

Rowe's great rhetorical sleight of hand was to convince some talented young architects that the problem of the modern city could be reduced to the reversal of figure and ground in Le Corbusier's urbanism. In this view, "Modernism" (i.e., Le Corbusier) was responsible for ruining the postwar city. It did not matter that in the United States the influence of Corbusian urbanism was limited to a few urban renewal projects—some civic spaces but mainly public housing. This was an almost total misreading of the material history of urbanization in the United States, in which suburbanization, industrial disinvestment, racial desegregation, and the popularity of the automobile played infinitely more decisive roles in the dissolution of centralized cities than Corbusian aesthetics. The United States was already subject to its own distinct form of modernization—rapid migrations of people and capital facilitated by profound technological transformations—well before European Modernism had its day. Then too the United States never had the great urban centers neotraditionalists would like to imagine. Yet, even in the pages of the *Harvard Design Magazine*, we still we have to endure Andrés Duany flogging his big-bad-Modernism hobbyhorse ad nauseam.¹² Forget the twentieth century: it is as if the nineteenth century never happened.

Urban Design III: Exporting Amerika

OMA's architecture is no doubt cosmopolitan in atmosphere, but does it provide an innovative model for urban design? Like Venturi and Scott Brown before him, Koolhaas established his intellectual credentials by theorizing the city, yet he has used his considerable influence to advance the cause of architecture more than the city. *Delirious New York* was a watershed for a postmodern urbanism, exporting Amerika by drawing a playbook from what was arguably the greatest city of modernity. His construal of urban context as an art of retroactive imagination established Koolhaas as among the rightful inheritors of the formal experiments at Cornell. He abandoned Rowe's preindustrial, Italophile sensibility and admitted the twentieth century into the collage: skyscrapers, highways, and the blank, elementarist aesthetics of Constructivism. Perhaps his most cunning invention came by way of his reading of the Downtown Athletic Club. Turning the Cornell School's obsessive focus on the figure-ground plan on its side, Koolhaas understood that in an archipelagic city of coagulated densities, the vertical section could be