan³⁶.

The book tells the story of an unformulated movement, "Manhattanism", from the earliest days to its death. The movement's true program was so outrageous that in order for it to be realized it could never be openly declared³⁷: it includes an *Introduction*, a *Prehistory* – a series of urban episodes that give substance to his theory of Manhattanism –, a *Post-mortem* and an *Appendix*.

When drafting *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas is not shy on stories and anecdotes that partake in breathing life into his vision of the city. In 1993, in an interview by architecture critic Cynthia Davidson, he stated that the aim behind *Delirious New York* was to lay a foundation from which to work as an architect, even though at the time he was still to start his professional activity³⁸. By writing a Manifesto, he was building the basis for the work of OMA, which he will found in London in 1975, together with painter Madelon Vriesendorp, his former AA tutor Elia Zenghelis and the latter's wife, Zoe, a designer and painter³⁹. What he brings together through this project is a collection of references and

influences from which he will pick and tap into through his long career, personal archive of inspirations. To obtain total credibility, though, his manifesto needed images.

Here is where Madelon comes into the story, as her surrealist paintings of New York became the perfect representation of the theory that Rem Koolhaas was describing, something he himself acknowledges at the end of the book. She was instrumental in giving iconic power to the narrative of *Delirious New York*⁴⁰. According to her recollections, Koolhaas was never one to draw that much: during the early days of OMA he and Elia Zenghelis would come up with an idea and draft it, then Madelon and Zoe would be the ones actually bringing the image to life⁴¹.



Figure 21 - (From left) Madelon Vriesendorp, Rem Koolhaas, Elia and Zoe Zenghelis in New York, 1978 (Photo from Rex Archive, rexfeatures.com)

The story of the painting *The City of the Captive Globe* began way before Koolhaas even had the idea of the book. It goes back to 1972, when he moved to New York with then wife, Madelon Vriesendorp, and first had the idea to write something about the city⁴². This “something” became the *Appendix: A Fictional Conclusion*, that would later be the final section of a completed “*Delirious New York*”. Here he combines all different parts and ideas of the book and forms a fictional city, leading to the vision of *The City of the Captive Globe*.

Rem Koolhaas went to America to learn more about New York, and there he started his research. When recounting that process while being interviewed by architecture historian, theorist and curator Beatriz Colomina, he describes it as reading and collecting paraphernalia⁴³.

Noteworthy is that, according to their accounts, the reading involved was more of a support rather than the core of the research behind *Delirious New York*, which was primarily based on images and objects. Everything was being learned and theorized by means of observation and visual analysis.

“Manhattan - writes Koolhaas - is the 20th century Rosetta Stone occupied by architectural mutations, utopian fragments and irrational phenomena, still at its core it is not a layered city at all, it is a manmade artefact that grows artificially following an imposed grid, that exists in the present and is utterly ordinary (“common”, to a certain extent) and representative of modernity itself. (Koolhaas, 1994: 9)

Amongst the different reasons that led Vriesendorp and Koolhaas to move to New York there was also the desire to be part of the Metropolitan Postcard Collectors Club, whose meetings occurred once every month in a huge building downtown (COLOMINA, 2007).

The postcards they collected would later on play a very important role in the development of *Delirious New York*, providing one third of the information and iconography - still they were found mainly by mundanely driving from town to town, searching for material in thrift stores and antique stores. They found pictures of different models of the Rockefeller Centre, and many more images that were later used in the book⁴⁴.

It is through this search that they come across a picture of the never-completed project for the *Coney Island Globe*⁴⁵ (Figure 22), which acts as a catalyst for the project and later for *Delirious New York* itself: *The Coney Island Globe project* is the incubator for Manhattan’s incipient themes and infant mythology⁴⁶ while the postcards showed what might have been and what is yet to come for the city and its inhabitants.



Figure 22 - Postcard, The Friede Globe Tower Amusement Park Swindle, Coney Island. (Illustrated Postcard and Novelty Co., NY. 1906). Figure 23 - Picture of part of Madelon Vriesendorp’s postcards collection (The Archive: Postcards’ on Madelon Vriesendorp’s website “World of Madelon Vriesendorp”, www.madelonvriesendorp.com).

Many factors and people have played an important role in the story behind the book and the drawings made for the *Appendix*. At the beginning of this research, based on the credits in *Delirious New York*, it seemed clear that Rem Koolhaas had drawn the picture and Zoe Zenghelis had painted it in watercolour. Then, through reading and researching, the mis-crediting of the painting occurred: it is a mistake that persists from day one, since

it was attributed to Zoe Zenghelis in the first edition of *Delirious New York*, in 1978, and it has not yet been resolved.

Once you start analysing, though, there is more to the life and work of Madelon Vriesendorp: it is clear how strong of an influence she exercised on Rem Koolhaas and vice versa. The surrealist and pop character of her paintings is present in the whole book. Being so young at the time means that they probably tended to share inspirations and heavily affect each other's works, but still it should be noticed that Madelon's work is prior to the writing of *Delirious New York*. Discussing their relationship in his piece *Madelon Seeing Through Objects*, Charles Jencks clearly underlines the role she played in forming the imaginary of Koolhaas's early work through the fresh and unexpected perspective that only an outsider, as she technically was, could bring to architecture: the "unintended narrative"⁴⁷. All her paintings that feature in the book were never painted for the book itself⁴⁸ - she painted them all in advance and later on let Koolhaas use them⁴⁹. They were actually a means of providing the "proof" that he needed to support his own theories.

Both Vriesendorp and Koolhaas worked using what they called the "PCM", the *paranoid critical method*, of surrealist inspiration⁵⁰. This system consists in "the fabrication of evidence for unprovable speculations and the subsequent grafting of this evidence on the World, so that a false fact takes its unlawful place among the real ones" (KOOLHAAS, 1994: 235-237). It means that you would build your own tools to fabricate the proofs to support your theories, which – one could argue – can be seen as a much more fascinating method than pure archive-based research. Can it be stated that crafting evidence becomes part of the theorization process itself and enriches it by making a work of art on its own? It is indeed an artistic process, as its father and master is none other than Salvador Dalí - Rem Koolhaas's personal hero.

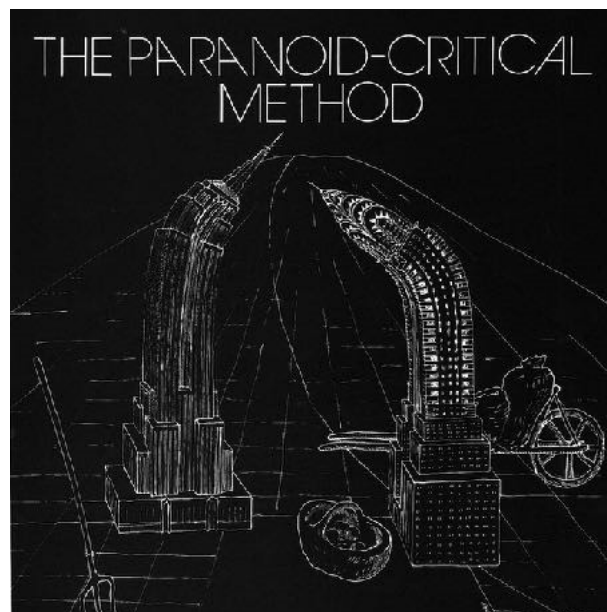


Figure 22 - Dalí and Le Corbusier: the Paranoid Critical Method. Poster for Rem Koolhaas's Lecture on Dalí and Le Corbusier (Madelon Vriesendorp's website "World of Madelon Vriesendorp", madelonvriesendorp.com)

Madelon's paintings were, at the time, the perfect representation of the fabricated evidence on which to build the theory. After all, it is one thing to devise proof, but a whole other one to have it in front of your eyes in the physical form of a painting: it makes it all around more believable and perfectly in line with that process of image-based research Rem Koolhaas was pursuing at the time.

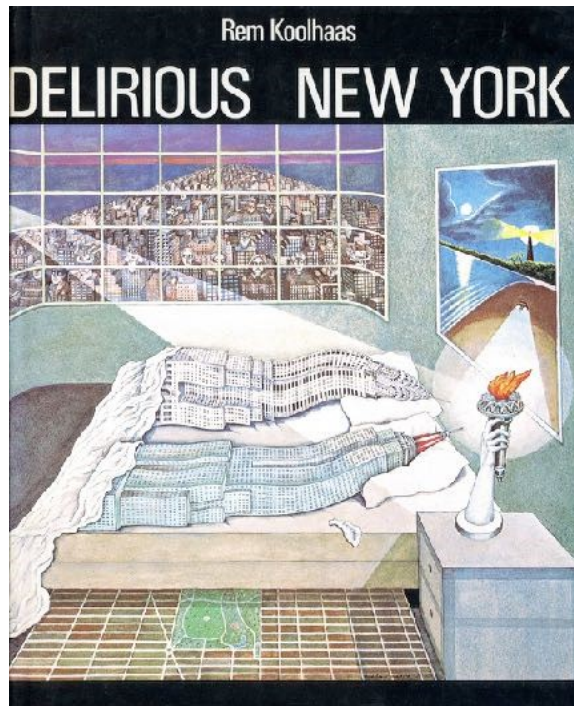


Figure 22 - *Flagrant délit* (Flagrant Crime), 1975 (Madelon Vriesendorp, painting used as cover art for the first edition of Rem Koolhaas *Delirious New York* Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978)

Several paintings Madelon Vriesendorp made or contributed to can be found in *Delirious New York*, whether only in the colouring or also in the development of ideas, as in *Flagrant délit* (Figure 22). Charles Jencks states: “with the x-ray of narrative vision, the objects were seen through, re-animated to get the unofficial story that Koolhaas was telling. Because of their humorous power, Vriesendorp’s images soon became the thought-diagrams of the book. Like all effective icons, they essentialized the basic idea, reducing it to a few images that became so associated with the concepts as to be interchangeable” (JENCKS, 2008).

It is difficult to state with absolute certainty whether it was Rem Koolhaas or Madelon Vriesendorp who first started using the paranoid critical method, to say who inspired who in their explorations, who first started looking into New York: very little is known of the painter’s work before marrying Koolhaas, she was young and only at the beginning of her career.

When studying at Central Saint Martin’s University in London she was already experimenting with surrealist language and vocabulary, which can be seen in her early 1970s

work: before there were buildings, her pictures would include lions and demons and flowers⁵¹, but the storytelling method is already the same one we will find in the Manhattan pieces. On a purely chronological perspective, Madelon's paintings come before the writing, as they were painted at the beginning of the 70s. Harder to date and resolve is the timeline and interplay between Vriesendorp's imaginary and Koolhaas' theories⁵².

"Therefore, regardless of saying who influenced whom, what appears clear is that Madelon was able to listen to Rem Koolhaas's narrative and push it a bit further into a different realm where it could be revelled in as a joke that everybody already knew, the sub-Freudian realm of phallic skyscrapers and lighthouses as flashing dicks, the world of pop-psychology and postcards. Her best work combines these insights with a deeper, sequential story, like the drama of skyscraper promiscuity" (JENCKS, 2008).

She more or less unintentionally managed to build the basis for Rem Koolhaas's mental process. The flip-side to this is that, for many years, Madelon's work lay frozen and crushed by over-exposure to the disproportionate fortunes of the OMA think tank⁵³.

Even though her pieces had an immense value for the book, underlining and visualising the written text, her name was often omitted in the credits or the paintings were described as commissioned by Koolhaas. She had a huge impact on the research regarding the book, as she was a part of the postcard collecting⁵⁴.

When talking about her work, she tells the Guardian: "Nothing was made for the books", "it was all my series. It was not a collaboration. He just used it"⁵⁵.

In order to expose some of this mis-crediting, Shuman Basar and Stefan Trüby launched an exhibition on Madelon Vriesendorp in 2008: *The World of Madelon Vriesendorp: Paintings/ Postcards/ Objects/ Games*⁵⁶, which would also be turned into a book.

Delirious New York is such a famous book that every architect or architecture student has read it. Its colourful, surreal images and illustrations are so clear in everyone's imagination that there is no need to actually stop and read more into it, or so it seems. What more is there to know about it rather than what Koolhaas himself has written in the book? Still, the history of *The City of the Captive Globe*, and, above all, of the representation that made it symbolic is one of those that has been put aside in the shadow of the myth of its author. Many of the characters of this story have been lost through the years and we rarely see the project credited as it should be: confusion and mistakes never fixed over the years make up the "life" of this project, what Walter Benjamin would most probably define as "aura" in his renowned *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* essay⁵⁷.

The City of the Captive Globe represented the idea of Manhattan, all the different ideologies existing on a grid⁵⁸. It is more than a collection of theories, though, *Delirious New York* is not only a retroactive manifesto for the most hectic and modern city of the time: it is a "wunderkammer", Koolhaas and Vriesendorp's own "valhalla of references"⁵⁹. The true project behind *Delirious New York* was not the city but the design of OMA itself, and *The City of the Captive Globe* is at the basis of it all.

Written and designed before writing the manifesto, this project is a preparation for it: it is a test, it is the groundwork, it is a combination of elements that build the foundation of

the life project that OMA is - still, it is also the perfect example of the issue of fame and the issue of authorship in architecture, as its own creator is hardly ever linked to it, to the point that Madelon Vriesendorp never gets credit for it in any edition of *Delirious New York* or in any other publication; after all, “OMA has always been, through its whole history, shrouded in myth, some self-manufactured, others accumulated”⁶⁰, and hardly ever fact checked.

This Globe is, then, not only “captive”, but at the core of a long history of miscrediting, which tends to be forgotten or overlooked in the shadow projected by the light of Rem Koolhaas’ fame and in a culture of main characters rather than groups. Architectural history likes to have a face to look up to, a mind to admire, but design rarely is a one-man job, especially in contemporary times.

The history of the painting *The City of The Captive Globe* teaches us that we should start looking at architecture as more than the genius spur of a chosen one: maybe we should go back to the roots of a well-known project and look for all those characters and leaders we lost along the way in this search for the mythological figure of “the architect”, and in doing so we might encounter a voice that we had not had the chance to hear or a “world” we had not seen yet, such as that of Madelon Vriesendorp.

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¹ This article was developed in the context of the curricular unit *Theory and History of Architecture and the City II*, coordinated by Marta Sequeira in 2020-2021, from the Integrated Masters in Architecture at the Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa.

² "As Vriesendorp acknowledges, history is often overtaken by myth and speculation." (JACOB, 2018). "If at first you don't succeed, cry, cry again": Madelon Vriesendorp on being written out of history". *The Architectural Review*, February 22, 2018).

³ See Monacelli Press. Avaliabçe at: <https://www.monacellipress.com/book/delirious-new-york-2/> [March 2021].

⁴ See Delirious New York, OMA Website. Available at: <https://www.oma.com/publications/delirious-new-york> [March 2021].

⁵ See Moma online. Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/104696> [March 2021]. The project appears to be credited to Rem Koolhaas and Madelon Vriesendorp, but in the description of the image it is stated that it had been painted by Zoe Zenghelis. This is probably due to a mistake in the first version of *Delirious New York* that attributes it to the latter.

⁶ See Drawing Matter. Available at: <https://drawingmatter.org/writer/koolhaas-rem/> [March 2021] and <https://drawingmatter.org/architect/vriesendorp-madelon/> [March 2021].

⁷ See: Moma online, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/104696> [March 2021]. On the website, the project appears to be credited to Rem Koolhaas and Madelon Vriesendorp but in the description of the image it is stated that it had been painted by Zoe Zenghelis, this is probably due to a mistake in the first version of *Delirious New York* that attributes it to the latter.

⁸ "The City of the Captive Globe is devoted to the artificial conception and accelerated birth of theories, interpretations, mental constructions, proposals and their Infliction on the World." (KOOLHAAS, 1994: 294).

⁹ "Long before it offers a solution to the 'problems' of the city, Koolhaas's discourse focuses on (literally) overturning its clichés, its ordinary 'commonplaces'." (LUCARELLI, 2014)

¹⁰ "Once again, the impartial composition of different scenes is made possible only with parallel projections, only with a view from an infinite point." (COCOZZA, 2017: 8).

¹¹ "For a long time the axonometry role was confined to technical drawing. The art movements of the 1920's brought it back in the arts field. It was thanks to the works of two painters, Theo van Doesburg and Cornelis van Eesteren, that Architects rediscovered parallel projections." (COCOZZA, 2017: 7)

¹² "I wanted to construct - as a writer - a terrain where I could eventually work as an architect." (KOOLHAAS, 1993: 42-43).

¹³ See Futurism, Tate Art Terms. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/futurism>. [March 2021]

¹⁴ See Modernism, Tate Art Terms. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/modernism> [March 2021].

¹⁵ "While *Tschumi's* architectural paradox does convey a certain ambiguity when we try to analyse an actual project with it, there are correlations that can be established." (SKOBLAR, 2018: 1).

¹⁶ "Aus den Erfahrungen im «Big Apple» resultieren schliesslich zwei wegweisende architektonische Manifeste: Koolhaas' *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto of Manhattan* und Tschumi's *The Manhattan Transcripts*". (SCHLAEFLI, Samuel, *Architektur als eine Form des Wissens*. ETH LIFE, Mai 20, 2011. Available at:

https://www.ethlife.ethz.ch/archive_articles/110520_architektengespraech_sch/ [March 2021]

¹⁷ As a student, Koolhaas prepared a project for a swimming pool in London, a theme that was to meet with an extraordinary series of variations in his work (he loves swimming in pools, and has said, "when you work out, you can try to guess who else swam there before you". "The fluidity of water – Veseley writes – which is also the fluidity of desire opposing the solidity of matter, remains a permanent obsession of the Surrealists." (GARGIANI, 2008)

¹⁸ "(...) Through the publication of the studios directed by Ungers at the TU Berlin, which approached the city of Berlin systematically through design projects. Koolhaas's interest eventually led to his admission to Cornell in the Autumn of 1972, in order to study with Ungers." (SCHRIJVER, 2008: 235).

¹⁹ "BC: Which architects did you interview? RK: Le Corbusier, but it was a very brief article. BC: Le Corbusier? On what occasion? RK: At the very end of his life he won a prize in Holland. He was completely unapproachable, inarticulate. He went, [imitating Le Corbusier] pointing to the left 'La lumière de Vermeer' and pointing to the right 'La lumière de van Gogh'. It was a very modern

building. That was all. I think that it was very near the end. When did he die?... It must have been '64. And an architect called Wijdeveld, a Dutch visionary from the twenties, and Constant." (COLLOMINA, 2007: 134-135)

²⁰ "From the establishment of the "Dr Caligari Cabinet of Metropolitan Architecture" – the first embryo of OMA – and the projects included in *Delirious New York* to the recent buildings in Chicago, Berlin, Oporto and Seattle, the book is a long biography all in the historic present." MASTRIGLI, Gabriele, *The work of Rem Koolhaas*. Domus web, January 08, 2007. <https://www.domusweb.it/it/recensioni/2007/01/08/l-opera-di-rem-koolhaas.html> [March 2021]

²¹ "The first houses built by Koolhaas can be considered all variations on the Farnsworth motifs." MORRA, Marco, "The Koolhaas formula". *Architecture Talks, Discussions on Indifference*, November 24, 2016. <https://marchitectretalks.wordpress.com/2016/11/24/the-koolhaas-formula/> [March 2021]

²² "Bringing together a diverse set of heroes, as the aforementioned [...] together with Ivan Leonidov insofar as it lauds Leonidov's heroism." (VAN GERREWEY, 2019: 29)

²³ See *Costruttivismo*, Domus Web. Available at:

<https://www.domusweb.it/it/movimenti/costruttivismo.html> [March 2021]

²⁴ "Zoé painted an acrylic version with little regard for the intricate details, so when Centre Pompidou did a show on 'the City' I decided to make a meticulously detailed watercolour with the light coming from below and I drew part of a skeleton version of Rem's design for the 'Grande Bibliothèque' in the top right corner." VRIESENDORP, Madelon, Message to Sarah Malinowski and Rebecca Billi. December 10, 2020 at 03:11 WET. E-mail.

²⁵ See *Tres Grande Bibliothèque*, OMA website, Projects. Available at:

<https://www.oma.com/projects/tres-grande-bibliotheque> [March 2021]

²⁶ See *Costruttivismo Russo*, Storia dell'Architettura Moderna. Available at:

<http://storiadellarchitetturamoderna.blogspot.com/2013/06/costruttivismo-russo.html> [March 2021]

²⁷ "A series of prismatic, quasi architectural sculptures [through which he] sought to demonstrate the timeless laws of architecture underlying the ever changing demands of function. These studies [were] purely experimental and the buildings [had] no function and no internal organization." (COLQUHOUN, 2002: page)

²⁸ "Rem would dedicate a section of the 2014 biennale to their work, and it is known that both him and Zaha Hadid met with the collective many times" (BATTISTA, 2014)

²⁹ See *Istogrammi di Architettura*, Centro Pecci Prato. Available at:

https://centropecci.it/it/centro/collezione/istogrammi-d-architettura_1 [March 2021]

³⁰ "The design was intended to represent the finite and the infinite, a fitting analogy for the vision of a heady future built using existing technologies being presented by the fair at large" (FIEDERER, s.d)

³¹ See: *Costruttivismo*, Domus Web. Available at:

<https://www.domusweb.it/it/movimenti/costruttivismo.html> [March 2021]

³² OBRIST, Hans Ulrich. Rem Koolhaas. *Cultivating Urban Emptiness*. Interview with R. Koolhaas. <http://archivio.archphoto.it/2004/09/23/hans-ulrich-obrist-interview-rem-koolhaas/> [Dec. 2022]

³³ "Considering Vriesendorp's representational techniques, one notices that all of the iconic structures atop the blocks are rendered as pure white prisms. This creates similarity across the set, which differ greatly in their formal qualities. The white representation also codes the objects as ideal things, perfect representatives of the values of each ideology or Avant-garde movement. The blocks, though clearly acting as city blocks within the grid, are also rendered with a marble-like texture, perhaps to give the reading of a pedestal that displays a piece of art. The blocks are typically rendered as a solid mass that supports another object on top, however this rule is broken several times. For example, in one instance a park is sunk down into the block which turns the solid block into an open topped box. In a second instance, two buildings are nested into the inside

corners of the block, which then begins to function as a wall with an opening on one side. Each of these anomalies is likely done for reasons specific to the project or building within each block, but it shows that Vriesendorp had an attitude of flexibility towards the blocks, allowing them to adapt to the particular conditions posed by each project.” (STEWART, 2018)

³⁴ “For this reason Koolhaas introduces an element that interrupts the grid-blocks dialectic: the Captive Globe, suspended in the middle of the city. Its role is to demonstrate that all ideologies contribute to the construction of the world, and nurture it.” (LUCARELLI, 2014)

³⁵ “In the summer of 1969 while studying at the Architectural Association in London, Rem Koolhaas wrote a story-manifesto titled ‘*The Surface*’.” (LUCARELLI, 2014)

³⁶ “Not only are large parts of its [Manhattans] surface [are] occupied by architectural mutations [Central Park, the Skyscraper], utopian fragments [Rockefeller Centre, the UN Building] and Irrational phenomena [Radio City Music Hall], but in addition each block is covered with several layers of phantom architecture in the form of past occupancies, aborted projects and popular fantasies that provide alternative images to the New York that exists” (KOOLHAAS, 1994: 9)

³⁷ See *Delirious New York*, OMA Website. Available at: <https://oma.eu/publications/delirious-new-york> [March 2021]

³⁸ “I wanted to construct - as a writer - a terrain where I could eventually work as an architect.” (KOOLHAAS, 1993: 42–43)

³⁹ “The text marks the (un)official beginnings of his partnership with Elia Zenghelis, initiating a shared intellectual evolution that would lead to the founding of OMA.” (LUCARELLI, 2014)

⁴⁰ “When published in 1978, Vriesendorp was instrumental in giving iconic power to the narrative of *Delirious New York*.” (JENCKS, 2008).

⁴¹ “Neither were they commissioned by OMA, or painted by other people, as recent books by current OMA partners have erroneously and unforgivably claimed.” (JACOB, 2018)

⁴² “I painted it in watercolor for the book, funny enough I never saw that it was erroneously credited to Zoé Zenghelis in the very back of the book and has been in every following edition. Only when I saw last year that it was reprinted in a book by OMA partner Reinier de Graaf with my watercolour and again credited to Zoé, I found out about the miscredit in DNY. [...] Zoé painted an acrylic version with little regard for the intricate details” (VRIESENDORP, Madelon, Message to Sarah Malinowski and Rebecca Billi. December 10, 2020 at 03:11 WET. E-mail)

⁴³ “Essentially reading, of course, but also collecting debris, paraphernalia, the remnants of the more phantasmagoric populist New York [and] Postcards. We had a collection of maybe about 10,000 postcards about New York.” (COLOMINA, 2007: 134-135)

⁴⁴ “In this obscure treasure trove, we found one phenomenal card after another. Early models of Rockefeller Centre never realised” (VRIESENDORP, 2008)

⁴⁵ “The unbuilt Coney Island Globe Tower, glowing with lights; shots of Manhattan’s subterranean underbelly exposed; firemen fighting flames. Dozens of incredible images, many of which made it into the book.” (VRIESENDORP, 2008)

⁴⁶ “At the junction of the 19th and 20th centuries, Coney Island is the incubator for Manhattan’s incipient themes and infant mythology. The strategies and mechanisms that later shape Manhattan are tested in the laboratory of Coney Island before they finally leap toward the larger island. Coney Island IS a foetal Manhattan.” (KOOLHAAS, 1994: 30)

⁴⁷ “She has played a role in forming the image of [Rem Koolhaas’s] early work, and continued to bring to architecture the fresh perspective of an outsider. Her unexpected vision is created by allowing objects to set up an unintended narrative, that is, a story outside the usual bounds of literature.” (JENCKS, 2008)

⁴⁸ “These works weren’t created for commission! - [Vriesendorp] comments smiling, almost hesitantly in Basel. -They were created as the result of an in-depth analysis of the possibilities provided by architecture- and accordingly mark the moment when the rigid corset of modernism seemed to be entirely exhausted.” (LUCARELLI, 2014)

⁴⁹ “Nothing was made for the book,” she asserts. “It was all my series. It was not a collaboration. He just used it.” (CARD, 2019)

⁵⁰ “In an interview towards the end of *The World of Madelon Vriesendorp*, Shumon Basar muses to Rem Koolhaas: “Delirious New York seems to have been written with the help of Salvador Dali’s paranoid-critical method (PCM). Proofs are important for his method, even if they are wrong or fake. I’ve sometimes thought that in Delirious New York the proofs are missing, and this is where Madelon’s paintings come into play. You described the critical part of PCM as being to fabricate artificial proofs for an idea. In your collaboration, Maddie seems to be the critical part, and you the paranoid one.” [To which Koolhaas replies:] “You’re right. Her ability was totally crucial.” Here we see that Basar has identified the two roles here needed for the PCM to be successful, with Koolhaas as the paranoid, with his irrational, poetic, fantastical analysis of Manhattan, and Vriesendorp as the ‘critique’, developing these stories, compressing them and fabricating these paintings which give life to Koolhaas’s ideas, allowing the manifesto to be credible and compelling.” (LUCARELLI, 1994)

⁵¹ See Madelon Vriesendorp’s website. Available at:

<https://www.madelonvriesendorp.com/earlyworks> [March 2021]

⁵² “On a factual level, the curators Shumon Basar and Stephen Trüby want to correct the common misapprehension that the paintings were commissioned to illustrate the book. This is a simple matter of chronology: the paintings were made in 1974 and 75, while the book was written a couple of years later. What proves more difficult to unravel is the interplay between Vriesendorp’s fanciful imagery and Koolhaas’ theories.” (KING, 2008)

⁵³ “Madelon Vriesendorp’s world of esoteric art was for too many years frozen and crushed by over-exposure to the disproportionate fortunes of the OMA think tank, created together with her ex-super-husband. “My name is Koolhaas, Rem Koolhaas,” one of the planet’s most influential architects seems to repeat.” (DE CARO, 2010: 98-102)

⁵⁴ “I started collecting postcards seriously in the 1970s, when my husband and I were living in Ithaca. He was working on the book that would become *Delirious New York*, and we would drive from town to town, searching for material. [...] Later, when we moved to the city, we joined the New York Postcard Club, which met every Monday in a generic building on Broadway and Eighth Street.” (VRIESENDORP, 2008)

⁵⁵ “[...] though Vriesendorp’s works have also become iconic as illustrations of the text, her name has been missed off credits or the paintings described as commissioned by Koolhaas. - Nothing was made for the book, - she asserts. - It was all my series. It was not a collaboration. He just used it.” (CARD, 2019)

⁵⁶ “The tendency to appropriate, miscredit or sideline Vriesendorp’s work was addressed in 2008 when the Architectural Association (AA) staged a major retrospective entitled *The World of Madelon Vriesendorp: Paintings/Postcards/Objects/Games*. Curated by cultural programme director Shumon Basar and theorist Stephan Trüby, the show consisted of etchings, watercolours, gouache and oils alongside her collection of objects, postcards, trinkets and cardboard maquettes.” (CARD, 2019)

⁵⁷ The term was used by Walter Benjamin in his influential 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Benjamin argued that “even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: Its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.” He referred to this unique cultural context i.e. “its presence in time and space” as its “aura”. (Tate.org.uk/art terms) (BENJAMIN, 1969: 217).

⁵⁸ “In this project, the grid – the modernist tool par excellence – is freed of the incumbency of mediating any context and traces an abstract and potentially infinite archipelago of “Cities in the City”. Each “island” corresponds with a city block of this theoretical Manhattan. If, at its origin, the blocks of New York’s urban grid had generated diverse buildings simply on a formal level, then during the adult phase of Manhattanism, a growing programmatic complexity and the development of technologies transformed each project into a potential “ideological laboratory”, reducing the city to a catalogue of Avant-garde movements”. (LUCARELLI, 2014)



⁵⁹ “The drawing of the city features illustrations, presented as examples, of fourteen buildings representing the same number of ideologies, a sort of private Valhalla of OMA at the time and a sampling of the theoretical ingredients destined to nurture the notion of Manhattanism.” (LUCARELLI, 2014)

⁶⁰ “[And] OMA, founded by Vriesendorp with Zoe and Elia Zenghelis and Rem Koolhaas, has always been shrouded in myths. Some self-manufactured, others accumulated. Especially those early years, which – though she remarks ‘were just messing around, having fun’ – are passing into architectural lore.” (JACOB, 2018)