8. *Strategies of the Void*
Rem Koolhaas, Jussieu Libraries, 1992-93
What does Walter Benjamin’s remark mean in reference to the iconic buildings of today?

“If Walter Benjamin, in his famous and oft-quoted remark, said that architecture is viewed in a state of distraction, then the iconic buildings so prevalent today may reflect this condition.”
“This prominence of iconic buildings relates to two factors: first, perhaps to a tendency to treat the diagram as an icon; second, a tendency to apply the iconic diagram directly to the problem of generating form.”
“Much of Rem Koolhaas’s earliest work explores the diagram as a symbolic form; for example, the New York Athletic Club becomes symbolic of a discontinuous formal diagram.”
“However, much of his recent work, such as the Seattle Public Library or the Casa da Musica in Porto, privileges the idea of an iconic diagram in that the realized form of the building has a visual similitude to its diagram of functions.”
“It can be argued that Koolhaas’s 1992 project for the Jussieu Libraries takes a position between these two types of diagrams – that is, that it marks an inflection point in Koolhaas’s shift from a symbolic to an iconic diagram, and that this movement is registered through a critique of the diagrams of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe.”

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“…Palais des Congres-Strasbourg…because in section the project implies a continuity between the ground and the roof…denies the ground as a datum by suggesting that the ground is conceived as a malleable fabric, capable of being pulled up to meet the roof.”
What is poche?

“...Koolhaas uses the void... an inversion of poche”
While architects such as Luigi Moretti sought to solidify the void, Koolhaas instead seeks to capture its energy by conceptualizing the void as a latent force contained between layers of solid floors.
Lecture 9: Rem Koolhaas, Jussieu Libraries, 1992-93

How does void become poche in Tres Grande Bibliotheque?

“'Strategy of the Void'...describes the library as a solid stack from which volumes are carved...’The major public spaces are defined as absences of building, voids carved out of the information solid.’”

“...the project conceives the void not only as a critique of modernist precedents, but also as a means to rethink the relationship between the subject and the object of architecture, and ultimately to suggest another form of close reading.”
“...the expansion of which had been initially truncated by the student uprisings of May 1968. Koolhaas (describes) being powerfully affected by the events of 1968 and the literary and cultural theories generated in its wake.”

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Discuss the ‘subject’ and ‘object’ in the above images with the statement below.

“These challenged the humanist notion of the subject and the modernist notion of the object as a part of a rational whole.”
“…the fragment cannot help but to recall an absent ‘whole,’ and in that sense maintains, at least in concept, a traditional part-to-whole relationship. The post 1968 generation…reflected alternative ways to view the subject, drawing on structuralist and poststructuralist theory.”

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“A second aspect of Koolhaas’s strategy of the void involves creating situations which introduce a voyeuristic gaze and in which the voided space both blocks direct vision and reveals supposedly hidden elements.”
How is the ‘lifting up’ different for Le Corbusier and Koolhaas?

“…the surface is malleable and pliable, that it is no longer specifically related to the ground, and it partakes in a vertical continuum…in lifting up the city’s fabric, a hidden aspect of its infrastructure is revealed as an underlying object.”

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Describe the New York Athletic Club as contiguous discontinuity in the New York Athletic Club.

“It is not a traditional diagram of function, but is rather a diagram symbolic of the dismantling of the traditional physical contiguity of part-to-whole relationships.”
“…contiguous discontinuity, also appears in Koolhaas’s entry for the 1982 Parc de La Villette competition in Paris.”
Discuss figure ground using the two images above.

“Koolhaas’s La Villette proposal breaks with a figure/ground urbanism to propose a montage of programmatic lateral bands linked by the strong vertical of a proposed promenade.”
Compare the two images above. Why is the comparison of these two specific project types important?

“This is a clear echo of the New York Athletic Club…”
“This denial of the ground as a datum begins to appear in Koolhaas’s project for the Tres Grande Bibliothèque in 1993, which further develops Koolhaas’s diagram of contiguous discontinuity in the section of the building.”
Discuss the statement below using the images above.

“This structural system also could be seen as a critique of Mies’s umbrella diagram.”
How is the convention center in Morocco a critique of the Maison Dom-ino?

“The 1990 project for a convention center at Agadir, Morocco, presents a critique of the horizontal extension of space proposed by Le Corbusier with his Maison Dom-ino diagram.
Describe the three types of sectional interpretations.

“...one, the ground becomes modulated; two, the sectional space becomes modulated where the ground rises substantially in the section; and three, the horizontal is no longer a continuum.”
Discuss the figured void and figured poche.

“...proposes a figured section where the horizontal is a figured void cut out of an equally figured solid poche.”
What is Eisenman saying differentiates Koolhaas from others before him?

“Koolhaas introduces a horizontal disturbance in section as a dominant mode of discourse rather than the vertical extrusion typical of classical architecture and present in the work of postwar American architects such as Louis Kahn.”
Why would this condition be called a ‘performative discourse?’

“The resultant *coup d’oeil* and peripheral views shift the focus of opticality from the physical object to the subject...becoming a part of a different kind of spatial relationship between subject and object...*performative discourse*.”

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“While the Jussieu Libraries project of 1992-93 is essentially a vertical project, the warped floors signal an evolution from Agadir.”
“Conceptually the circulation and the floor levels become a continuous surface, yet the project retains a discontinuous relationship in terms of a Cartesian axiality.”
“There are spaces in Jussieu which allow a voyeuristic tendency to take place..begins with the Jussieu Libraries and continues…in the Seattle Library.”
“The unfolded section of the Jussieu Libraries competition entry becomes a critique of Koolhaas’s earlier New York Athletic Club diagram, and produces an entirely new diagram that focuses on the internal continuity of surfaces.”

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“The sections also suggest that the only real volumes in the building are the interstitial spaces between floors.”

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“At Jussieu, as in the Tres Grande Bibliotheque, Koolhaas retains aspects of classical architectural notation...”
“The cross section of the Jussieu Libraries expresses the discontiguous relationships of program, and the continuity of the ramped floors produces an entirely other section, no longer the stacked layers of the New York Athletic Club or La Villette.”

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“…suggest a departure from architecture as a product of close attention…linking the issue of the void – present in the postwar work of Moretti and Venturi – to new methods of working that confront questions about part-to-whole relationships, inattention versus close attention, disjunction versus fragmentation.”

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“These voided elements, which are rendered as gray solids in the large competition model, cannot be read as purely poche, nor as purely figure.”
“The energy, whether it is registered in different shapes, horizontal cuts, spirals, or ramping floors, does not disturb the edge. This contrasts with the edge stress of cubist painting and the centrifugal stress of Venturi’s and Moretti’s work.”
"At Jussieu, these is neither a centralized stress, nor a stress at the edge. Rather, the stress is diffused; it appears in the different layers of the object, particularly when the only centralizing figure is clearly thrown off center, but not enough to be seen as moving toward the edge."

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“The void produces a space of unresolved tension between center and edge. It is this irresolution that introduces what has been called here the idea of undecideability.”
“The void produces a space of unresolved tension between center and edge. It is this irresolution that introduces what has been called here the idea of undecideability.”
“...the floor and the circulation are joined as a single element. The Jussieu Libraries become the model for many of the later projects, including the Seattle Library, the Casa da Musica in Porto, and the Dutch Embassy in Berlin...”
“...the critical and theoretical arguments condensed in Jussieu’s model, drawings, and section give way to an increasingly iconic use of the diagram by Koolhaas at the Seattle Public Library and at the Casa da Musica.”

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“…Koolhaas’s work begins to suggest another attitude toward close reading. When the reading of the diagram approaches the reading of the building, close reading is no longer necessary…They give up close reading for the immediacy of shape and a more popular appeal: the diagram as logo and branding.”