"Basically, I think I can do architecture as a journalist, and one of the most interesting things about journalism is that it is a profession without a discipline. Journalism is only a regime of curiosities, applicable to any subject, and I would say this is still a very important driving factor in my architecture."

"Architecture is a curiously old subject, with a kind of terrain and laws and interests that are in some cases more than 4,000 years old. By contrast, we are today at the exact moment when you could say the whole world has become the subject of architecture."

"We are at a moment when almost all cultures are not only colliding but also interacting with and influencing each other. How we address these new conditions of flow and exchange is crucial to our work. I am interested in seeing whether we can work from within this condition to create new and better conditions. This remains a very important issue for us as architects."

"For me, the audience is both the people who produce a building and the people who use it, the people who walk past it and even the people who enjoy the final triumphant image, an image with flatness like a tourist brochure, or an image on the internet, images that exist in a constant and endless dialogue."

With the tensions between globalization and 'local' interests, Koolhaas is trying to become a global expert. It is about the local culture, if it is currently poised in terms of its economy, part of the global market.

In the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale (2014), Koolhaas highlighted the effects of globalization on architecture or more precisely, the effects of global architecture on the local culture.

As a journalist, in the era of the internet, the modern day printing press, the book that killed architecture, Koolhaas (like Eisenman) turned to words as his site and materials to construct his architecture.

Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto of Manhattan (1978), globalization spreads in the metropolis and Manhattan is the quintessential metropolis, a collective experiment of man-made experience where real and natural cease to exist. The product of an unformulated theory, the splendors and miseries of the metropolitan condition: hyper-density, the exploitation of congestion.

In 1811, to parcel off Manhattan island, 12 north/south avenues and 155 east/west streets define 2,028 blocks, a matrix capturing all remaining territory and all future activity: the Manhattan Grid.

Unoccupied land divided, a conceptual speculation, indifferent to topography, the subjugation and obliteration of nature its ambition. Dimensionally identical, individual identity erased, developers must invent differentiation, create value.

Finite in the number of blocks, conventional growth outward is denied. Occupancy is at the expense/denial of another's existence. New form of growth develops up, the infinite multiplication of the ground plane: the Skyscraper. Only possible by the invention of the elevator, continuity of space is no longer functionally necessary, no longer needed contiguous spatial relationships.
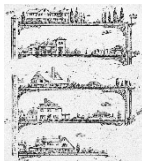
Stacked/layered floors created individual privacies, independent of each other, particular sites no longer matched with predetermined purpose, unforeseeable and unstable combinations of simultaneous activities, planning is limited predictability. The skyscraper becomes the metropolitan destabilizer, programmatic instability.

"The permanence of even the most frivolous item of architecture and the instability of the metropolis are incompatible. Architecture is reduced to the status of a plaything. In Manhattan this paradox is resolved in a brilliant way: its interiors accommodate compositions of program and activity that change constantly and independently of each other without affecting the (exterior) envelope. The genius of Manhattan is the simplicity of this divorce between appearance and performance: it keeps the illusion of architecture intact, while surrendering whole heartedly to the needs of the metropolis."

In Delirious NY, Koolhaas tells the Story of the Pool (1977): a long rectangle (Manhattan block) of metal sheets bolted onto a steel frame, placed in water it became a floating swimming pool. Improving the world through architecture, it was an enclave of purity in contaminated surroundings (W. Berlin/E. Germany).

Discovered if they swam in unison (communism), the pool would move slowly in opposite direction, use as a vehicle for escape to freedom (Berlin wall), across the Atlantic, reaching NYC after 4 decades. "When they finally arrived, they hardly noticed it – they had to swim away from where they wanted to go, toward what they wanted to get away from. Had Communism reached America while they were crossing the Atlantic?"

New Yorkers criticized the design of the pool, against Modernism now, the pool was too bland, so rectilinear, no decoration, only straight lines and right angles. The Pool/Block threatened them, a closed system, inserted in any situation, purity floating in the streams of chaos. Like a thermometer/dipstick that could be inserted into their projects to take the temperature of their decadence.

Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture (AA thesis, 1972) defines Wall as the central parti to the project, the aspects of a wall (division, isolation, inequality) could create a new phenomenon of a desirable alternative.

A strip of metropolitan desirability runs through center of London, a landing strip for new architectural monuments, two walls enclose and protect this zone from contamination by cancerous organism that threatens to engulf it.

Inhabitants of a walled oasis would be voluntary prisoners ecstatic in the freedom of architectural confines, collective facilities that accommodate individual desires, continuous state of ornamental frenzy & decorative delirium, overdose of symbols.

S, M, L, XL (1995) unsurpassed in design publishing, the book by which all other architectural monographs are measured.

Imagining Nothingness (1985): "Where there is nothing, everything is possible. Where there is architecture, nothing (else) is possible."

Ville Nouvelle, Melun-Sénart (Paris competition, 1987), inspired by Corbusier's Ville Radieuse. Juxtaposes chaos of the city with unplanned strips, either as erasure (void bands) or for chaotic urban growth (Liberty Zones).

"All definitions of what the city might be have proved unsuccessful. Hence, randomness and incoherence are basically the underlying condition of architecture today. Architecture is a hazardous mixture of omnipotence and impotence."

"To rid architecture of responsibilities it can no longer sustain and to explore this new freedom aggressively. Since we are no longer responsible, we have to become irresponsible. The unbuilt as the last source of the sublime, (in order) to treat the built as we formerly did nature."
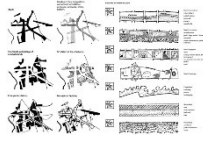
"As left-out spaces, thereby protected from contamination by the city, they are seen as enabling fields, territories with potential for any kind of activity, but kept free from architecture."

"Carefully define what we did not want to do, asking 'where not to build?' Avoiding determination and specificity of program, voids present room for unexpected new options (Event-Structure)."

"These void bands should present attractive urban elements of beauty, serenity, accessibility, identity. They should surrender to the uncontrollable growth of city, developing independently so the urban fabric is flexible."
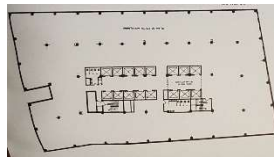
"Typical Plan (1993) is an American invention. It is zero degree architecture, stripped of all traces of uniqueness and specificity, without identity."
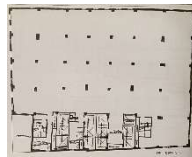
"It belongs to the New world. It is the end of Architectural History, which is nothing but the hysterical fetishization of the atypical plan. The plan without qualities is the great quest of American building."
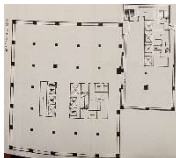
"The superiority of the artificial to the real, the true credo of Western civilization, the source of its universal attraction."
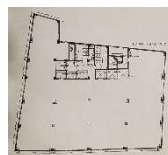
"Can the bland be amplified?"

"Can the featureless be exaggerated?"

"Is the contemporary city like the contemporary airport, all the same?"
"What if this seemingly accidental – and usually regrettable – homogenization were an intentional process, a conscious movement away from difference toward similarity?"

"What if we are witnessing a global liberation movement: 'down with character!' What is left after identity is stripped? The Generic?"

"The residual. To abandon what doesn't work, what has outlived its use. Accept whatever grows in its place. All that remains of what used to be the city."

"The Generic City (1994) presents the final death of planning. Planning makes no difference whatsoever. Buildings flourish/perish unpredictably. Nobody knows where, how, since when the sewers run, the exact location of the telephone lines, what the reason was for the position of the center. Infinite hidden margins, colossal reservoirs of slack, a perpetual, organic process of adjustment. In this apotheosis of multiple choice it will never be possible again to reconstruct cause and effect. They work – that is all."

"The churning mass becomes oceanic. Waves break. Silence, a welcome relief. The viewer no longer registers only humans but begins to note spaces between them. The center empties, some debris that was trampled underfoot.
Relief… it is over. That is the story of the city. The city is no longer.
We can leave the theater now…"
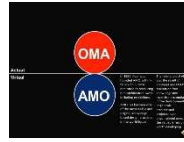
In 1999, the Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) spun off a sister company, AMO. Initially a research arm of OMA, it became a multi-national consultancy.

"The random sequence of commissions on which each architect depends is the opposite of an agenda. The birth of OMA's mirror image AMO enabled us to create knowledge independent of chance and to pursue our own interests in parallel to those of our clients."

In 2001, Koolhaas took a research position at Harvard, to further AMO's mission studying the built environment. The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping resulted and analyzed the consumerist transformation of city and suburb, from the first department store to the latest mega-mall.

Concluding, the parasite of the store becomes the host that supports other forms of life. Late 1980s marked the era of capitalism that operated by deregulation at all levels, producing not grand projects so much as junkspace from the Generic City.

"Rabbit is the new beef… Because we abhor the utilitarian, we have condemned ourselves to a lifelong immersion in the arbitrary. Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in process, its fallout."

"Junkspace is the sum total of our current achievement; we have built more than did all previous generations put together. Architecture disappeared in the 20th century; concern for the masses has blinded us to People's Architecture."

"It is always interior, so extensive that you rarely perceive limits; it promotes disorientation by any means (mirror, polish, echo). Junkspace is sealed, held together not by structure but by skin. Air-conditioning has launched the endless building. Conditioned space inevitably becomes conditional space."

"Instead of development, it offers entropy, it always leaks somewhere in Junkspace. Change has been divorced from the idea of improvement. There is no progress, like a crab on LSD, culture staggers endlessly sideways."

"Junkspace reduces what is urban to urbanity. Instead of public life, Public Space. In the third Millennium, Junkspace will assume responsibility for pleasure and religion, exposure & intimacy, public life & private. Inevitably, the death of God has spawned orphan space; authorless, yet surprisingly authoritarian. The dictatorial is no longer politics, but entertainment."

"New York's Prada Epicenter (2001) – an exclusive boutique, a public space, a gallery, a performance space, a laboratory – is part of OMA / AMO's ongoing research into shopping, arguably the last remaining form of public activity, and a strategy to counteract and destabilize any received notion of what Prada is, does, or will become."

"As museums, libraries, airports, hospitals, and schools become increasingly indistinguishable from shopping centres, their adoption of retail for survival has unleashed an enormous wave of commercial entrapment that has transformed museum-goers, researchers, travelers, patients, and students into customers. What if the equation were reversed, so that customers were no longer identified as consumers, but recognized as researchers, students, patients, museum-goers? What if the shopping experience were not one of impoverishment, but of enrichment?"

"The Wave – a curving space scooped out of the ground floor and opening it up to the basement – is the main element facilitating experimentation in what a fashion store can be. On one side, the slope has steps – ostensibly for displaying shoes and accessories – that can be used as a seating area, facing a stage that unfolds from the other side of the wave. The store thus becomes a venue for film screenings, performances, and lectures."

"Experimental technology, intriguing materials, and innovative display methods are utilized everywhere to enrich and transcend the shopping experience: customers touch a button to make the glass doors of the changing rooms opaque, and see their new clothes from various angles on video projections."

[10 MINUTE BREAK]

Koolhaas drew inspiration from Salvador Dali and viewed his life as research into the corruption and sickening aspects of society, turning his attention to the internal mechanisms and systematic associations peculiar to paranoid phenomena.
In particular, the Paranoid Critical Method (PCM): the spontaneous method of attaining knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectification of delirious associations and interpretations.

For Koolhaas, architecture is literally a paranoid critical activity reinforced by calculations and structures in order to bring together the rational and irrational side of the human mind.

Further, Koolhaas views ornamentation, form, structure as secondary to the conceptual apparatus, which is the institution. Disestablishing the authority of formal devices and thereby deinstitutionalizing the authority of the programmatic in the building.

How a building is perceived conceptually, culturally, politically, is paramount and these are the materials Koolhaas manipulates first in his designs.

For example, "Shopping has infiltrated, colonized, and replaced every aspect of urban life. The public realm costs money, it is no longer free, conditional space."

Today, "the (public) library stands exposed as outdated and moralistic at the moment that it has become the last repository of the free and the public."

The book has to compete with the explosive multiplication of information media. The library should no longer be defined as a free information store, but as a vital public place of encounter in the city. So, with the Seattle Central Library (2004), Koolhaas redefines the library as the mall.
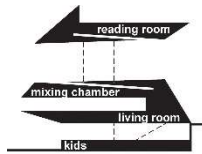
Each level was treated as shifting planes, destabilizing their internal relationships. Merging the attraction of the book and other media with social activities, the spaces in between provide trading floors for inspiration, work, interaction, stimulation, and play – encounters outside of preprogrammed structures/functions.

The Reading Room on the top are a series of terraces, providing public access to a panoramic view of the urban environment.

The Mixing Chamber is the intermediate floor between the reading & living rooms. A trading floor for information, cumulative human and technological intelligence.

Billboard sized screens display the latest arriving books, event information, member chat messages and international news. Librarians no longer tied to a desk, roam freely throughout the mixing chamber, with foot haloes illuminating the floor beneath their feet for people to locate them easily.

The Living Room is the third unstable level, an open social space directly off the Fifth Avenue entrance, the largest free public space in downtown Seattle. Includes a café, reception area, and open space for public performances/events.

Included in the design, but rejected by library administrators, were hospital units for the homeless – a nod toward Dali's delirious associations and interpretations.

"Beyond a certain scale, architecture acquires the properties of Bigness (1994). It can no longer be controlled by a single architectural gesture. Issues of composition, scale, proportion, detail are moot."

"The distance between (interior) core and (exterior) envelope increases to the point where the façade can no longer reveal what happens inside. Interior and exterior architectures become separate projects – the interior dealing with the instability of programmatic needs and the exterior an agent of disinformation offering the city the apparent stability of an object.

"Together, all these breaks (with scale, with architectural composition, with tradition, with transparency, with ethics) imply the final most radical break: Bigness is no longer part of any urban tissue. It exists; at most, it coexists."

"Bigness is the last bastion of architecture – a contraction, a hyper-architecture. The containers of Bigness will be landmarks in a post-architectural landscape – a world scraped of architecture: inflexible, immutable, definitive, forever there, generated through superhuman effort. Bigness surrenders the field to after-architecture."


China Central Television (CCTV), completed in 2008, is Koolhaas' masterwork.

The iconic form is what catches everybody's attention. It is the icon that is the building's function, it is its content. Form as content, not content as form.

Pushing the limit of vertical building, the skyscraper. The horizontal connections operate as dynamically important to the vertical building. The entire television operation is contained within the single structure, historically concealed and government controlled, the loop design provides a continuous path for the public to access, including the observation deck at the top.
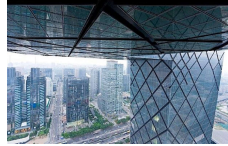
Accumulation of new facilities which can be used by the global culture for working with the media, a new condition in China.