

IN WHICH

BLU
DREAMS OF
REM KOOLHAAS
AND TONKOTSU
RAMEN.

Here is Yolo,
grump,
grump,
grump,
standing on the grey
stone steps outside the old
Central Post Office, in
Auckland, waiting for Blu
who is late. It is, as far as
she knows, close to 1pm or
thereabouts but she *feels* it
must be well after the hour,
although she could in fact
confirm this intuition, if only
she would stop being out
of sorts with the world and
pause long enough to look up
and consult the large
station clock, directly
overhead.



Steps, old Central Post Office, main entrance, Britomart
Transport Centre, downtown Auckland

“Come on, Bro,” thinks Yolo. She watches a stream of Asian students pour out of downtown language schools and tertiary training providers, and swarm over the pedestrian crossing at the bottom of Queen Street, in a concentrated but determined march toward a revolutionary lunch. “Where’s the Red Guard when you need them?”

“Where’s the who?” asks Blu from the pavement, his classic-fit jeans, extra large secondary school boys’ long sleeved shirt and grey-green beanie giving him the appearance of an unnervingly tall 13 year old, except of course for the well-trimmed beard he wore with his usual self-assured but grown-up aplomb. “At your service, M’Dear.”

Yolo is not amused. “Yeah right, Her Majesty’s Secret I ‘spose.” Fearful of a fall, she grasps the heavy safety-compliant stainless steel handrail, launches herself forward down the cavernous concrete staircase and out on to the street.

Blu is taking photographs and crouches before a large polished granite plaque framed by a try-hard gilt monogram and crown. The inscription reads:



Detail, main entrance, Britomart Transport Centre, downtown Auckland

THIS BUILDING WAS REOPENED FOR PUBLIC BUSINESS
AS THE MAIN ENTRANCE
TO THE BRITOMART TRANSPORT CENTRE BY
THE HON. JOHN BANKS OSO
MAYOR OF AUCKLAND CITY
ON THE 5TH JULY 2003

He peers into the viewfinder. "Bring back Banksie. All is forgiven, eh?" Blu makes an adjustment to his screen. "Still, the Hon. Jon. should have been up-front about accepting joy-rides in helicopters and over-generous philanthropic cheques written by fat Germans." *Click!* "No such thing as a free lunch."



Street front, Britomart Transport Centre, with old Central Post Office clock and bollards, downtown Auckland

"Really?" says Yolo unimpressed. "That's what I'm here for - it's your shout, remember?"

"I know," says Blu, lining up his Smartphone for another shot, "lunch, on me, but first, a short circulatory loop."

Yolo resists. "Why?"

“Architecture.” Yolo pretends not to hear him. “And digestion,” grins Blu, beaming with that irritating but ordinarily adorable baby brother cuteness. “Besides, walking is good for you. Strengthens the appetite.”

“You think so?” replies Yolo, eyeing up the overpriced New York-style hot-dog cart parked just round the corner. “If I wanted exercise I’d go to the gym.”

Blu ignores her, “This way, Most-Loved-Honourable-No. 1-Sister-of-Mine. Kōkiri!” and he is off across the road.

When Yolo catches up, Blu seems overcome by the most mundane and uninspired fence to enclose a demolition site since the fall of the Roman Empire. “Look!” he exclaims. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”



Downtown Auckland 'void,' view from Britomart Transport Centre

Yolo is lost for words.

“Exactly,” murmurs Blu, unaware his sibling is about to pop a pulmonary artery. “Sublime.”

“What is?” asks Yolo, feeling more than a little peckish and instantly resentful of an invasive advertising hoarding confidently asserting ‘HERE THE CITY BEGINS.’

“What is what?” asks Blu.

“Beautiful.”

“This is,” Blu says raising both arms toward the sky, “the void. The beautiful, ineffable, void.” Like a Tai Chi master in the park, he begins a slow, measured capture of the space between. Happy, he sighs.

Yolo has had enough. “Cut that out, Kung-Fu Kingi. Bruce Lee left the building in 1973.”

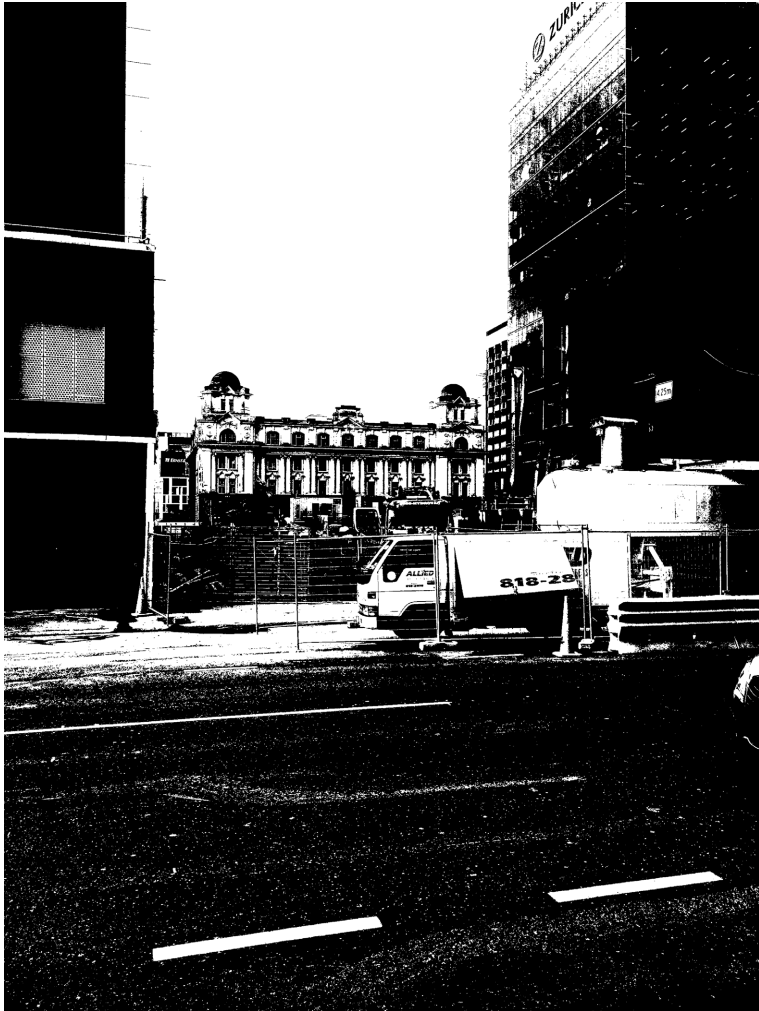
“Yes Grasshopper,” nods Blu sagely. His hands sweep through the air in a smooth, singular description of Zen-like movement. He exhales with satisfaction and calmly returns to a position of rest. “It’s all here, Sister. Rem Koolhaas’ *The Strategy of the Void*, also known as, what to do with an enormous hole.” He laughs.

“What hole?” asks Yolo who is feeling anything but Zen. “Where?” She looks down, annoyed, and considers the uneven, pockmarked tarmac all around her. She is sad. “F-ugly billboard was right. Downtown Auckland is a hole.”

Blu focuses her attention. “See?” he says, pointing to a brilliant shaft of daylight. “The void is the hole or gap that now exists in the space between those two buildings.” He snuggles in toward her. “I just love the freedom and openness of it.”

“Good for you,” mutters Yolo, in love with neither.

Blu gives his sibling a gentle hug. "The void is such an uncertain condition. It's a space where things are about to happen or might happen. That's exciting, don't you think?" Before Yolo can reply he rips off another photograph *Click!* and is on the move again.



Downtown Auckland 'void,' view from Lower Albert Street across to Britomart Transport Centre

Reluctantly, Yolo trails after her brother, who has already negotiated the makeshift plaza that has appeared since the removal of the Downtown Shopping Centre. The two of them are standing in Lower Albert Street, Blu intent on grabbing a pic of Britomart and the old C.P.O. through the new, open space opposite him. "Amazing," he says, holding out his phone. "Incredible how a gap like this can suddenly propose a view of something not previously possible."

Click!

"It's as if QEII Square has been lifted up and elevated into the air. Become a flying piazza or carpet, maybe." Blu takes a step back. "Magic, really. The void is so open to interpretation. Your imagination can take off. Go where it wants to go, do what it wants to do. Play, be real or unreal." He zooms in. "But the best thing," he confides conspiratorially, "whatever the projections, you as the architect, are in control of the space and what happens there."

"Can we eat?" protests Yolo, "I'm hungry."

"Soon!" says Blu "nearly there." Slalom-like, he sidesteps a row of fluoro orange road cones and swooshes away, down the slope, toward Quay Street and the sea. Yolo struggles, but with her short legs pumping, she almost keeps up. Blu is looking at the hole where the Downtown Shopping Centre once was. The site

is walled in, defined by monitored restrictions to access and an oppressive security presence, some of which hide controversial excavations for the City Rail Link. "So empty," observes Blu. "It's like our Ground Zero, hopefully located in a parallel universe somewhere near the CCTV building in Beijing." He checks his pace. "Imagine that. What if Rem Koolhaas was working right here? Now he's an architect who can take a building for a walk." "Run, more like," puffs Yolo, out of breath.

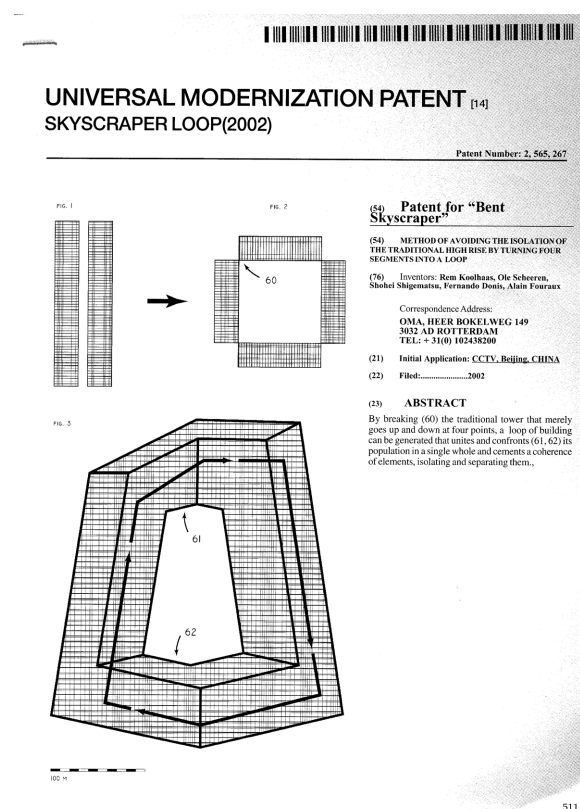
Blu waits for his sister. "After 9/11 it was Koolhaas who re-imagined the World Trade Center as a new kind of high-rise. When the Twin Towers collapsed, his idea was to re-make the fallen skyscrapers not by raising them up, but by bending and contorting the structures to create a totally new shape he called a 'continuous loop.'"

"Can't see the Americans going for a concept like that as their grand monument to the War Against Terror," says Yolo.

"They didn't. But the Chinese did." Blu strides forward. "Koolhaas' radical re-design of the skyscraper was realised by his now legendary proposal for the new headquarters for China Central Television in Beijing, where literally the act of walking was taken and turned into a building. Like a skyscraper being folded in on itself, twisted and bent over backwards." Blu smiles. "Apparently, local people call the building *Big Pants*."

"Bet I could get into them," complains Yolo, "my waistband is killing me."

"Ever thought of some calculated 'X' bracing to relieve that stress?" asks Blu, "Perhaps an occasional touch of exterior reinforcing as support for the load on the body? Or maybe a dash of OMA applied physics and engineering?" He slips his arm



Rem Koolhaas, Ole Scheeren, Shohai Shigematsu, Fernando Donis, Alain Fournaux, *Universal Modernization Patent, Skyscraper Loop, Bent Skyscraper (2002)*, Rem Koolhaas, Brendan McGettrick, Office for Metropolitan Architecture, *Content: Triumph of Realization*, Köln: Taschen 2004, p.511

through the crook of her elbow and squeezes up close. "Next thing you know, you'll be a model for Koolhaas!"

Although Yolo is perspiring a little she still has energy to appreciate his joke. "Yeah. Nah. Jenny Craig Apartments, Bro, with parking garage by Weight Watchers International."

The siblings are walking into a stiff wind funnelled by the Ferry Building. Blu shivers. Even for someone incredibly athletic Yolo thinks he is way too thin. "Koolhaas' architecture really makes you sensitive to your own body," says Blu, tightly zipping up his lightweight jacket. "CCTV totally understands circulation and the need for people to be warm in relationships that connect with each other."

To avoid an over-full rubbish bin, Yolo has to step off the pavement and into the street. The uncollected refuse is an indictment. Blu also has to pick his way through the debris. "Koolhaas suggests that if an architect is going to think at all, they might as well think big. Not necessarily big expansive buildings but big ideas – ones with functional departments of sanitation, we trust."

Yolo can't really take any more of her brother's 'short circulatory loop' and is about to give up the ghost. "Not now," Blu encourages



Molly Macalister, *A Māori figure in a kaitaka cloak* (1967), bronze, Quay Street, downtown Auckland

her, "treat you to an extra large bowl of gluten free noodles. Fancy some spicy pork flavour, myself."

Yolo forces herself to make one last effort. "Chinatown here we come!"

Together they turn on the diagonal from dingy Quay Street into what is left of QEII Square, passing by Molly Macalister's imposing bronze sculpture of a Māori chief. Yolo pats the fold of the old boy's kaitaka cloak. "Tēnā koe e Pā," she says.

"Afternoon, Sir," says Blu. "Lucky that koroua isn't going anywhere in a hurry," remarks Yolo.

"Yup," agrees Blu, "no overnight change of mayor will move him."

Yolo and Blu weave their way through a thinning lunchtime crowd and make for Tyler Street, a back alley tucked round the northern side of the old C.P.O. building.

"Jeepers!" says Yolo, stopping to assess the narrow width of the access, "Beijing without the holiday."

Suddenly aware that the hour really has been passing, even Blu appears anxious about the lateness of the afternoon. "Kia tere!" he says. "Hurry up!" They scurry down the lane.



Tyler Street, downtown Auckland



Noodle House, shop frontage with manhole cover, Tyler Street, downtown Auckland

Unable to wait any longer, Yolo barrels up to the red front door of the noodle shop and notices that the tiled stoop is cracked and quite shabby. She tries the latch. It's stuck. Undeterred, she puts her ample shoulder to the frame and gives it a shove. No joy. Yolo considers another attempt but before she can do so the door opens just a crack. Relieved, she steps forward and tries to cross the threshold.

Despite the constraints of time, Blu can't help but take a photograph. Yolo is not entirely sure why. "Documentation of an architectural moment," he says, "everything Auckland has become. Priceless."



Main entrance, Noodle House, Tyler Street, downtown Auckland

The proprietor bars her way. "Solly, too rate. We crose."

Bundled unceremoniously into the street, Yolo is on the cusp of losing it completely.

Quickly, Blu steers her further down the alley that opens out into Gore Street. Yolo is led past a semi-permanent installation of fluoro orange road cones, up a short flight of steps and onto a lawn. She thinks the grass is fake. "No it's not," says Blu, who, when offering her a rather dubious, oversize lounge chair, tears the sod slightly. "Looks real, acts real, must be real."



Garden with outdoor furniture, beanbags and road cones. Takutai Square, Gore Street, downtown Auckland

Yolo declines his provision of seating and flops directly on to the ground. "That's me. Done."

Blu returns from taking photographs of Takutai Square and the garden.

"What garden?" says Yolo, unconvinced by the sterile tactility of the turf. "Too plastic and uninviting for any self-respecting worm."

"Which is why," says Blu, "Koolhaas' often unacknowledged female collaborator, Petra Blaisse, made

sure her landscape design for the out-there CCTV was equally challenging."

Exhausted, Yolo has closed her eyes and is lying on the grass like a beached whale. "Evidently," she says, "Petra never picked up a trowel in the layout and design of this little oasis."

"Evidently," replies Blu, "but it was in fact her interest in the intricate and detailed drawings of Roman cities by Piranesi that

became an idea for landscape capable of standing up to Koolhaas' radical walking building proposal."

"How?" asks Yolo, sooo not wanting to move herself.

Blu looks down at her. "You know, the garden for CCTV is designed to make people like you get up and walk. Those who go there have to *move* to really appreciate and enjoy the space."

Yolo opens an eye. "What's that?"

"Lunch," says Blu, handing her a paper bag.

Artist note

Yllwbro are an anonymous sibling artist collaboration. Big sister and little brother. Wētā and Kōkako. They are walking along a road often travelled by others, having left their tiny studio with all the tools and brushes and unanswered emails, taking with them only good humour and their fondness for each other, a maxed-out credit card, mobile phone and the most serious intentions in the world. Yllwbro are represented by Mokopōpaki, Auckland.

Contextual note

Blu Dreams of Rem Koolhaas by Yllwbro was a finalist in the 2016 New Zealand Institute of Architects Warren Prize Awards for Architectural Writing. Competitors were asked to: 'Write about a journey you have made to an architectural site — it could be a new building or an old one, a town or city, or even a ruin. Explain why you went and describe what you found, and what it means to you.' Because the artists refused to identify themselves, *Blu Dreams of Rem Koolhaas* by Yllwbro was not included in the 2016 collection of prizewinning and highly commended essays: *10 stories: writing about architecture /2* published by the New Zealand Institute of Architects (2017).

Yllwbro presents their writing about architecture to coincide with the opening of *The Dutch Embassy* (1 May – 22 June 2019) at Mokopōpaki. A group exhibition co-curated by Gabriela Salgado, Artistic Director, Te Tuhi; Mokopōpaki; PĀNiA!; Yllwbro and A.A.M. Bos.

Blu Dreams of Rem Koolhaas by Yllwbro

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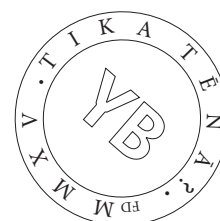
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CBK R'DAM

YOLO IS
TAKEN ON A
CIRCULATION
AND

AND
THE STORY
CONTINUES