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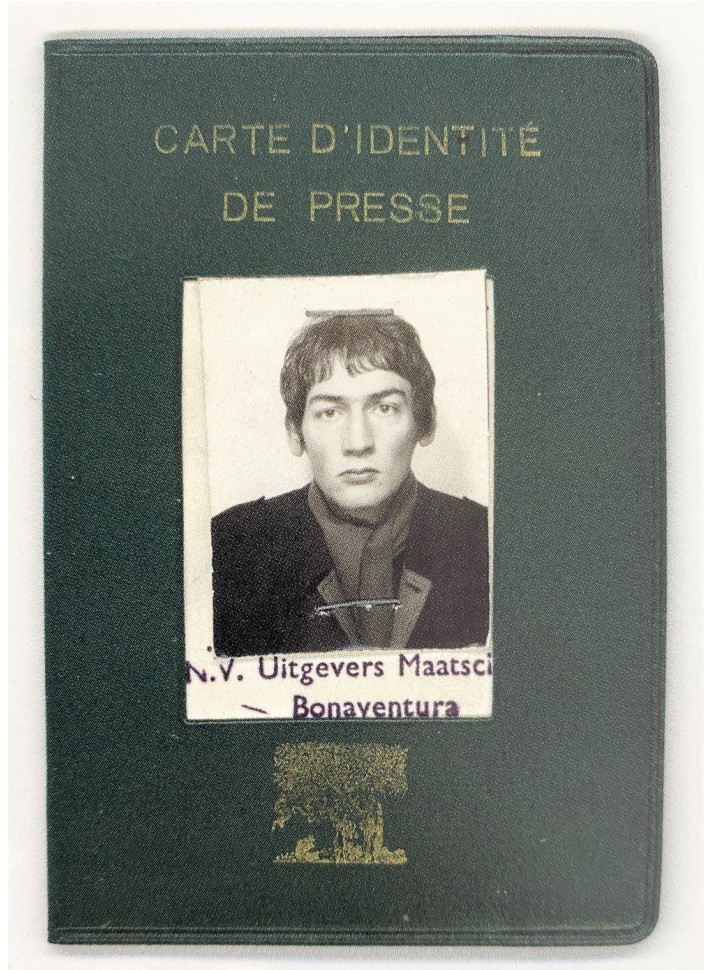
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Koolhaas. Journalism, Architecture, and the Power of Information

Antonio Cantero



Before Rem Koolhaas designed buildings, he designed narratives. This essay explores how his early journalism turned interviews into architecture, treated data as cultural, not computational.

In 1966, Rem Koolhaas, then a young journalist, interviewed writer Harry Mulisch. The author told him: “You can practice politics like a honeybee or a hornet. Almost all politicians are honeybees, but the Provos are hornets. They sting you where no one usually does”. The interview, published in *Haagse Post*,

encapsulated what Koolhaas himself would become—not just as a journalist, but later as an architect: a constructor of narratives.

Long before Koolhaas designed buildings or theorised cities, he gathered data. His years at *Haagse Post* (1963–1968) were a relentless exercise in observation—a training ground for information mining before the term *big data* had been coined. His data were never numerical. He was not quantifying movement patterns or mapping density figures; instead, he was extracting cultural and political intelligence from the gestures, words, and silences of the figures he interviewed. His raw material was conversation, his methodology was close reading, his algorithm was intuition.



Mosaic of pages from Haagse Post and Eva Magazine from the 1960s featuring Rem Koolhaas's contributions / Haagse Post and Eva Magazine, 1963–68. Mosaic by Antonio Cantero

The Newspaper Studio

Unlike the architects of his time, who often relied on historical precedent or personal vision, Koolhaas trained himself to read the present. Each of his interviews probed how power, culture, and ideology operated in the built environment. His interviewees ranged from Le Corbusier to Federico Fellini, from countercultural Provos to Amsterdam hippies, from influential writers to sex professionals. It was an expanded field of architecture—one that included not just buildings but also the ways that people lived in and narrated their worlds.

In *Haagse Post*, journalism was more than reporting: it was an epistemological experiment. Under the leadership of the journalist Sylvia Brandts Buys, together with artist Armando, and under the influence of the *Nul* movement, the newspaper encouraged a style of writing that was both detached and immersive. Koolhaas absorbed this. He learned to observe without imposing, letting data emerge organically from conversations.

The essays he published in *Haagse Post* wove together data he'd gathered from interviews. The resulting pieces transcended

straightforward journalism, expressing not just the news or the opinions of influential men and women but also the underlying power dynamics. The subjects spoke, but Koolhaas shaped their words, framing the larger subject. He selected which contradictions to highlight, which details to amplify. The data was already there, but the data mattered less than its interpretation.

Constructing Interviews

What happens when an architect is trained to interpret culture before he learns to interpret space? Koolhaas's trajectory suggests that journalism was his first architecture. He did not sketch plans; he sketched ideological landscapes. His interviews with figures like Constant Nieuwenhuys, who envisioned the nomadic *New Babylon*, or Le Corbusier, whose utopianism was already tarnished, were less about the individuals and more about mapping emergent urban conditions.

This process of data collection did not end when Koolhaas transitioned into architecture; it evolved. At *Haagse Post*, he had already treated the interview as more than a method for gathering information; it was a tool for editing reality, framing contradictions, and revealing how narratives shape power. His architectural practice absorbed this approach. He did not abandon the interview; he expanded it. The structured conversations of *Metabolism Talks*, the provocative exchanges of his *Interview Marathons*, and the many interviews embedded in his publications are not auxiliary to his work—they are integral to it.

If his early journalism was an experiment in decoding ideology through dialogue, his architectural work turned the interview into a generative act—one that produces, rather than merely documents, architectural thinking. His conversations with clients, theorists, and politicians are not peripheral; they sit at the center of the project—at its beginning. Like a data set, an interview is raw material, but its meaning depends on interpretation. Koolhaas does not just extract data; he reconfigures it, reframing discussions as speculative exercises which challenge assumptions. If an architectural sketch captures space before it is built, Koolhaas's interviews capture thought before it solidifies into form. The interview, in this sense, is not just a method of inquiry; it is an architectural device in its own right—a way of structuring ideas that can inform design practice.



Collage of fragments from Rem Koolhaas's contributions to *Haagse Post* and *Eva Magazine* in the 1960s / *Haagse Post* and *Eva Magazine*, 1963–68. Collage by Antonio Cantero

Narrative Data

Koolhaas's training at *Haagse Post* anticipated an architectural intelligence that is now more relevant than ever. In a time marked by data-driven frameworks, his work suggests a counterpoint: that data is not just what can be quantified, but also what can be narrated. The way a city is spoken about is as revealing as its infrastructure; the way people describe their spaces is as important as their blueprints.

His interviews functioned like an early form of crowdsourced spatial analysis. He was, in essence, running a social algorithm—testing responses, gathering anomalies, tracking patterns in discourse. His ability to navigate these narratives became the foundation for his architectural strategies. Koolhaas's method suggests that architects could be not just data analysts but also data storytellers. The path forward may lie not only in collecting more data, but in learning how to interpret the data we already have—how to listen, how to frame, how to extract meaning from the noise. After all, an architect, as a journalist, is the one who knows exactly where to *sting* to obtain data.



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explores the formative years of Ren Koolhaas and the cultural forces that shaped his early thinking.

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