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Envisioning Metropolis—New York as Seen, Imaged and Imagined

Mapping New York's Literary Neighborhoods

1 New York has always been more than a geographical place, more than a big city of socioeconomic relevance. Especially since the mid-nineteenth century, it has engaged the literary and artistic imagination to an extraordinary degree. The one cannot be separated from the other—not only because a substantial part of the history of American literature and art has been inscribed into New York's (especially Manhattan's) geography, but also because New York, as imagined and represented in texts and images, has continuously entered the experience of place and been present in it as myth and remembered history.

2 One may walk through the streets and districts of Manhattan as if through the chapters of a cultural history—as Mario Maffi once did in his study of Ethnic New York[1]. And if one does, the city—which has only recently begun to remind its visitors of the riches of its cultural past by commemorative plaques—turns into an open book, transforms real into imagined and imaginary space in which experienced present and narrated or imaged past merge: its history revealed not in chronological sequence but in spatial synchronicity. The old immigrant sections with their densely settled tenement houses west of the Bowery might form the first chapter of such a book: their abject poverty Stephen Crane had dramatized in *Maggie* and his "Bowery Tales" and Jacob Riis documented in his photographic report on *How the Other Half Lives* (as had Lewis Hine, a few years later, in his portraits of workers and immigrants)[2]. A second chapter would focus on the Lower East Side, the Jewish ghetto a bit further east around Hester and Delancy Street which, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, found voice—its English voice[3]—in the narratives of Abraham Cahan and Anzia Yezierska. It was here that Henry James had tried to decipher the signs of a, for him, almost unimaginable future in his skeptical and yet fascinated reading of Jewish immigrant life in *The American Scene*[4]. North of Houston Street, in the lower streets of the East Village and between Avenues A, B and C, Henry Roth located the immigrant section of his *Call It Sleep* in which David Schearl, the child protagonist of his novel, loses his way in a labyrinth of streets and languages. (Today it is part of the Puerto Rican Lower East Side, the Loisaida. There, on East 3rd Street between Avenues B and C, is still the Nuerican Café, a literary center of Puerto Rican New York especially during the 1980s and 1990s).

3 Northwest of Houston, along Fifth Avenue between Washington Square and Central Park, extends the area of "old" New York with its expensive mansions and fashionable hotels in whose salons Henry James and Edith Wharton[5] enacted the complex game of manners in their staging of New York's "good society". (East of Fifth Avenue, on 25th Street, Herman Melville had spent the last thirty years of his life as customs inspector—by then quite forgotten by his contemporaries). To the West, North and South of Washington Square, for a long time, beat the "heart" of Manhattan: Greenwich Village, where literary associations become even denser and the tracks of two avant-gardes (those of the 1920s and the 1950s and 60s) meet and overlap[6]. Here, on the corner of Washington Square West and South, was the home of the Provincetown Players and, above Washington Square on Fifth Avenue, Mabel Dodge's salon where New York's *radical chic* met, the progressive literary and political bohemia around *The Masses*. In the same area lived Eugene O'Neill, Sherwood Anderson, Man Ray, Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, Marianne Moore and E.E. Cummings; as did, some thirty years later, Frank O'Hara, Norman Mailer, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. Famous little magazines—like *The Little Review*, *Broom* and *The Dial* in the 1920s and *Evergreen Review* and *Village Voice* in the 1950s – had their offices here.

4 Further east, on Lexington Avenue between 25th and 26th streets was the 69th Regiment Armory where the great Armory Show of 1913 was held (which introduced the U.S. to modern

painting and where especially Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" created a scandal). A little further north and west, on Fifth Avenue between 30th and 31st Street, Alfred Stieglitz had his gallery "291" in the late 1910s and early 1920s[7]—a meeting place for poets and painters like William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, Jean Toomer, John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth and Charles Sheeler. Much further north and west, on Broadway and 67th Street had been the salon of Walter and Louise Arensberg where the Dadaist wing of New York's avant-garde met in the early 1920s—among them Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, Edgar Varèse, Albert Gleizes, Morton Schamberg, Joseph Stella and Mina Loy[8]. And again further up Broadway in the direction of Columbia University between Broadway, West End Avenue and Riverside Drive is the "Upper West Side" where—on what is now W. 84th Street but was then farmland far away from the city—Edgar Allan Poe supposedly wrote his "Raven". In the 1950s and after (when the city had long since expanded north)[9], Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, E.L. Doctorow, Harold Brodkey and Paul Auster lived in The Upper West Side for a while and made it a locus in their fictions (Bellow in *Seize the Day*, 1956, Auster in *City of Glass*, 1985, and *Moon Palace*, 1989, and Doctorow in *City of God*, 2000).

5 A last chapter would be dedicated to Harlem, that "race capital of the world" (as Alain Locke called it in the mid-1920s). Extending roughly north from Columbia University to the Harlem River and east, beyond Spanish Harlem, to the East River, it can be seen as the black equivalent of the Jewish Lower East Side but also, since it was the locus of the Harlem Renaissance, as a counterpart to Greenwich Village and thus as the black site of American modernism. In the stories of Rudolph Fisher, in the novels of Claude McKay (*Home to Harlem*, 1928), Nella Larsen (*Passing*, 1929), and also—or even more so—in Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* (1926), Harlem is represented as a quasi-mythological place of unleashed libido—a "dreamscape" where white money and white fantasies of "primitive" blackness, on the one hand, and the creative vitality of black people, on the other, seemed to open, if only for a brief moment, the possibility of social interaction across racial barriers[10]. Decades later, after the race riots of 1935 and 1943 and after years of economic depression, Harlem, in Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1954), or LeRoi Jones' *The System of Dante'sHell* (1965), had become more than anything else a black ghetto: a place of confining poverty, repression and of painful self-assertion against odds. Until, again several decades later, in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992), and Samuel Delany's novella "Atlantis: Model 1924" (1995)[11], the Harlem Renaissance was re-evoked and re-membered as cultural tradition —as the, by then, mythic image of a new and still emergent African American urban culture.

New York Transfigured: Modernist Visions of Urban Sublimity

6 One might thus conceive of the literary history of New York as a history of urban regionalisms, as an ensemble of predominantly realistic narratives about ethnically or class-specifically defined districts or neighborhoods that provide the social and geographic context for innumerable tales of initiation or searches for identity from Abraham Cahan and Henry Roth to Saul Bellow and James Baldwin. Yet this would only be half the story. For next to these ethnic or regional narratives (and, at several points of New York's literary history, dominating them) is the literature and art of an "urban sublime"[12] that reaches beyond neighborhood to grasp New York as a whole, the city's essence: its energy and latent spiritual form. I connect it with a totalizing view from above and outside, with Nick Carraway's view from Queensborough Bridge that, for him, meant seeing the city as if for the first time "in its first wild promise of all the mystery and beauty of the world"[13]; or with Hart Crane's and John Dos Passos' view from Brooklyn Heights across the East River and Brooklyn Bridge to the Manhattan skyline. (According to one source, they lived in the same house when Crane wrote *The Bridge* and Dos Passos *Manhattan Transfer*[14].)

7 In "Here is New York" (1949), his famous homage to the city ("this mischievous and marvelous monument which not to look upon would be like death"), E.B. White distinguishes three New Yorks:

> There is, first, the New York of the man or woman who was born here, who takes the city for granted and accepts its size and its turbulence as natural and inevitable. Second, there is the New York of the commuter—the city that is devoured by locusts each day and spat out each night. Third, there is the New York of the person who was born somewhere else and came to New York in quest of something. Of these three trembling cities the greatest is the last—the city of final destination, the city that is a goal. It is this third city that accounts for New York's high-strung disposition, its poetical deportment, its dedication to the arts, and its incomparable achievements[15].

8 This third city of the newcomers and questers, of those fleeing the economic constrictions of the country or of the European continent, drunk with a sense of possibility and future, is the mythic city seen "for the first time", a construct of stone, steel, glass as much as of dream, vision and hope. It is New York as the very image of the modern, visibly represented in Brooklyn Bridge and the new Manhattan skyline: the skyscrapers of the Woolworth, the Chrysler and the Empire State Buildings.

9 When Brooklyn Bridge was inaugurated in 1883, it was celebrated as one of the great architectural wonders of the world[16]. It was then also the highest building in New York from which one could look down on the low rising, pre-modern city while crossing the East River from Brooklyn to Manhattan. The Skyline—as we know it from many photographs of the period and still recognize it despite its many transformations—was constructed during the first three decades of the twentieth century. It made Brooklyn Bridge part of a metropolitan and specifically modernist iconography—of skyscrapers, building cranes, steam hammers and hurrying human masses—in which New York seemed to stage itself as a city always in the making, always in a process of construction, as a field of visible and invisible energies created by capital and industry. The sight of the new bridges and high rises, that had destroyed what in his eyes was the more modest nineteenth-century city he had known from his youth, fascinated Henry James, yet made him also shiver with aversion. In a memorable passage of *The American Scene*, he was one of the first to describe the modern metropolis, this "unmannered young giant", as a monstrous machine, a giant loom:

> This appearance of the bold lacing-together, across the waters, of the scattered members of the monstrous organism—lacing as by the ceaseless play of an enormous system of steam-shuttles or electric bobbins […] commensurate in form with their infinite work—does perhaps more than anything else to give the pitch of the vision of energy. One has the sense that the monster grows and grows, flinging abroad its loose limbs even as some unmannered young giant at his "larks", and that the binding stitches must for ever fly further and faster and draw harder; the future complexity of the web, all under the sky and over the sea, becoming thus that of some colossal set of clockworks, some steel-souled machine-room of brandished arms and hammering fists and opening and closing jaws. The immeasurable bridges are but as the horizontal sheaths of pistons working at high pressure, day and night, and subject, one apprehends with perhaps inconsistent gloom, to certain, to fantastic, to merciless multiplication. (James 75)

10 This elaborate image of the city and its bridges as an uncanny expression of gigantic industrial energies would later enter the rhetoric of the "urban sublime", yet as ecstatic affirmation of what Whitman had called the "spirit of the modern". The rhetoric is present, for instance, in John Marin's paintings of Lower Manhattan: in "Brooklyn Bridge" (1910), the ecstasy of walking over the bridge—which Hart Crane would record a decade later in letters and in poems—is projected onto the bridge itself exuberantly dancing in a burst of urban energy. The same rhetoric enters a short experimental film made, in 1920, by the painter Charles Sheeler and the photographer Paul Strand[17]. "Mannahatta" invokes Whitman not only in its title. It is a filmic celebration of a city constantly "under steam" and incessantly in motion whose unceasing energies are embedded in nature and its cycles. In the same year, the Italian Futurist Joseph Stella (who had come to New York seven years earlier at the time of the Armory Show) began painting the five sections of his "The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted" which combines futurism's fascination with the power of machines with Whitman's vision of America. It was most of all Brooklyn Bridge and the view it opened through its network

of cables on the skyline of Manhattan that made him feel "as if on the threshold of a new religion or in the presence of a new DIVINITY". In a dithyrambic autobiographical statement, published in 1929, he rendered in words what he had, less than ten years earlier, expressed in a series of ecstatic images (especially in the last one, dedicated to Brooklyn Bridge):

> Seen for the first time as a weird metallic Apparition under a metallic sky, out of proportion with the winged lightness of its arch, traced for the conjunction of Worlds, supported by the massive dark towers dominating the surrounding tumult of the surging skyscrapers with their gothic majesty sealed in the purity of their arches, the cables, like divine messages from above, transmitted to the vibrating coils, cutting and dividing into innumerable musical spaces the nude immensity of the sky, it impressed me as a shrine containing all the efforts of the new civilization of AMERICA… the eloquent meeting point of all the forces arising in a superb assertion of powers, in Apotheosis[18].

11 Practically at the same time—in 1923/24—Hart Crane began with the first drafts of "Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge" and "Atlantis", the prayer-like opening poem and the ecstatic finale of his cycle *The Bridge* (1930) which, in the unifying symbol of Brooklyn Bridge, propagated continuity between technology and art, between America's metropolitan present and the mythological heritage of its past.

> How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
> The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
> Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
> Over the chained bay waters Liberty—
> Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
> As apparitional as sails that cross
> Some page of figures to be filed away;
> —Till elevators drop us from our day.
> …
> And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
> As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
> Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
> Implicitly thy freedom staying thee! …
> ("Proem", stanzas 1, 2, and 4)
> Forever Deity's glittering Pledge, O Thou
> Whose canticle fresh chemistry assigns
> To wrapt inception and beatitude,—
> Always through blinding cables, to our joy,
> Of thy white seizure springs the prophecy:
> Always through spiring cordage, pyramids
> Of silver sequel, Deity's young name
> Kinetic of white choiring wings… Ascends.
> ("Atlantis", stanza 10)[19]

12 The curve of the seagull's rising movement suggests liberation from its chilled confinement in "chained bay waters". It is echoed in the dynamic curve of the Bridge and thus in a movement that is resting in itself, its freedom staying (and sustaining the movement), whereas the seagull's revelation of liberty is only a fleeting vision to the observing eye. The final poem renders this movement as an ecstatic-mystical experience of "being carried forward and upward" that Stella had also tried to convey in his paintings of Brooklyn Bridge[20]. In a letter to Stella, Crane wrote several years later: "It is a remarkable coincidence that I should, years later, have discovered that another person, by whom I mean you, should have had the same sentiments regarding Brooklyn Bridge which inspired the main theme and pattern of my poem" (Weber 334). It was the recognition of such brotherhood of spirit (confirmed in his friendship with Alfred Stieglitz, Waldo Frank and Jean Toomer) that made Crane believe in a latent spiritual order of modern America ("an America still in the making", as Stieglitz called it). It gave Brooklyn Bridge relevance beyond being merely "an economical approach to shorter hours, quicker lunches…"[21]. But when the completed cycle finally appeared in 1930, Crane had already lost faith in the very myth his poem propagated.

13 Around the time*Manhattan Transfer* and *The Great Gatsby* were published and Hart Crane was still working on the first versions of *The Bridge*, the architectural designer Hugh Ferriss, a visionary of the city of the future[22], made a charcoal drawing suggestively titled *The Lure of the City*. In the foreground, dark and sharply outlined against the radiant towers of the city, we can barely recognize the contours of a farm and the rolling hills of rural America. In the background yet central, we see the high rising metropolis, no doubt a vision of New York,

transfigured, almost made transparent, by a corona of light originating from a source to the right of the picture where all shapes and outlines are dissolved in brightness. Facing that source of light and evidently blinded by it, is the figure of a man, bent forward and backward, rigid with wonder.

14 Ferriss combines Stella's exalted vision of the city with elements of American social history. The strong line that separates the dark land from the shining city seems to mark a division in time, separating an agrarian past from an urban future; the human figure, standing at that line —face forward—held at a historic moment of transition. However, an alternative reading seems also possible: although Ferriss' utopian commitment to metropolis cannot be doubted, the Dreiserian title of this particular work establishes an almost moralist perspective; the city, in its geometric beauty and seductive power, suspended in light, is mere dream and chimera, at once transcendent and illusory, a splendid surface without substance.

15 Ferriss' drawing is emblematic of the ambivalence surrounding "the city as ideal text" since its promise of fulfillment eventually proved deceptive and spiritually empty. This dark side of the urban sublime Stieglitz, Stella and Crane had interpreted as the painful precondition of their vision ("only in darkness is thy shadow clear", Crane had written in his "Proem"). For them, the ideal was still latent: the artist had to bring it out from within or behind the shallow surface of the real. But in many representations of New York in the mid-twenties and after the discordant elements of the urban sublime could not be symbolically reconciled in that fashion. In his collection of New York stories, *The Color of a Great City* (1912), Theodore Dreiser—who, in *Sister Carrie*, had mythologized metropolis as a new urban "West"—now sees its original promise betrayed, the city's openness turned into a closed system, marked by the rules and rigid social structures of corporate capitalism. In *Manhattan Transfer*, surely the most brilliant American city novel, Dos Passos represents the city as an artificial world, as a closed and mechanized environment, as a giant machine processing its daily influx of human raw material into a standardized product. To live in Manhattan meant either to submit to the economic, social and sensuous pressures of the city or to be discarded as part of its daily garbage. Dos Passos' protagonists only have the choice of either to leave it or be crushed by it.

16 And yet, even if Dos Passos thoroughly destroys the promise of the first glance (the splendor of the city as seen from above or afar), he nevertheless invests his own creative energy in the artificial city of his text: in his own city of words which he puts together from the growing arsenal of urban signs: advertisements, headlines, popular songs—"a city of scrambled alphabets". While Jimmy Herf eventually leaves New York without apparent destination, his creator achieves control over the overwhelming presence of metropolis via formal abstraction: through strategies of collage and montage, through his "symphonic design" which allows him to represent the big city as a fragmented multiverse of images, sounds, and voices—yet also as a totality in all its fragmentation. He is thus able to transform its destructive energies into the liberating energies of his aesthetic construct. Dos Passos' book thrives on the dynamics and the technological wonders of urban civilization without granting it the utopian potential that Crane or Stella had bestowed on it.

17 Together with Stella's "The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted" and Hart Crane's *The Bridge* (as well as the New York photographs of Alfred Stieglitz), *Manhattan Transfer* is a center piece in an American modernist vision of the "urban sublime" at the same time that it anticipates its eventual collapse—a collapse that Fitzgerald in "My Lost City" (1932) and, six years later, the surrealist painter O. Louis Guglielmi[23] in his "Mental Landscape" (1938) would express in related and yet very different ways. Unlike Fitzgerald's romantic elegy, Guglielmi's painting is a radical debunking of Stella's vision: the cables of Brooklyn Bridge which Stella as well as Crane had stylized into strings of a giant harp are torn; the figures in this surreal landscape of catastrophe and desolation are mechanical puppets whose mechanism, like the bridge itself, has been broken. What is left of Brooklyn Bridge opens towards an empty background from which the city's skyline has been eliminated. On the ruins of the Bridge we see someone playing a harp—perhaps a deranged poet still caught in a mad celebration of the mythic Bridge (and City) that once was.

Local Narrations and Postmodern Abstractions

18 "Mental Landscape" marks the end of the literary and artistic representation of the "city seen for the first time"—i.e. the vision of those who had approached the city's wonderland from the countryside or from abroad. The protagonists of subsequent city novels are children of metropolis, marked by it, formed by it. They belong to that first New York according to E.B. White, that of the native born who take the city for granted. During the 1950s and after, the mythological city of the 1920s is thus again replaced by realist (or neo-realist) versions of New York as a realm of everyday experience—by modes of "regional" narration that had either preceded or accompanied the art of the urban sublime as a persistent counterpoint (displaced but never completely repressed by it).

19 Yet the rhetoric of the urban sublime does not altogether disappear: it is further abstracted, or ironically belittled, or transformed into different modes of sublimity. In painting, this can perhaps first be perceived in the pictures of Abstract Expressionism and of Pop Art where modernist abstractions of the dynamically sublime have become the play material for abstractions of a different kind[24]. Take, for instance, Franz Kline's "Third Avenue" (1954) —a geometric design of rectangular lines done in black and white and in broad brush strokes—where, in contrast to Stella's ecstatic paintings, abstraction has lost all visionary significance. Central alone is the formal abstraction of the design—which makes the title of the painting almost irrelevant. (Although we could, if we strained ourselves, still recognize certain representational elements.) In the case of Claes Oldenburg's "Upside Down City" (1962), the appeal to the viewer is essentially a playful one: evidently Oldenburg's collage parodically evokes the hallowed New York skyline (upside down) at the same time that it foregrounds its material – textile waste (painted stockings filled with paper) that Oldenburg possibly collected in the street or took from his own throwaways. This combination of playful abstraction with the materiality of the discarded, together with the arbitrary collage of randomly collected waste material, is characteristic of Pop Art in general. (According to Peter Conrad, Robert Rauschenberg collected the material for his collages within strictly defined, yet always changing areas of the city[25].) We find literary equivalents of this in Donald Barthelme's abstractly playful narratives of New York—in *Snow White*, and especially in the stories of *City Life* where the high-rising glass building that the unnamed hero of "Glass Mountain" is to climb in order to redeem his princess is located precisely at the corner of 13th Street and 8th Avenue. Or we may think of Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985) and its mysterious design of labyrinthine *mise-en-abîmes* and textual interlockings in which protagonist and reader become trapped. Thus Stillman's seemingly aimless wandering through the Upper West Side reveal, as Quinn believes, a pattern that he reads as "Tower of Babel". Stillman's excursions are in turn duplicated by Quinn and lead him in an even wider loop from the Upper West Side down Broadway to the World Trade Center, from there east to the Lower East Side and back up to where he started. While Stillman arbitrarily collects city waste, Quinn collects images of human waste—waste he himself turns into before finally and mysteriously disappearing from the novel completely.

20 Auster's book is reminiscent of Michel de Certeau's earlier essay "Walking in the City" which begins with a panoramic, yet abstractly-elevated view of the city from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center and subsequently sets this totalizing perspective from above against the narrower, yet sensuously concrete view gained when walking horizontally through the labyrinth of the city, the horizontal perspective filling empty and abstract spaces with names, memories and stories: "Stories about places are makeshift things. They are composed with the world's debris"[26]. "As this elevated position provides the illusion of 'mak[ing] the complexity of the city readable and chang[ing] its opaque mobility into a clear text,' it can still evoke a transcendental subject. One can in fact read the subject's gradual descent into the city as a symbol or allegory of its growing textualization", Hanjo Berressem writes in a comment on de Certeau's essay. "The result is a 'subject of the city' […] caught in a discursive labyrinth which it produces, but which it cannot decipher…"[27]. In Auster's novel the ordering view from above is absent. Yet the consciousness of a lost or absent order – of a language that would

again tie the word to its lost referent—is inscribed in the protagonist's (and his many doubles') aimless search for names and stories.

21 In other words, the transcendent dynamic city of the modernists, although ideologically deconstructed, experienced several metamorphoses in the post-modern period. This was Ihab Hassan's argument at the beginning of the eighties when he wrote of the "dematerialization of the city in contemporary fiction"[28]. It was not only that the representation of the city had become increasingly abstract (by emphasizing its textual status or by staging itself explicitly as textual construction, e.g. in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*)—but that the non-fictional city itself had now become recognizably part of a metropolitan sign system that once contained and transcended it[29]. Both these developments had announced themselves already in Dos Passos' representation of New York. In novels like John McElroy's *Lookout Cartridge* (1974) and Paul Auster's *City of Glass* or *Moon Palace* (1989)[30], and especially in several novels by Don DeLillo, New York, although concretely present as geographic space and sensuous experience, is also abstracted as the visible sign of invisible forces that shape it and encompass it.

22 In DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), the protagonist's city memories are childhood memories of ethnic neighbourhood in the 1950s: of street gangs and their various rites of initiations. When *Underworld*, in its last chapter, moves back into the 1990s, it also makes clear what has replaced the city: systems of urban and trans-urban signs, networks of communication, electronic circuits with their massive flow of information—for all of these the city has become mere metaphor. For the protagonist of DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003), the "arrowed towers" of an older urban iconography have lost all relevance since they have long been replaced by the awesome fluidity of a digital world. The actual collapse of the highest of these towers on September 11, 2001 confirmed, on the one hand, their symbolic obsolescence. On the other, it catastrophically and traumatically realized the city's latent fears that E.B. White had expressed, in uncanny anticipation, as early as 1949:

> The subtlest change in New York is something people don't speak much about but that is in everyone's mind. The city, for the first time in its long history, is destructible. A single flight of planes no bigger than a wedge of geese can quickly end this island fantasy, burn the towers, crumble the bridges, turn the underground passages into lethal chambers, cremate the millions. The intimation of mortality is part of New York now: in the sound of jets overhead, in the black headlines of the latest edition. (54)

The City as Local and as Global Text

23 Critics of contemporary urban fiction maintain that the literary and artistic representations of New York (or the city in general) have changed during the last two decades of the century together with the function of the city itself. Drawing on new sociological and anthropological studies of metropolitan culture, Guenter Lenz has recently argued that "[g]lobalization has transformed a number of urban centers throughout the world into so-called 'global cities'". Some of these "have assumed such world-wide importance that they no longer are *of* the nation state they are located *in*"[31]. In doing so he introduces a postcolonial and transnational perspective into a discussion of urban literature that had previously been focused on nation and/or place: "in the metropolitan or global cities of today we do not have one unified culture nor simply a diversity of separate subcultures, but a force-field of cultural flows (Ulf Hannerz), of the (re-)production of meanings and social practices, of a plurality of cultures that have their dynamics in their 'fluidity, [their] fusion, [their] negotiation'"[32]. Whether this new element has changed New York fiction once and for all remains to be seen, but it has certainly extended its range, added a new dimension to it. Next to variations of the urban sublime and the regionally or ethnically rooted model of New York writing there is the new fictional space of a metropolitan in-between: of the migratory and transitional that is experienced locally as well as globally[33].

24 One of Lenz's examples is Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992)—a family history spanning the experience of three generations and weaving its narrative between the experienced and the dreamed (or imagined) "real", between two languages (Spanish and English), between the different perspectives of several family members as well as between

Havana and New York. Central is the perspective of Celia del Pino, the grandmother, rooted in Cuba and eventually dying there, whose story opens and closes the novel. Of her three children, the oldest, Lourdes, emigrates with her husband and her two-year old daughter Pilar to Brooklyn where she opens a bakery in a neighborhood whose ethnic composure is in a constant process of change (from Jewish to Black to Latino). Neither Lourdes nor Pilar can rest in their newly acquired "American" identity. Although, unlike her mother, Lourdes has become vehemently anti-Castro and patriotically American, she still dreams of Cuba; while Pilar—who, like her mother before her, turns against *her* mother—has left Brooklyn to study art at Barnard and lives on the Upper West Side. Feeling deeply connected with her grandmother, she finally persuades Lourdes to visit Celia and her/their Cuban "home". "*Dreaming in Cuban*", Lenz writes, "enacts a clash of languages, politics, cultural traditions, religions, spiritualities. It again and again asks the questions, What is 'home'? What is cultural 'identity'? What does 'community' mean?" (418). Obviously, the answer to these questions can neither be 'here' nor 'there': Although, as in many Hispano-American narratives, the grandmother ("abuela") is the source and carrier of cultural tradition, and reconnecting with her, therefore, part of a ritualistic re-establishment of psychic balance, Pilar is finally certain where to go: "I'm afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know now it's where I belong—not *instead* of here but *more* than here" (236).

25 Similar patterns of cultural in-betweenness dominate the narratives of other (im)migrant writers such as Bharati Mukherjee or Kiran Desai[34]. Desai's first novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006)—a title that would also fit García's book—is centered in India but also tells the story of Biju whom his father sends to America to make his fortune and who ends up in New York, that "archipelago of ghettos seething with aliens"[35]. Living in some abject place in Harlem, he finds temporal work in dirty and rat-infested Indian restaurants between downtown and uptown Manhattan, between the financial district, the Upper West Side and Washington Heights[36]. As one of thousands of migrants—employed and exploited because of their illegal status—he desperately hopes to acquire an ever elusive green card. When these hopes come to nothing, he begins dreaming of India until he finally returns home where he is robbed by a band of local insurgents and loses the little money he had managed to save during three long years of work in America. At the end, he meets his father again who has himself suffered from one of India's violent regional conflicts—both empty-handed and now free of illusions but also with nowhere else to go.

26 Biju, who thought himself to be "the luckiest boy in the whole wide world" when he received a visa to the U.S., fails in the cultural in-between which García's Pilar seems to be able to master: humiliated by the arrogant indifference of his American clientele as well as by his Indian employers' exploiting him in the name of the American Dream, he yearns for a cultural purity – the purity of "home", the clarity of *one* culture—that "America" cannot provide. He refuses the virtuoso role-play of his flexible African friend Sayeed as well as the cultural confusion of his beef-eating Indian employers and their socially ambitious and fast adjusting families. Betrayed by a dream of America as much as by a dream of India, he suffers a double inheritance of loss.

27 Although it would be foolish to deny the "migratory topographies" that Lenz has discovered in contemporary New York fictions, it would be equally foolish to ignore the continuing bifurcation in New York writing which I have associated earlier with the regional or realistic, on the one hand, and with the abstract geographies of postmodern versions of the urban sublime, on the other[37]. From Joseph McElroy's *Lookout Cartridge* (1974) on, the latter tradition has connected the increasing semiotization of metropolitan life—the emptying out of the 'real' into the filmed and televised—with conspirational games and terrorist plots[38]. In *Players* (1977) and later in *Mao II* (1991), Don DeLillo created urban landscapes of empty surface—the reign of the Image, the "narcissistic heart of the West" (DeLillo) that makes terrorism thrive—on a local as well as on a global scale (New York, London, Beirut). Perhaps the most brilliant, if also the most irritating, version of such neo-realist surface writing, Bret Easton Ellis's *Glamorama* (1998), moves, along the flight lines of a transatlantic metropolitan/

cosmopolitan triangle, between the fashionable districts of Manhattan (Greenwich Village, Soho, Tribeca), London (Notting Hill) and Paris. In its inextricable blending of reality and film, of "real" and imag(in)ed experience, it mixes the two-dimensional spectacle-world of fame and fashion, the glitter and glamour of its life-style, its excessively transgressive (and yet exceedingly casual) games of drugs and sex with a gruesomely detailed pornography of terrorist destruction[39].

28 However, I prefer to conclude this essay with the discussion of an author who straddles the dividing line of the two modes of twentieth-century New York writing whose development I have tried to sketch. *The Intuitionist* (1999), the first novel of the African American writer Colson Whitehead, seems to combine a tradition of neighborhood-rooted ethnic writing with a return to the rhetoric of the modernist urban sublime—except that it ironically subverts the utopian vision of "unlimited verticality" by connecting it with an as yet unfulfilled promise of social "elevation". Whitehead's novel has little in common with the family- and community-embedded narratives of ethnic writers like García. Rather it is an interesting mix not only of historical and utopian narrative conventions but also, like Auster's or Pynchon's city novels, of motives and patterns of detective fiction[40]. Although we may safely assume that "the most famous city in the world" in which the plot of the novel unfolds is in fact New York[41], it remains the unnamed urban center of a collective modernizing effort where complex race relations have to be read and unraveled by the black heroine, Lila Mae Watson, one of several "detective-philosophers of Vertical Transport". She is not only the first black female inspector of the city's elevator system but also set on discovering the mysterious "black box" (the blueprint for the perfect elevator of the future). In addition, Lila Mae—the token black woman on the rise—may be caught in a conspiracy whose target is the city's system of social elevation: a new and sophisticated elevator that she had last inspected has crashed in an impossible freefall from one of the top floors of the Fanny Briggs Memorial Building. (Its name—that of a famous slave who taught herself to write —is another token gesture of the city's administration toward an "increasingly vocal colored population".) The time-frame of the novel is as unspecific as its local reference: the only historical date mentioned is that of Elisha Otis' presentation of the first elevator at New York's Crystal Palace exhibition in 1853. It is the foundational event of the city's "vertical revolution" without which the skyscraper and thus New York's skyline —that centerpiece of modern metropolitan iconography—would not have been possible. The network of mystery and intrigue that Lila Mae is trying to disentangle evidently concerns the future: the possibility of a "second elevation", of higher and more perfect cities.

29 Central is the struggle between the Empiricists and the Intuitionists, which is a conflict of philosophies (since they imply fundamentally different attitudes toward elevation and elevator inspection), but also of politics since both have their institutional underpinnings and a claim to power. Lila Mae is an Intuitionist trying to stay aloof from a political game that serves essentially white interests and in which both sides attempt to use blacks for their own purpose. It is a game that has background players who use the struggles between Empiricists and Intuitionists only as a front: the competing elevator industries "Arbo" and "United" aiming to gain control over the future by finding the mysterious black box whose blueprint is supposed to be among the papers James Fulton left after his death. Fulton is the Guru of the Intuitionists and his *Theoretical Elevators*, Volumes I and II, their Holy Bible—even though the first volume with its "arcane investigations of the mechanism" of elevation and its rhetoric of modernizing verticality also appeals to the party of Empiricists. As Lila Mae gradually finds out, Fulton was a "black" man passing for white who wrote his books as a "joke" on the white establishment that, believing him white, took it for truth. "White people's reality is built on what things appear to be—that's the business of Empiricism" (239). Therefore, in declaring that "there is a world behind the world we see", he not only proclaimed an ideological principle of Intuitionism but also established, implicitly, a black perspective. "There was no way", Lila Mae ruminates, that "he believed in transcendence. His race kept him earthbound, like the stranded citizens before Otis invented his safety elevator" (240).

30 Finding her way through plots and conspiracies, she discovers neighborhoods without elevators, the places that "verticality indicts, the passed-over flatlands" (185). She also comes

to question her own plot-bound imagination when she understands that the impossible freefall crash of Elevator Eleven was not part of a conspiracy against her but truly, and against all odds, an accident she had been unable to anticipate[42]. Extricating herself "from their order of things", she yet continues to believe in Fulton's mysticism of elevation as proclaimed in Vol. II of his theory where he sees elevators not as mechanized objects but as sentient subjects, as the Other of communication. For him elevation has become communication, "Intuitionism is communication. That simple. Communication with what is not-you" (241). Fulton thus remains the prophet of an order still to come—of an elevation that was neither "relentlessly vertical" nor a false promise of social rise (that motor of Lila Mae's earlier ambition to excel) but vaguely spiritual, horizontally inclusive of Otherness:

> Sometimes in her room she thinks about the accident and its message. Much of what happened would have happened anyway, but it warms her to know that the perfect elevator reached out to her and told her she was of its world. That she was a citizen of the city to come and that the frail devices she had devoted her life to were weak and would all fall one day like Number Eleven. […] She returns to the work. She will make the necessary adjustments. It will come. She is never wrong. It's her intuition. (255)

31 The novel is a racial and political allegory[43]—a funny but also a bitingly satiric questioning of the rhetoric of modern verticality (of its gains and losses) that yet maintains some faith in "elevation". This becomes even more evident in Whitehead's homage to his native city, *The Colossus of New York* (2003), a book that seems to reassert E.B. White's eulogy of more than fifty years earlier. If White ends his homage to New York with a somber warning of its potential destructibility, Whitehead inversely reconfirms the city's vital presence after such a traumatic experience has indeed occurred—except that the event is never mentioned, only implied in the sensuous and elegiac evocation of a city that in its constant and painful changes[44] always stays, colossally, the same:

> Our old buildings still stand because we saw them, moved in and out of their shadows, were lucky enough to know them for a time. They are part of the city we carry around. It is hard to imagine that something will take their place, but at this very moment the people with the right credentials are considering how to fill the craters. The cement trucks will roll up and spin their bellies, the jackhammers will rattle, and after a while the postcards of the new skyline will be available for purchase. (10)

32 Like White's *Here Is New York*, Whitehead's book is not fiction. But it is not a series of essays either; rather a collage of vignettes, prose poems, or Dos Passos-like "camera eyes" in thirteen sections (each narrated from a point of view marked by a different pronoun)—sections that wind their way through and around the city: below ground, above ground, on walks through different neighborhoods, up Broadway, through Central Park, or across Brooklyn Bridge. In its multifaceted yet all-embracing gesture, Whitehead's *Colossus* seems to go back —consolingly and reassuringly—to a lost tradition of city confidence. But it quotes the language of the urban sublime that is part of its title only with ironic distance[45]. If it is concerned with sublimity at all, it is that of the urban Everyday—that commonness of sight and habit experienced collectively by a multitude of people who yet create New York individually in their consciousness.

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Notes

1 See Mario Maffi's loving and informative history of his own geographic and imaginary exploration of New York in *New York CITY: An Outsider's Inside View*; also Christopher Mulvey and John Simmons, eds. *New York: City as Text*, Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers* and Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, eds. *How We Lived: A Documentary History of Immigrant Jews in America* as well as Marcia Leisner, *Literary Neighborhoods of New York*; also Douglas Tallack's excellent history of New York's (self)representation in photography, film and painting from the 1880s till September 11, 2001: *New York Sights: Visualizing Old and New New York* and William B. Scott's and Peter M. Rutkoff's *New York Modern: The Arts and the City*.

2 Lewis Hine's photographic portraits of immigrant workers tried to establish their dignified self-assertion in poverty. The hidden romance of everyday street and tenement life John Sloan and other members of the Ashcan School had painted in early representations of the urban scene. Sloan's paintings —especially his rooftop paintings ("Night Windows", "Love on the Rooftops") and his print series New York City Life—attempted to reveal the pastoral joys in everyday urban existence. Although he did many sketches for *The Masses*, he argued in 1904 that he was "not interested in being socially conscious about the life of the people". Pollard in Mulvey 57.

3 Abraham Cahan, *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896) and *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917); Anza Yezierska, *Salome of the Tenements* (1923). The Yiddish voice was heard in the poems of the Sweatshops Poets (David Edelstadt, Eliakum Zunser, Morris Rosenfeld), the Yiddish Theater on the Bowery and Abraham Cahan's *Arbeiter Zeitung* and Jewish *Vorwärts*; see Sanders and Howe, 1976.

4 "The Bowery and Thereabouts", *The American Scene*, 194-208. The exotic strangeness of these quarters stimulated Anglo-Saxon intellectuals looking for a more sensuous and communal life. This is true of Hutchins Hapgood as well as of John Reed who described New York as an "enchanting city": "I wandered about the streets, from the soaring imperial towers of downtown, along the East River docks, smelling spices and the clipper ships of the past, through the swarming East Side—alien towns within towns—where the smoky flare of miles of clamorous pushcarts made a splendor of shabby streets; coming upon sudden shrill markets, dripping blood and fishscales in the light of torches, the big Jewish women bawling their waters under the roaring great bridges; thrilling to the ebb and flow of human tides sweeping to work and back, west and east, south and north" (Quoted by Eric Homberger in Mulvey and Simmons 29f).

5 I am obviously thinking of James's *Washington Square* and the mid-town mansions of Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth* (1905)*, The Age of Innocence* (1920), and *Old New York* (1924). When William Dean Howells decided to move from Boston to New York during the mid-1880s, he found a home further north on W. 57th Street. His long search for it entered his fiction in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). The development of Uptown Manhattan later became the topic of Steven Millhauser's *Martin Dressler. The Tale of an American Dreamer* (1996).

6 See Bradbury 186-189 and 252-255.

7 Stieglitz subsequently moved further uptown and to the East Side: his "Intimate Gallery" was located at 59th Street and Park Avenue and "An American Place" (which he opened in the 1930s) at 53rd Street and Madison Avenue.

8 See Naumann.

9 The city gradually extended its boundaries northward along Broadway—a movement that accelerated during the second half of the 19th century. From 1880 till 1940 New York's population grew from 1.4 to 7.4 million (Graham Clark in Mulvey 12). New York's vertical extension happened at the turn of the century when the construction of the first skyscrapers changed the appearance of the city fundamentally and the high-rising skyline emerged "as the quintessential image of the modern metropolis: what Le Corbusier sensed as part of Manhattan's essentially 'sublime' aspect" (Clark 12f.). The architectural history of the city's horizontal expansion northward was fictionalized by Steven Millhauser in his *Martin*

Dressler, and E.L. Doctorow described the "islanded city's" rapid growth "not up but in a northerly direction" in his concise and graphic sketch "The Nineteenth New York", *Jack London, Hemingway, and the Constitution: Selected Essays, 1977-1992*, New York: Random House, 1993, 139-147. In *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), John Dos Passos topicalized the city's vertical expansion during the first decades of the twentieth century. However, the most persistent fictional historiographers of New York have been E.L. Doctorow in novels like *Ragtime* (1975), *Billy Bathgate* (1989), *The Waterworks* (1994), *World's Fair* (1985), *City of God* (2000), and Don DeLillo who frequently made New York the center of his fictions (as in *Great Jones Street*, 1973, *Players*, 1977, *Underworld,* 1997, *Cosmopolis*, 2003, and *Falling Man*, 2007).

10 See North. In his essay on "The Image of Harlem in Black Literature", James L. de Jongh makes a related if somewhat different claim. For him "Harlem was recognized as a mythological landscape in which [the African inheritance of black artists from all over the world] was being reclaimed in the diaspora". But Harlem, he argues, was the "race capital of the world" also in a different sense: "This initial formulation of black Harlem as a dreamscape of reasserted African values in exile resonated ironically with Harlem's alternative formulation by a daring but disillusioned international assortment of young writers of the same generation who were not black" […] and who "identified Harlem as a conveniently urban heart-of-darkness" (among them Maxwell Bodenheim and Carl Van Vechten but also Yvan Goll, Garcia Lorca, and Salvatore Quasimodo). De Jongh in Mulvey 132.

11 Samuel R. Delany, *Atlantis—Three Tales*, Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1995. "Atlantis: Model 1924" is the first and longest, 1-122. On the literary reconstruction of Harlem and the Harlem Renaissance in contemporary African American fiction, see Löbbermann.

12 On the literature of the urban sublime, see Den Tandt and Graham Clark, "The City as Ideal Text", in Mulvey 12-27.

13 "Over the great bridge, with the sunlight through the girders making it a constant flicker upon the moving cars, with the city rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps all built with a wish out of non-olfactory money. The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty of the world", F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby,* 73. The novel, of course, dismantles the illusion of the first glance. As does his later essay "My Lost City", Fitzgerald's elegy in prose for the New York of the 1920s, where he uses a similar metaphor: "New York had all the iridescence of the beginning of the world" (25), or: "There again was my lost city, wrapped cool in its mystery and promise" (31), *The Crack-Up*, 22-33.

14 See Carr 199.

15 White 25-26. In the blurb of the essay's re-edition in 1999 we learn that "*The New York Times* has chosen *Here is New York* as one of the ten best books ever written about the grand metropolis".

16 It was erected next to the site where the Brooklyn Ferry, which Whitman had used and celebrated in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", left for Manhattan

17 Charles Sheeler was a painter and photographer and became famous in the 1930s especially with his paintings and photographs of Henry Ford's River Rouge Plant. Like Sheeler, the photographer Paul Strand belonged to an avant-garde circle around Alfred Stieglitz, Strand being, at least in his early phase, Stieglitz's most faithful disciple. Graham Clark regards the photography of Stieglitz as instrumental in the creation of a rhetoric of the urban sublime: the city as ideal text—its energies revealed and spiritualized by defining the image of the city in terms of nature ("The City as Ideal Text: Manhattan and the Photography of Alfred Stieglitz, 1890-1940" in Mulvey 12-27).

18 Joseph Stella, "Brooklyn Bridge: A Page of My Life", *Transition* 16-17, June 1929, 86-89; also Jaffe 13. It is interesting to compare this passage with a comment Stieglitz made in the 1940s on his photograph of the Flat-Iron Building ("The Flat-Iron") in 1903: "I stood spellbound as I saw that building in that storm… I had watched the structure in the course of its erection, but somehow it had never occurred to me to photograph it in the stages of its evolution. But that particular snow day, with the streets of Madison Square all covered with snow, fresh snow, I suddenly saw the flat-iron building as I had never seen it before. It looked, from where I stood, as if it were moving toward me like the bow of a master ocean-steamer, a picture of the new America which was still in the making". "Six Happenings", *Twice a Year*, nos. 13-15, Fall/Winter 1946/7, 188-189, quoted in Clark, 16. Like Stella, Stieglitz saw his "America still in the making" revealed in terms of energy; but unlike Stella, the energies revealed are part of or continue those of nature.

19 Crane 43 and 107.

20 He painted it twice: the first time in 1918-19, and then again in 1920-22, as the last and culminating picture of "The Voices of New York Interpreted".

21 *Letters*, 261.

22 Hugh Ferriss, master of "the vertical sublime", was an architect by professional training and worked for the New York architectural bureau of Cass Gilbert. He became most famous, in the twenties, for his fantastic designs of monumental, high-rising, crystal-shaped cities of the future as envisioned in his *The*

Metropolis of Tomorrow, published in 1929, which also includes "The Lure of the City". Ferriss must have been on Dos Passos' mind when he wrote *Manhattan Transfer*.

23 Born in Egypt, Louis Guglielmi came to the U.S. in 1914. During the 1930s he developed what was then called "social Surrealism" in an attempt to combine the Surrealist idiom with social and political consciousness.

24 "If the controlling metaphor for the description and artistic representation of the city in modernism was the *machine*, it is today, in an era of postmodernity, the *text*, or, more accurately, the *textual machine* […] This change from machine to text implies that while the reality of the city was formerly defined by the real space of metropolis, it is today defined by cyberspace, a virtual space of purely informational, cybernetic systems which is superimposed on the real space of the city" (Berressem 1992, 107). Berressem's essay describes, with great insight and precision, the dominant tendencies of the 1970s and 1980s but ignores that "regional" writing continues as a partially submerged tradition.

25 See Conrad, especially Chapter 15: "An Aleatory Island". Although the waste that Rauschenberg and Oldenburg collect is in part industrial, it is true that, as Berressem argues (quoting Baudrillard), "[New York] is a site which has long been turned from a waste-land of industrial production to a semiotic waste-land in which 'industrial waste is nothing compared to the waste of language'" (108). This is, indeed, the very topic of Barthelme's *Snow White* (1971) as well as of many of his short stories.

26 See Certeau.

27 Berressem, 110-111. His quote from de Certeau's essay is translated from a German version of de Certeau's original French.

28 See Hassan.

29 See Ickstadt, "Trash and Collage: The City in Post-Modern American Fiction", and my forthcoming "Replacing the 'Urban Sublime': The City in Contemporary American Fiction" as well as Berressem 1992.

30 On Auster and postmodern city representations in literature and the arts, also see Berressem and Chénetier. For a different approach to modern and postmodern New York City fiction, see Antje Dallmann's impressive *ConspiraCity New York: Großstadtbetrachtung zwischen Paranoia und Selbstermächtigung*.

31 See Lenz, Ulfers and Dallmann, eds. "Introduction", 11; Lenz, Löbbermann and Magister, eds.; and Lenz and Riese, eds.

32 Lenz, "Literary Transfigurations of Intercultural Translations: New EthniCities and Migratory Topographies in New York Fictions of the 1990s", in Lenz, Ulfers and Dallmann, eds. 400. The quote is from Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 289-290.

33 One could perhaps argue that the shift from immigrant to migrant, from the locally rooted to the transitory, coincides with the metaphoric shift from the city as machine to the city as text (or "textual machine"). The semiotic explosion of which the latter is the symptom can be seen as correlated to the general shift toward the global.

34 Mukherjee was born and educated in Calcutta, then studied in the U.S. before she settled first in Canada and finally in the U.S., becoming an American citizen. Kiran Desai was born in India, lived in England but subsequently moved to New York and has now dual citizenship. A third American writer of Indian descent, Jhumpa Lahiri, was born in England and soon afterwards emigrated with her parents to the U.S. (She now lives in Brooklyn.) She is therefore more concerned with a second generation of immigrants who are Americans yet may dream of an India they more imagine than know (as in her novel *The Namesake*, published in 2003).

35 The phrase is taken from Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine,* 140.

36 In Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters*, it is in Jackson Heights (in Queens) where an Indian-American middle-class wants to maintain a remembered Indian identity while desperately seeking to adjust to the American way of life.

37 It is tempting to label this division according to either ethnicity or gender since the authors of contemporary variants of the sublime are predominantly male and white. However, there are enough exceptions to doubt the rule—with Siri Hustvedt's *Blindfold* (1992) as one example (that makes the labyrinth of city streets and neighborhood life on the Upper West Side the stage for the heroine's transgressive exploration of her sexual identity) and with Colson Whitehead's racial allegory of social and urban "elevation" (*The Intuitionist*, 1999) as another.

38 On the paranoid structures and strategies of contemporary city fiction, see Dallmann 2009 as well as Hantke.

39 Ellis describes, in horrifying close-up and slow motion, the impact of several terrorist explosions in Paris restaurants as well as the disintegration of an airplane bombed on its transatlantic flight from Paris to New York and the bloody dismemberment of its passengers. The forces behind this terrorism remain obscure. Ellis seems to go back to DeLillo's *Players* where the "system" (visibly represented in the Twin

Towers) seems to generate its own agents of destruction. In his brilliant analysis of *Glamorama*, Hanjo Berressem chooses to discuss this pre-9/11-novel from a post-9/11-perspective. Which is plausible in so far as the real event—in most cases experienced on the television screen—seemed to hopelessly blur the borderline between reality and image (between what was actually seen and what had been anticipated in filmed fantasies), except that its traumatic impact also broke the image to reveal the Real. In Ellis's novel the traumatic event is nothing but surface and image, however gorily imagined. In contrast, DeLillo's post 9/11-novel *Falling Man* (2007) absorbs the traumatic experience and makes the protagonist's working his way through it part of the narrative process. However, it is well possible, as Berressem argues (very much along the line of several DeLillo statements), that the assassination of John F. Kennedy (and its many televised repeats) may have been the traumatic ur-event of much contemporary American fiction. On *Glamorama*,see Berressem 2003, 87-114; also Dallmann 2009, 171-217.

40 The heroine Lila Mae Watson seems in fact modeled on Pynchon's heroine in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas; and Whitehead's precisely visual and sensuous language is often reminiscent of DeLillo's prose—although his linguistic versatility establishes his mastery of language beyond the possible models Whitehead may have had in mind. On *The Intuitionist*, also see Dallmann 2009, 311-330.

41 Several precise locations are given such as the Intuitionist House, 117 Second Avenue, on the Lower East Side, or The Federal Plaza where, close by, in the Fanny Briggs Memorial Building, Elevator Eleven crashed in freefall. Mid-town, Up-town and Harlem where Lila Mae lives at different stages of her search are suggestively outlined but not explicitly named. We also learn that the former site of the Crystal Palace Exhibition is today's Times Square (79) and that Johnny Shush, the Mafia boss, owns "the West Side, from the crown of the Island down to the docks" (103).

42 "What her discipline and Empiricism have in common: they cannot account for the catastrophic accident […] Whatever signals the genies may or may not have dispatched through her darkness went unread. She imagines the proximity of the catastrophe sending ripples through the darkness from the future, agitating the genie with impending violence" (227f.).

43 It also contains a history of techniques as well as theories and mythologies of elevation and elevator construction in a Pynchonesque mix of fact and fiction.

44 In an essay on the redevelopment of Brooklyn, Whitehead writes in a similar vein: "What do I know about Brooklyn? I know it's part of New York City, and that means that every inch of it is constantly screaming, 'Move, get out the way!' Bike messenger, delivery truck, sports stadium coming through. Honk honk. It's a white neighborhood, it's a black neighborhood, it's an immigrant neighborhood, it's a subplot on a sitcom about yuppies. It's a working-class neighborhood, then it's not. It's changing so fast you shouldn't bother unpacking, and you might as well blame water for being wet […] In the end, the same energy that draws us here, binds us to this place, is alternately creative and destructive, razing here, renovating there, and it's all we can do to adapt".Fort Greene's Gentrification - Redevelopment of Brooklyn - Colson Whiteheadhttp://nymag.com/nymetro/realestate/urbandev/features/n_10289/#ixzz0YclRSmOb
In his review of *The Colossus of New York*, Wyatt Mason resents a book that, although "[e]ngendered by the terrorist attack on the city", deals with it with such easy melancholy: "In this way the loss of the twin towers has been gently absorbed into the city's history of losses. A facet of being a New Yorker, Whitehead offers, is to be aware of those sudden voids, to be as aware of them as of the actual presences before us" (*The New Republic* on line, Dec. 4, 2003).

45 When the well-known metropolitan wonders are acknowledged, it is done from the knowledge of their previous deconstruction. "Let's pause a sec to be cowed by this magnificent skyline", thus the narrator comments the by now highly conventionalized view from Brooklyn Bridge of Manhattan's skyline. "So many arrogant edifices, it's like walking into a jerk festival. Maybe you recognize it from posters and television. Looks like a movie set, a false front of industry. Behind those gleaming facades, plywood and paint cans" (101).

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Résumé / Abstract

Cet article esquisse d'abord la géographie de New York dans la littérature depuis les quartiers de la Bowery et du Lower East Side jusqu'à Harlem, puis ouvre l'espace géographique à des chapitres consacrés à l'histoire littéraire de New York, du modernisme et de sa métropole mythique (dans les œuvres de Dos Passos, Joseph Stella et Hart Crane) à l'effondrement de la vision d'un sublime urbain au cours de la Grande dépression. Il s'intéresse ensuite à des versions plus ludiques de l'urbain dans des œuvres du Pop Art et dans des textes littéraires des années 70 et 80, avant de s'orienter vers la fiction contemporaine où la tradition moderne du sublime urbain est déconstruite et où la métropole est recréée comme faisant partie d'un vaste système de renseignements transnationaux, de flux monétaires globaux et de mouvements migratoires. Dans les romans de Don DeLillo, Cristina García, Kiran Desai et Colson Whitehead, la ville est vue comme un espace d'interconnexion abstrait, comme un lieu d'aliénation, en ses marges sociales et économiques, et comme une zone de conflits culturels où il est néanmoins possible de mener une existence culturelle intermédiaire. New York donne alors lieu à des expériences concrètes et traumatiques, mais elle est aussi, paradoxalement, reconnue comme un lieu d'appartenance. Ainsi, cet article conçoit l'histoire comme suivant deux lignes parallèles, orientées vers une narration locale (et/ou ethnique) ou vers des récits tentant d'envisager la ville selon une perspective totalisante. Même si la tradition d'un sublime urbain tend à perdre de son allant au cours du vingtième siècle, elle demeure néanmoins un contrepoint marquant dans l'histoire des représentations littéraires de New York.

Mots clés : New York comme espace d'histoire littéraire et artistique, réalisme/ naturalisme, littérature et art du sublime urbain, New York comme espace de narration locale et ethnique, abstraction postmoderne et paysages de surfaces, New York comme ville globale et comme espace migratoire dans la fiction contemporaine.

The essay first sketches the geography of literary New York from the Bowery and the Lower East Side to Harlem; then fills out the geographic space with chapters of New York's literary history from modernism and its myth of metropolis (in Dos Passos, Joseph Stella and Hart Crane) to the collapse of this vision of an urban sublime during the Great Depression. It subsequently discusses more playful versions of the urban in Pop Art and literary texts of the 1970s and 1980s, before it turns to contemporary fiction where the modernist tradition of an urban sublime is deconstructed and metropolitan space reconceived as part of a larger transnational system of information, global money flows and migratory movements. In novels of Don DeLillo, Cristina García, Kiran Desai and Colson Whitehead, the city is seen as a space of abstract interconnectedness as well as of alienation at its social and economic margins; as a culturally conflicted space in which it is nevertheless possible to negotiate a cultural existence in-between. Here New York is experienced concretely and traumatically, yet also, paradoxically, accepted as home. Throughout, the essay conceives of this history as following the parallel tracks of local (and/or ethnic) narration and of narratives trying to encompass the city from a totalizing perspective. Although this latter tradition of an urban sublime loses

impetus in the course of the twentieth century, it nevertheless remains a distinct counterpoint in the history of New York's literary representations.

Keywords : New York as a space of literary and artistic history, realism/naturalism, literature and art of the urban sublime, New York as space of local and ethnic narration, postmodernist abstractions and landscapes of surfaces, New York as global city and migratory space in contemporary fiction.