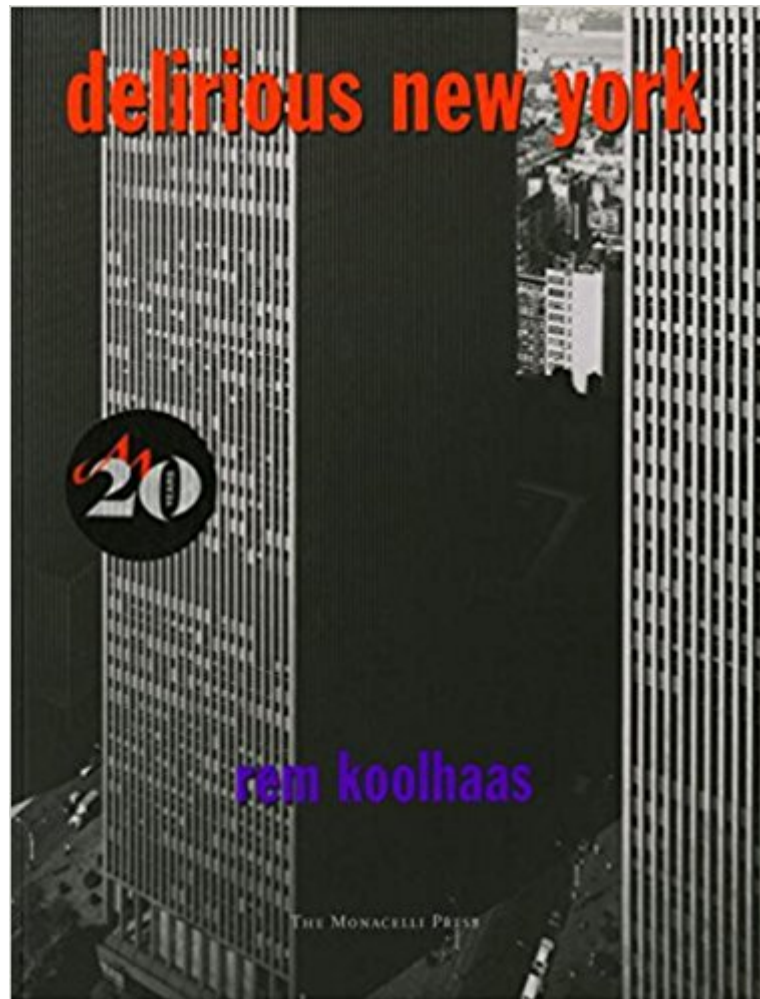


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Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto For Manhattan



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

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: The Monacelli Press (December 1, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1885254008

ISBN-13: 978-1885254009

Product Dimensions: 7.2 x 0.9 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (33 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #36,851 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Criticism](#) #14 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Urban & Land Use Planning](#) #17 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > History](#)

Customer Reviews

While "Delirious" has its fair share of archispeak, Mr. Koolhaas pulls off an intelligent, fun and thought-provoking take on the early 20th century building culture of New York. One of the quirkiest (and frankly, awesome/bravadoish) aspects of "Delirious" is Mr. Koolhaas's analysis of Coney

Island: an "incubator for Manhattan's incipient themes." As a reader, one initially questions the inclusion of such a trashy place in such a lofty manifesto. However, as the chapter progresses, you start to see Mr. Koolhaas's iconoclastic brilliance. He pays an amazing homage to "the laboratory" that was Coney Island, illuminating the vital role it played in the building philosophies that would emerge later in Manhattan. Scattered throughout "Delirious," also, are compelling supporting images that Mr. Koolhaas clearly spent a lot of time digging up. In fact, flipping through the book for the images alone makes for a near-equivalent, and fun, learning experience. However, unlike his tasteful use of images, Mr. Koolhaas's flamboyant use of scholarly English makes his writing difficult to digest at times: "It is probably inevitable that a doctrine based on the continual simulation of pragmatism, on a self-imposed amnesia that allows the continuous reenactment of the same subconscious themes in ever new reincarnations and on inarticulateness systematically cultivated in order to operate more effectively..." Given Mr. Koolhaas's journalism background (and assumed mastery of writing), I suspect he made the conscious decision to remain somewhat inaccessible to preserve his "lofty" image. While such a decision may be understandable, his brilliance as a writer often gets overshadowed by the sheer irritation of trying to understand him.

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.

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