

CONTRIBUTIONS TO ENGLISH
AND AMERICAN LITERARY STUDIES 4

Sascha Klein

Skyscraping Frontiers

The Skyscraper as Heterotopia
in the 20th-Century
American Novel and Film



PETER LANG

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As a space of extremes, the skyscraper has been continually constructed as an urban frontier in American cultural productions. Like its counterpart of the American wilderness, this vertical frontier serves as a privileged site for both subversion and excessive control. Beyond common metaphoric readings, this study models the skyscraper not only as a Foucauldian heterotopia, but also as a complex network of human and nonhuman actors while retracing its development from its initial assemblage during the 19th century to its steady evolution into a smart structure from the mid-20th century onward. It takes a close look at US-American literary and filmic fictions and the ways in which they sought to make sense of this extraordinary structure throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries. More traditional poststructuralist spatial theories are connected with concepts and methods of Actor-Network Theory in a compelling account of the skyscraper's evolution as reflected in fictional media from early 20th-century short stories via a range of action, disaster and horror films to selected city novels of the 1990s and 2000s.

The Author

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Introduction: A Space of Extremes

When after more than twenty years in Europe, Henry James, eminent American writer and critic, returned to the United States in 1904, he found his hometown New York City fundamentally transformed. While at his departure Trinity Church had still topped the Manhattan silhouette, it was now hardly visible among the many

“tall buildings,” which have so promptly usurped a glory that affects you as rather surprised, as yet, at itself, the multitudinous sky-scrapers standing up to the view, from the water, like extravagant pins in a cushion already overplanted, and stuck in as in the dark, anywhere and anyhow [...]. (James, *The American Scene* 76)

Not only forlorn in the Manhattan “pin-cushion” with its “loose nosegay of architectural flowers” (76–77), those palisades of new commercial towers, “poor old Trinity” on closer inspection seemed almost beleaguered by the new architectural giants:

[...] I gazed across at the special sky-scraper that overhangs poor old Trinity to the north – a south face as high and wide as the mountain-wall that drops the Alpine avalanche, from time to time, upon the village, and the village spire, at its foot [...]. (83)

During James’ absence, New York had grown vertical at such an amazing pace, literally having turned into another, a ‘new’ New York that it recurrently left him rather disoriented with several of “the new landmarks crushing the old quite as violent children stamp on snails and caterpillars” (81). The increasingly vertical city not only offended James’ refined sense of aesthetics and cultural tradition but also deprived the native son of his sense of home, thus rendering many of his rich memories of the ‘old’ New York obsolete. In a most painful way James had to experience the meaning of rapid urban change upon discovering that the very place of one’s individual rootedness, of local belonging, namely his birth place at Washington Place had also been replaced by a tall building of the new type:

That was where the pretence that nearly nothing was changed had most to come in; for a high, square, impersonal structure, proclaiming its lack of interest with a crudity all its own, so blocks, at the right moment for its own success, the view of the past, that the effect for me, in Washington Place, was of having been amputated of half my history. (91)

Indeed so much had New York, and as James was to discover on his journey cross-country, so much had almost all of America changed, that his travel notes, published in 1907 under the title *The American Scene*, read like the report of an

ethnographer exploring a foreign culture, similar to such well-known European visitors to the U.S. as Alexis de Tocqueville over half a century before or Jean Baudrillard almost a century after James.¹ In James' harsh judgment, the turn-of-the-century United States was a country driven by short-sighted commercial gains, by "that perpetual passionate pecuniary purpose" as well as a "universal will to move – to move, move, move, as an end in itself, an appetite at any price" (111, 84) – an America, therefore, that privileged a restless will to change, indeed to modernize itself over all possible rootedness in custom and tradition, in preserving a cultural identity which, to James, also manifested itself in the nation's architecture.

No wonder then that James could regard New York's new giant buildings as nothing but "impudently new and still more impudently "novel" – this in common with so many other terrible things in America – and [as] triumphant payers of dividends; all of which uncontested and unabashed pride, [...]" (76). To James, Manhattan's tall office buildings were "monsters of the mere market" built for no reason other than to extract as much profit, to pay as high a dividend from as small a piece of downtown land as possible (80). As creatures of the market and its shifting moods, he saw in these towers nothing but provisional structures:

Such growths, you feel, have confessedly arisen but to be "picked", in time, with a shears; nipped short off, by waiting fate, as soon as "science," applied to gain, has put upon the table, from far up its sleeves, some more winning card. Crowned not only with no history, but with no credible possibility of time for history, and consecrated by no uses save the commercial at any cost, they are simply the most piercing notes in that concert of the expensively provisional into which your supreme sense of New York resolves itself. [...] One story is good only till another is told, and sky-scrapers are the last word of economic ingenuity only till another word be written. (77)

In fact, around the turn of the century, high-rise buildings were objects of a restless financial speculation that often demanded a rapid replacement of older structures by still higher ones. Being almost as quickly razed as new towers were erected, many Manhattan skyscrapers were expected to have a 'life expectancy' of a mere 15 to 20 years in this era of excessive housing speculation (see Yablon, "The Metropolitan Life" 313–315, Page 27–28). Amidst the frenzy of an overheated real estate market and despite his fears that New York might end up as "a huge, continuous fifty-floored conspiracy against the very idea of the ancient

1 I am referring here to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835/1840) and Baudrillard's *America* (1986), two influential European engagements with American culture based on the authors' lengthy travels through the United States.

graces” (92), James was not the only one to expect that most of these crude structures were all but temporary phenomena and that Manhattan would shrink again as soon as the speculative bubble burst.

As a result of their ephemeral fate as products of a heated market, James felt that “[t]hey never begin to speak to you, in the manner of the builded majesties of the world as we have heretofore known such – towers or temples or fortresses or palaces – with the authority of things of permanence or even of things of long duration” (77). And in case those many early skyscrapers, especially in New York, that willfully emulated historical forms and styles and hid their modern steel frames behind lavish masonry in order to ‘feign’ tradition, James mercilessly debunked the “insincerity of the effect of the sky-scrappers” which, to his mind, only too obviously betrayed “that unmistakable New York admission of unattempted, impossible maturity” (111).²

And yet, as Tamara Follini has noted, “James was not immune to the aesthetic appeal of these buildings” (Follini 37). Indeed, he had to admit that

after all that those monsters of the mere market, as I have called them, had more to say, on the question of “effect,” than I had at first allowed? – since they are the element that looms largest for me through a particular impression, with remembered parts and pieces melting together rather richly now, of “downtown” seen and felt from the inside. (James, *The American Scene* 80)

For all their commercial crudity and false maturity, James observed that in the “lights and shades of winter and summer air, [...], when refinement of modeling descends from the skies and lends the white towers, all new and crude and commercial and over-windowed as they are, a fleeting distinction” (81). And even “the vast money-making structure [shadowing Trinity Church] quite horribly, quite romantically justified itself, looming through the weather with an insolent cliff-like sublimity” (83).³

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- 2 Follini argues that the image of the skyscraper “suggests the threat to human proportions which similar forms of architectural stylisation conveyed to James, and his anxiety that human values could be vulnerable to distortion if such a process became unduly amplified and space was given over to formalised pattern and perfected design” (Follini 37).
 - 3 James, however, was not alone with his divided feelings towards the new architectural giants of Manhattan. Montgomery Schuyler, New York journalist and influential architectural critic had protested already in 1903 that these “monster[s] of our own creation” “have turned the sky-line of New York into a horribly jagged sierra, and converted the commercial quarters of all our chief commercial cities into gloomy and windy canyons,” while at the same time clearly admitting their potential for evoking the sublime, such as when stating that skyscrapers had turned “such places as the lower end of Manhattan

Yet the true ethnographer James proved to be in *The American Scene*, not only passed his judgment on these new architectural giants predicated on their outward impressions and aesthetic effects but also set out to explore them on the inside. And it is on the occasion of these explorations that he, among the very first and most eloquent observers, delivered a number of interpretations of the skyscraper and the ‘high-rise’ way of life that were shared by many of his contemporaries just as much as they were echoed by a great many of future observers engaged with these extraordinary buildings. Similar to his sublime and thus inherently ambiguous vision of these towers from the outside, James’ ‘inside report’ is marked by an array of ‘awe’-ful experiences, both in the positive and negative sense of that opalescent word.

The morning I speak of offered me my first chance of seeing one of them from the inside – which was an opportunity I sought again, repeatedly, in respect to others; and I became conscious of the force with which this vision of their prodigious working, and of the multitudinous life, as if each were a swarming city in itself, that they are capable of housing, may beget, on the part of the free observer, in other words of the restless analyst, the impulse to describe and present the facts and express the sense of them. Each of these huge constructed and compressed communities, throbbing, through its myriad arteries and pores, with a single passion, even as a complicated watch throbs with the one purpose of telling you the hour and the minute, testified overwhelmingly to the character of New York – and the passion of the restless analyst, on his side, is for the extraction of character. (81–82)

What the “restless analyst” describes here as “a swarming city in itself” is one of the first written instances of interpreting the skyscraper as a vertical city that houses a massive “compressed community” within its confined, yet at the same time abundant spaces. While James may certainly harbor ambivalent feelings regarding the clockwork-like rationality at work in the skyscraper, it also seems doubtless that the sheer mass and complexity of both the high-rise’s spaces and population filled him with amazement and thus prompted yet another vision of sublimity. As David E. Nye has convincingly demonstrated, the skyscraper emerged early on as an instance of what he calls the “American technological sublime”: Traditionally associated with overwhelming experiences in the face of nature, the sublime may also be evoked by man-made structures, especially when they are as tall and massive as the modern skyscraper that certainly redefined people’s sense of dimension when it first emerged in downtown Chicago and Manhattan at the end of the 19th century (see Nye 87–108). Just as with natural

Island and the business district of Chicago [into an] [...] awfully impressive expression [...] of human energy and of American individualism” (Schuyler 445–446).

phenomena, these super-tall buildings could be experienced as sublime, as their sheer size and dimensions proved aesthetically and intellectually thrilling but also deeply disturbing and frightening in the way that their vastness and complexity might reduce one's own small existence to virtual nothingness and thus plunge one into a crisis of the self.

The same ambivalence inherent in the sublime experience may speak from James' recurring commentary on the "over-windowed" nature of the tall edifices populating downtown Manhattan: While aesthetically despised by James, the towers' vast and orderly structured faces of myriads of windows also seem to have stirred a terrifying sense of rationality and mass-observation in him. At night, however, the "flash of innumerable windows and flicker of subordinate guilt attributions, is like the flare, up and down their long, narrow faces, of the lamps of some general permanent "celebration""; thereby momentarily revealing a playful, irrational, and thus also transgressive character of these seemingly so rational and coercive high-rise spaces (James, *The American Scene* 76).

And while looking out from high above promised new and thrilling vistas to James the passionate esthete⁴, the travel upward, indeed that kind of "invasion of the air" by way of the elevator, a technological innovation of the 19th century that made living and working in such heights possible and comfortable, proved to be an excruciating experience to James (186). Not only did one have to "wait, perpetually, in a human bunch, in order to be hustled, under military drill, the imperative order to "step lively," into some tight mechanic receptacle, fearfully and wonderfully working, [...] something that slides or slams or bangs, operating, in your rear, as ruthlessly as the guillotine", but also "the packed and hoisted basket" appeared to James as "an almost intolerable symbol of the herded and driven state and of that malady of preference for gregarious ways" of which he suspected his hometown in general (187).

James, however, was neither the first critic to engage aesthetically with these new buildings nor was he the first to note their quality for evoking the sublime. In fact, eight years prior to James' return to New York, Louis Henry Sullivan, one of the early and most influential architects of the Chicago School of skyscraper architecture, even seemed to have advocated the ability to stir the sublime in the observer – although not mentioning the concept directly – as the skyscraper's defining and foremost quality. In his important 1896 article "The Tall Office

4 Such thrilling high-rise vista, although from the seventh story of a much smaller "fresh, light, ornamental structure, ten stories high" had already found its way into one of James' early short stories, "An International Episode" (James, "An International Episode" 157; see also Buitenhuis 319).

Building Artistically Considered” (he does not yet call it a “skyscraper”) he argues as follows:

What is the chief characteristic of the tall office building? And at once we answer, it is lofty. This loftiness is to the artist-nature its thrilling aspect. [...] It must be tall, every inch of it tall. The force and power of altitude must be in it, the glory and pride of exaltation must be in it. It must be every inch a proud and soaring thing, rising in sheer exultation that from bottom to top it is a unit without a single dissenting line,-- that it is the new, the unexpected, the eloquent peroration of most bald, most sinister, most forbidding conditions. (Sullivan 406)

This ideal of sublime loftiness, however, cannot be attained by going back to the respected traditional forms of architectural history – regardless of how lofty and sublime such historical models may ever be in themselves. Not only would an American architect designing skyscrapers in that way “merely speak[...] a foreign language with a noticeable American accent” and thus simply arrive at what James would shun as “insincerity of the effect” and “impossible maturity”; such “display of architectural knowledge in the encyclopedic sense” would also amount to an architectural “miscellany [that] is abhorrent” – also in an aesthetic sense (Sullivan 409, 407; James, *The American Scene* 111).

Instead, the best way in which to design such tall office buildings, Sullivan was convinced, should be deduced from closely observing nature:

Whether it be the sweeping eagle in his flight, or the open apple-blossom, the toiling work-horse, the blithe swan, the branching oak, the winding stream at its base, the drifting clouds, over all the coursing sun, *form ever follows function*, and this is the law. Where function does not change form does not change. (408)

Only by shaping the skyscraper according to its specific function and not by quoting heavily from respectable architectural tradition can it rise up to the loftiness and sublime radiance demanded by Sullivan. The specific function of the early skyscraper, however, was grounded in housing abundant office space as “necessary for the transaction of business” in as practical and efficient a way as possible. To Sullivan the emergence of the “modern office building” had been nothing more and nothing less than a necessary and functional solution to a pressing problem, the “answer to a call, for in it a new grouping of social conditions has found a habitation and a name” (403). Business had no practical need for lavish decorum and historical quotation; it simply demanded housing most densely and economically a growing white-collar workforce in downtown locations. Rather than in dated and foreign designs, the architect of such business architecture should take inspiration from the most rational technologies and layouts that had been devised to make high-rise building possible and safe in the

first place. While clearly abhorred by James as provisional and hyper-rationalist, buildings that did embody such architectural functionalism, such aesthetics of commerce had no need – and here the architect Sullivan markedly differs from the esthete and critic James – to hide behind venerated styles and monuments of architectural history:

And thus the design of the tall office building takes its place with all other architectural types made when architecture, as has happened once in many years, was a living art. Witness the Greek temple, the Gothic cathedral, the mediaeval fortress. (408)

In fact, such aesthetics of the rational and commercial, as deduced from the skyscraper's business function, was championed by Sullivan as the necessary precondition for producing not only a truthful architecture that did not feign old age or another function but also for prompting by way of the clear, unanimous skyward rise of its forms a sense of the sublime in the observer.

These debates on the skyscraper's function, design, and effect should be understood as early attempts to make sense of a new building type that had emerged and spread at a rapid pace in the American metropolises of Chicago and New York. What could already be deduced from the two eminent voices presented above, those of a rather conservative James and a pragmatic-progressive Sullivan, is the fact that these soaring downtown edifices not only stimulated a great deal of commentary from all sorts of people but also seemed to stir most passionate and most different, at times even utterly contradictory interpretations and ascriptions.

Because of its sheer size and vastness, the skyscraper has always evoked the idea of admirable monumentality or even of the sublime, no matter how profane its actual function, even its individual design may have been or may be. It has thus attracted attention from a great many artistic disciplines, which have sought to make sense of this modern edifice by commenting on, writing about, painting, photographing, and filming it. And for the selfsame reason of its visual "impudency," its "uncontested and unabashed pride" provoked by its massive size and skyward hubris, to echo Henry James once more, it has always been the object of great controversy (James, *The American Scene* 76). From the very moment of its emergence it was variously praised or shunned, celebrated or dismissed, as if its extreme dimensions and outstanding proportions could only generate the most controversial, oppositional, indeed often contradictory reactions from its observers and users.

It is for these reasons that my reading of the skyscraper will be founded on and continually recur to a range of (seemingly) oppositional concepts, of productive dichotomies at work within and connected to the skyscraper throughout

this present study. My corpus of sources for this endeavor will comprise a great wealth of literary and filmic engagements with the skyscraper as well as the high-rise city at large from the entirety of the 20th as well as from the beginning of the 21st century. As a consequence of this broad scope, my study will encompass examples from the most diverse genres from science fiction to high modernism to postmodernism, from poems to short stories and novels, from utopian to dystopian and apocalyptic scenarios, from silent movies all the way to action blockbusters.

Scholars wishing to engage with the skyscraper in the arts and letters will come across a vast number of pieces written on it and probably even more pictures drawn, painted, taken, and shot of it. They will come to realize that the building's extreme iconicity, its unmistakable presence as well as its ability to evoke the sublime are a blessing as much as a curse to any scholarly engagement. 'Suffering' from a significant or symbolic surplus, the skyscraper like few other building types is a structure that lends itself to and indeed has spurred a great many interpretations and significant processes throughout the decades. On the one hand, the sheer mass of its artistic representations just as much as its historic and global diversity not only turn each attempt at a comprehensive treatment of the topic into something truly illusory but also forces the enquirer to select a however small sample from a vast collection of artifacts devoted to the skyscraper. On the other hand, its 'symbolic surplus,' its very quality as a 'super sign' has also invited a clearly discernable bias of representational and metaphorical readings of this most prominent structure, be this from the arts and letters or from scholarly engagement. It not only was and still is it popular to read a city's or even a nation's state or fate from the shape and condition of its skylines or certain prominent high-rise buildings (such as, for example, the 9/11 attacks have demonstrated), but theorists of the modern and postmodern have continually sought to demonstrate their ideas in relation to high-rise buildings, as one could already see with regard to Sullivan⁵; Jean Baudrillard and Michel de

5 As demonstrated above, one of the principal laws of modernist architecture, Sullivan's famous "form ever follows function" that was to guide more than a generation of architects and designers, was in fact developed out of a discussion of the aesthetic standards for the skyscraper's design (see Sullivan 408). It should, however, be noted that Sullivan's very own creations did not live up to his ideal of functionalism in the strict sense. Compared to later skyscraper designs of Mies van der Rohe or Le Corbusier, Sullivan's buildings still boasted rich ornamentation steeped in architectural tradition, thus also meeting with the representative demands of the companies that commissioned and resided in them.

Certeau have done so in relation to Manhattan's World Trade Centre, Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson with reference to the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles (see Baudrillard, *Simulations* 136–138, *America* 62–63, *The Spirit of Terrorism* 35–48; Certeau 91; Jameson 38–45).

The skyscraper's prominent iconicity has also shaped the field and state of scholarship devoted to this building type. While many accounts focus specifically on New York or rather, to be more precise, Manhattan, as the world's still most prominent high-rise space, they often struggle hard not to surrender to the edifices' popular appeal and thus not to neglect any academic distance for the sake of simply reveling in their marvel, celebrating their sublimity, or losing themselves in the myriad of stories and commentaries their history and presence has produced.

As a consequence, there is an almost timeless genre of richly illustrated books that simply celebrate the skyscraper's prominence and monumentality (e.g. Nash/McGrath 2010). Apart from this, there is, however, in art and architectural history an ever-growing corpus of accounts of the skyscraper's development, some of them more clearly directed at a broader, not necessarily academic readership (Balzer, Jencks, Goldberger, Schleier, J. N. Schmidt, Landau/Condit, Bascomb, Bernard, Korom, Dupré). They typically comprise ever-recurring accounts of the skyscraper's emergence, the futile endeavor to define and thus single out the first skyscraper erected, as well as Manhattan's race for the sky during the 1900s and 1910s and then again during the early 1930s centering on the iconic towers of the Chrysler Building, Empire State Building, and Rockefeller Center. Art historical accounts of the strictly modernist/International Style or postmodern skyscraper are still scarce when compared to the many works focused on the generative and maturing phase of the skyscraper from around 1870 to 1940 (Giedion, Jencks, Frampton, J.N. Schmidt, Khan).

While indeed most other accounts dwell either on purely technical facts or on largely representational interpretations and the stories connected to them, Karl Sabbagh's *Skyscraper: The Making of a Building* (1989) offers a somewhat different account by rather focusing closely on constructional and material aspects of the skyscraper in its detailed case study of Manhattan's Worldwide Plaza's planning and construction process, thus offering a proto-ANT approach. Generally, it seems that the more fruitful and inspiring studies take a look at the skyscraper's history under a certain thematic aspect, such as Oliver Zunz's and Angel Kwolek-Folland's accounts on the building's ambivalent role with regard to American businesses' conservative gender politics or David E. Nye's consideration of the skyscraper as an example of the sublime in his influential study on the American Technological Sublime. Jim Rasenberger's history of the

construction workers involved in actually building these massive edifices is also worth mentioning here.

Due to the already mentioned popularity of the tall building in the arts, there is a good number of cultural and social histories of the skyscraper that tend, however, to be rather miscellaneous and additive in their attempt to map the building's representation by various arts and media (Douglas, Moudry). Except for a few individual articles that address selected problems and aspects, there is hardly any comprehensive account of the skyscraper's impact, let alone its spatial mapping in literature and film. For the most part, the skyscraper has been examined as one prominent feature of the American city in literature and film – often with a specific New York bias (Gelfant, R. A. Gates, Thomsen, Lehan, Sanders, Tallack, Scanlan, Schleier, Eckhard, Lindner). Even though some of these accounts engage more directly with the aspect of spatiality in modernist and postmodernist city novels, they seldom address the skyscraper in this respect. For the most part, it is dealt with only fleetingly and if discussed at all, merely representational readings dominate. Some more recent readings of the early skyscraper have looked at pulp magazine science fiction short stories and novels studying their use of apocalyptic imaginary and the frontier trope, both of which will form important reference points in my own account (Yablon, A. Brown).

Apart from within the humanities, there has been a growing interest in studying cities along the vertical urban axis and thus especially of skyscrapers and other phenomena of a globally intensifying high-rise urbanism within the fields of urban geography and the social sciences in recent years, a trend that has even been labeled a “vertical turn” (Graham/Hewitt, A. Harris). As already demonstrated within a limited scope by some of this field's most prominent proponents, this new approach proves highly promising for the study of artistic engagements with vertical urbanism, such as the skyscraper (McNeill, Graham/Hewitt).

Some of the most inspiring and thought-provoking studies, however, come from cross-disciplinary approaches, such as that of architect Rem Koolhaas in *Delirious New York*, his 1978 *Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, which still has to be counted among the most original works on high-rise architecture in its unique and often associative combination of social, urban, and architectural history, practical knowledge, and philosophical reasoning, and, of course, of image and text. At the beginning of each subchapter, I will again provide short overviews on the existing scholarship on each work or genre addressed in detail.

In contrast to the vast majority of primary sources and scholarly accounts that have read the skyscraper along representational lines, my study rather sets

out to map and analyze the spatial and material configurations of that extreme urban structure as well as its thus-derived agency within a range of literary and filmic works from the entire 20th and early 21st centuries. In particular, I seek to explore how the skyscraper or rather the complex assemblage of different spatialities, materialities, and technologies it is composed of, its many stories, its residential and commercial use spaces, its infrastructures of transport (elevators, staircases), communication (telephone) just as much as its air, water, and energy supply systems (ducts, pipes, wires) but also the urban high-rise milieu at large assume (co)agency within the narrative set-ups of a number of novels, short stories, and films and how these possibilities for agency change over a period of roughly a century with the shift from a mechanic-industrial regime of disciplines to a computer-based 'smart' regime of control. While certainly not shying away from representational-metaphoric interpretations entirely, this study primarily embraces a relational-metonymic approach as its overall methodology, as I am more interested in how skyscrapers along with their many spaces and technologies work and what they are able to do rather than in what the skyscraper means or stands for within a given narrative context. In fact, a material and spatial reading from 'within' can at times even support some of these more popular and common representational interpretations from the 'outside' but may also subvert and refute others.

Choosing Actor-Network Theory (ANT), as outlined most prominently in the works of French scholar Bruno Latour, as well as a range of spatial theories and concepts by such scholars as Michel Foucault (heterotopia, panopticism), Henri Lefebvre (production of space, third space), Michel de Certeau (space/place, tactics/strategies of space), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (body without organs, control society), Manuel Castells (informational city, space of flows), Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge (code/space) as the theoretical and methodological backbone of my study will lead me away from reading the skyscraper as a closed and solid entity but will rather help me understand it as an open and dynamic network of a large variety of individual actors, both human and nonhuman. How this architectural network and its various actors transform within the long-term shift from an analogue space of machines to an increasingly digital space enacted by smart technologies is of central interest to my endeavor. Technology-centered as that very shift may seem at first glance, it always involves human co-actors entering into various agential partnerships with the skyscraper's spaces and technologies and may thus be understood as an inherently social process, if social denotes, along with Latour, the network of associations forged among these human and nonhuman actors and not such rather static structures as society and institutions.

Of special importance to my study is Foucault's conception of heterotopia, which serves me to determine the skyscraper's various social functionalities as well as to connect it to the recurring metaphor and profoundly American concept of the frontier (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces"). Apart from this, Deleuze's theorizing – along the lines of Foucault's work (especially in *Discipline and Punish*) – on the societies of discipline and control provides me with another important set of categories for analyzing the shifting conditions of the skyscraper's agency and affordance (Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control", J.J. Gibson, Norman).

At times, I also refer to approaches from urban studies that either seek to rethink cities and urban phenomena along the lines of ANT (Farias/Bender, Kitchin/Dodge, *Code/Space*) or specifically focus on the city's vertical or volumetric dimension, such as in a number of works advanced by British urban scholars in the wake of the discipline's self-proclaimed "vertical turn" (Graham/Hewitt, McNeill, A. Harris). Further theoretical as well as conceptual inspiration is drawn from the postmodern thinkers Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson.

Inherently interdisciplinary in its approach, this study also recurrently refers to works of architectural theory and criticism as well as urban planning, many of them produced by prominent 20th century practitioners of these disciplines themselves, in order to contextualize and critically extend my own reasoning just as much as the various fictional works analyzed (Sullivan, Wright, Le Corbusier, Jacobs, L. Mumford, Venturi/Scott Brown/Izenour, Jencks, Koolhaas).

In the following, a short outline of this study's content as well as the corpus of works analyzed will further clarify the course of my endeavor: The first chapter aims at conceptualizing the skyscraper along the lines of ANT's relational ontology and Foucault's heterotopology. Both theoretical frameworks are outlined and discussed in detail here by drawing on a range of crucial writings by, on the one hand, Bruno Latour and other eminent ANT proponents as well as ANT-inspired urban studies scholars, and, on the other hand, Michel Foucault and other poststructuralist theoreticians of space (most notably Michel de Certeau). These theoretical and conceptual models are then put to use in order to 'reassemble' the skyscraper in terms of a relational and spatio-material reading as an intricate actor-network and thus a complex urban assemblage just as much as a heterotopia in several of the senses outlined by Foucault. This theoretical re-reading not only informs retracing the building type's historical development but also defining the specific structural features and agencies of its architecture, spaces, and technologies. Finally, this chapter seeks to elucidate the skyscraper as well as the modern city's prominence as a recurring topos in both utopian and dystopian visions of the present and future. Based on Foucault's distinction

of heterotopias of illusion and compensation as well as Certeau's model of the 'walker in the city', a new scheme for categorizing and analyzing 20th-century fictional accounts, both literary and filmic, with a specific focus on (high-rise) urban space is proposed at the end.

In the second chapter of this study I apply the theoretical findings of my first chapter by firstly taking a closer look at a range of early 20th-century science fiction short stories that prominently feature skyscrapers. A much more detailed analysis is then provided of John Dos Passos' modernist city novel *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), a panoramic work of fiction that allows one to closely retrace how Manhattan's urban actor-network is crucially reassembled by the emergence and skyward-growth of high-rise architecture both on a representational and relational level. A number of this novel's more important characters are singled out and examined according to their changing positions and personal fates between the poles of disciplinary and subversive spatio-relational regimes at work within the modern high-rise city, thus elucidating how they associate with spatial and technological but also other human actors in order to assume agency of their own. I also pay special attention to the novel's formal characteristics, seeing how a relational approach to prose works can help to provide new interpretative impulses regarding their specific language and narrative structure.

The third and longest chapter of my study looks at the ways in which the increasingly complex actor-network of the skyscraper, its spatial structure, and heterotopic potentials change with the ever-intensified implementation of computer-based technologies, that is to say, its transformation into a 'smart building' in the course of the 20th century's second half. My analysis of a number of American literary and filmic works from that period is guided by the question of how the potentials for assuming agency and realizing heterotopias within this increasingly smart architectural-technologic assemblage have shifted in the light of a slow but determined transition from a disciplinary to a control society, as conceptualized by Foucault (*Discipline and Punish*) and Deleuze ("Postscript"). First of all, this comprises tracing the skyscraper's rise to a standard solution of housing as part of much-contested but almost globally implemented postwar urban planning schemes, while at the same time providing a prime site for the installment of smart control technologies. As a consequence of this ongoing computerization, the buildings' radically transformed spatiality and thus also any kind of accessibility for association and subversive affordance in general is closely examined by drawing on conceptual frameworks provided by Gilles Deleuze ("Postscript"), Manuel Castells, Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge as well as James J. Gibson and Donald A. Norman. These findings are then put to test in the following in-depth analysis of four movies and three novels including their

respective movie adaptations (with the exception of one of them) while at the same time aiming to understand these works from within the specific cultural contexts and logics of their time.

First, I look at two action catastrophe movies centering around failing or terrorist-seized ultra-modern smart skyscrapers, namely *The Towering Inferno* (1974) and *Die Hard* (1988), both offering scenarios of a struggle between a powerful skyscraper antagonist and an individual or a group of human protagonists attempting to resist or escape its perils. Then, I turn to *Scissors* (1991) and *Sliver* (1993), two lesser-known neo noir thrillers exploring the possibilities of turning the smart high-rise building into a prime spatio-technological tool of specifically male violence when used for manipulating and entrapping preferably female victims. Based on their narrative similarities, these four movies are situated in the newly coined 'bloxploitation' genre, defined by its exploitation of vertical spaces as settings and narrative catalysts. A range of films and novels subsumed under this label are then classified according to the specific actors that and methods by way of which they produce a characteristic 'high-rise horror'. These lines of analysis are extended into a close study of the (post-modern) novels *American Psycho* (1991) by Bret Easton Ellis, *Fight Club* (1996) by Chuck Palahniuk (including their film adaptations by Mary Harron (2000) and David Fincher (1999), respectively), and *Cosmopolis* (2003) by Don DeLillo, where I am specifically interested in how the control logics of smart code/spaces are enacted narratologically and stylistically but also in the new modes of alienation and subversion explored in these texts.

A final coda shall serve me to reiterate and summarize the theoretical and analytical endeavor undertaken in this study and thus to assess its academic harvest just as much as define a prospect for further study.

1. The Skyscraper as a Hybrid Network of Hybrid Actors

Abstract: The first chapter aims at conceptualizing the skyscraper along the lines of Actor-Network Theory's relational ontology and Foucault's concept of heterotopia. Both theoretical frameworks are outlined and discussed in detail by drawing on a range of crucial writings by, on the one hand, Bruno Latour and other eminent ANT proponents as well as ANT-inspired urban studies scholars, and, on the other hand, Michel Foucault and other poststructuralist theoreticians of space, such as Michel de Certeau. These theoretical and conceptual models are made productive in 'reassembling' the skyscraper in terms of a relational and spatio-material reading as an intricate actor-network and thus a complex urban assemblage just as much as a heterotopia in several of the senses outlined by Foucault. This theoretical re-conceptualization not only informs an outline of the skyscraper's historical development but also a definition of the specific structural features and agencies of its architecture, spaces, and technologies. Finally, this chapter seeks to elucidate the skyscraper as well as the modern city's prominence as a recurring topos in both utopian and dystopian visions of the present and future. Based on Foucault's distinction of heterotopias of illusion and compensation as well as Certeau's model of the 'walker in the city', a new scheme for categorizing and analyzing 20th-century fictional accounts, both literary and filmic, with a specific focus on high-rise urban space is proposed at the end.

Keywords: Skyscraper, Actor-Network Theory, Assemblage, Heterotopia, Frontier, Spatial Theory

1.1 Rethinking the Social and the City with Actor-Network Theory

Actor-Network Theory has its roots in the academic field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), which is a strand of sociological study specifically concerned with the social dimension of scientific research and technological innovation. Indeed, many of its early and most prominent studies were concerned with the practices of scientific research as well as with the workings and development of certain technologies. Over the years however, ANT has gradually emancipated itself from the somewhat narrow confines of STS and has been developed (especially by Bruno Latour) into a virtually universal philosophical theory of the social or (still later) of reality at large, thus evolving into a theoretical framework that may be transplanted to and fruitfully applied within almost any disciplinary context. It is, however, only within recent years that scholars other than

ANT's founding circle and outside the field of STS have increasingly adopted its ideas and started reworking their own disciplines by way of the conceptual tools offered by ANT (see e.g. Yaneva for architectural studies or Farias/Bender for urban studies).

ANT was developed in its basic outlines during the 1980s by a group of French and British scholars among whom Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law rank as the most prominent ones. Apart from crucial influences from the sociological currents of social constructivism and ethnomethodology, ANT also draws on theoretical-philosophical ideas by such scholars as Gabriel Tarde, Alfred North Whitehead, Gilbert Simondon, Gregory Bateson, Michel Serres as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (see Blok/Jensen 12–20, Berressem).⁶

Ever since Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann published their seminal study *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* in 1966, the social sciences and STS in particular have been under the spell of social constructivism, which is based on the fundamental idea that social and cultural phenomena, such as knowledge, ideas, values, and mores are not static givens but are constructed via human interaction in much the same way that material artifacts are. ANT's central theoretical point of departure may be best elucidated by taking a closer look at its simultaneous indebtedness to, its critique of, and subsequent departure from the social constructivist mainstream of 1960s and 70s sociological thought.

ANT is an heir to social constructivism insofar as it is also founded on the conviction that each and every phenomenon of the social world is in fact a result of construction or assemblage. It does, however, criticize social constructivism for artificially restricting that very argument of the world's universal constructedness and thus failing to push it to its logical end. For Berger and Luckmann the "social construction of reality" is limited to the social phenomena of the human world while at the same time it does not consider the material realm of nature, objects, and artifacts that seemingly remain a priori givens excluded from social construction. The reality principle of social constructivism thus only encompasses a social reality. As opposed to that, ANT demands a symmetric treatment of the social and natural/object world, considering both realms

6 In many ways, one may argue that ANT and a renewed academic interest in materialism spurred by it has led to a recent rediscovery and renewed interest in the seminal work of almost-forgotten or marginalized theorists such as Tarde, Whitehead, and Simondon, and to a lesser degree also Serres and Deleuze/Guattari. For Tarde see for example Latour, *Reassembling* 13–15.

and its entities as equally socially constructed.⁷ As both realms, however, are constructed and, as my initial analysis of the early discourse on skyscrapers has shown, frequently interrelate, ANT sees no need to maintain any kind of traditionally upheld separation between nature and culture, technology and society. In fact, as a result of that radical symmetry demanded by ANT, such deeply entrenched concepts as nature and society become obsolete in themselves. Hence, this theory opts for a more abstracted and thus more egalitarian or symmetric terminology: any kind of entity, “*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference” is simply referred to as an actor that may itself be related or connected to other actors, either human or nonhuman, thus establishing networks (Latour, *Reassembling* 71).⁸ With every new connection, every new association forged with another actor, both actors involved make a difference in each other’s actions and thereby undergo change and possible redefinition. In order to avoid confusion with the standard definition of an actor as both a human and a consistent source of action, as well as to highlight its inherently hybrid and ‘associated’ nature (such as being constituted of human and non-human components) ANT rather suggests referring to them by a more abstract placeholder term stemming from linguistics: actant. Within such a dynamic and hybrid model of constantly (re)networking and redefining actors or actants, every newly adopted actor may trigger translations by way of which the entire network of actors (forming an actant in itself) may change its name, shape, materiality, scope, power etc.⁹

7 As Latour has convincingly argued, the complexly constructed and assembled nature of material entities is already implied on an etymological level: the word ‘thing’, for instance, refers to an assembly concerned with negotiation and jurisdiction in the tradition of ancient Germanic tribes. The historical-political ‘thing’ is thus as much “a contested gathering of many conflicting demands” as is the more general object-thing in our modern usage (Latour/Yaneva 86, see also Latour, “When Things Strike Back” 115).

8 Contrary to a common-sense understanding of the term actor as a “source of action,” Latour rather stresses its mobility along with its ability to be associated with and to be changed and made to act by other actors when he defines it as a “moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it” (Latour, *Reassembling* 46).

9 In order to emphasize the continuous effort to be exerted by the actors so as to associate into new and maintain existing networks, Latour has actually suggested talking of “worknets” instead of networks as it is “the work, and the movement, and the flow, and the changes that should be stressed” when thinking of networks and the process of networking (Latour, *Reassembling* 143). Latour has not been consistent in his writings with regard to the question of whether these networks or worknets are to be treated

Yet, neither these larger actor-networks nor the actors themselves are treated as given a priori but are themselves regarded as the result of complex networking and assembling processes among other actors. Actors may hence be regarded not only as the originators or agents but also as the ultimate results of networking. It has thus been said that ANT takes up the 'preparatory' work carelessly skipped over by mainstream social theory, i.e. the long and often tedious task of retracing the micro processes of networking that much later may build up into the macro structures that form the basic components and explanatory tools of the traditional social sciences (actors, institutions etc.). ANT is therefore more interested in the micro processes of social construction or assembling and thus the very fabric and evolution of social macro structures, while mainstream sociology contents itself with founding its explanations on these macro structures and successfully represses the fact that they are themselves the result of long and complex micro processes of networking among a possibly vast number of actors. In terms of providing a good explanation of social phenomena, ANT deems the labor of closely retracing and describing the intricate processes of networking and translation as much more insightful than mainstream social theory's method of explaining any kind of phenomenon by macro models based on such classical aggregates of sociology as actors, groups, institutions, systems or even society at large, that may easily be revealed as nothing but unopened conceptual 'containers'.

Network building (or association) and translation are thus the basic operations that one has to follow when describing and explaining reality (of whatever nature or artifice), according to ANT. As there is no 'outside', neither social nor natural/material, to that endlessly relational reality composed out of a myriad of constantly and mutually (re)associating and translating actors, ANT offers an internalistic and truly holistic theoretical approach. As such, it also considers itself as non-reductionist: it spares nothing in the way that nature and the object world are excluded by social constructivism but instead claims to consider and explain 'everything' by way of a theoretical model at the same time simplistic (because so minimalistic), yet also highly abstracted and thus potentially very complex. After all, ANT presents itself as a relational-constructivist realism more truthful and accurate towards its objects of study than traditional strands of social theory. In this way, one could consider it as operating in a theoretical middle position in between a pure material realism that takes its natural

as an actual reality or merely as theoretical models able to best describe the nature of reality (see Latour, *Reassembling* 131–132, Berressem 63).

and objective environment for granted as an unconstructed given, and a radical poststructural constructivism which denies any real or material outside beyond the always-constructed un- or hyperreality of a social-linguistic matrix. Seen from that perspective, ANT reinigorates faith in a natural and objective reality (however equally constructed and thus symmetric to the social realm), only to extend poststructuralism's radical constructivism onto it. Thus symmetrized and equally considered as constructed realms, the social and the natural are, however, suspended as two distinct and essentially differing spheres and may dissolve within an 'undifferentiated' relational realism of actor-networks that does not differentiate between its actors save their quality as human or nonhuman.

Within such a model of reality there is no need for an autonomous social realm or even a society as either a force interacting with or a static cadre framing 'the rest' of reality, as is suggested by the theory and practice of several 'hybrid' fields of social study, such as social psychology, social anthropology or socio-linguistics where society or social factors are referred to in order explain certain aspects of psychology, culture, or language (see Latour, *Reassembling* 3–4). ANT, by contrast, starts out from much more neutral ground as it does not assign its actors to any of these well-established predefined fields (culture, economy, language, or society) but is rather interested in their self-definitions and in how their composition and definition changes as a consequence of continuous associations and translations with, by, and among these actors. Rather than being a static framework encompassing or neighboring other fields of reality, the social (or real) may be found in that very process of continuous association and translation among actors – a fluid medium operating in between actors as compared to the static aggregates of mainstream social theory (actors, institutions, systems, or society at large). It is in this sense that Latour can echo Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum – although with very different intentions – that for ANT “there is no such thing as society” (Latour, *Reassembling* 5). If ANT's approach is thus concerned more with dynamic associations among actors than with the static framework of society, it may indeed be better labeled a sociology of associations, an “associology”, instead of a sociology of the social (9). Certainly, ANT's relational-immanent conception of reality bears many links to and correspondences with earlier theoretical conceptions, such as, for instance, the rhizome in Deleuze and Guattari's work or Foucault's dispositive concept that similarly suggest a model of reality as an immanent and dynamic network of associations and assemblages (Deleuze/Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 3–25, Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh” 195). In fact, several proponents of ANT have had trouble with the label “actor-network theory” and have proposed alternative or more precise namings for their theoretical endeavor, such as “sociology of translation”

(Callon, “Some Elements” 196) or “actant-rhizome ontology” (Latour “On Recalling ANT” 15, 19, *Reassembling* 9) with the latter obviously revealing ANT’s affinity at least with the Deleuzian approach (see also Berressem 68–69).¹⁰

But let me briefly retrace the development of ANT from its origins in STS to a fully-fledged philosophy of the real in order to explain and concretize a range of its key concepts in greater detail, many of them being fundamental to the analytic endeavor of this present study.

As already mentioned above, ANT’s roots are firmly grounded in the tradition of social constructivist Science and Technology Studies. It is thus no wonder that one study that became seminal for ANT’s later development as an independent theoretical framework, in fact already introducing many of its later key concepts, also ranks as a classic STS text strongly rooted in both social constructivism and ethnomethodology. The text in question is *Laboratory Life*, Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar’s collaborative 1979 work on the “social construction of scientific facts” based on an almost anthropological field study of scientific research in the laboratories of one prestigious temple of the natural sciences, namely Salk Institute for Biological Study near San Diego.^{11,12}

Latour and Woolgar come to understand the scientists’ work in their laboratories not as revealing or discovering some a priori existing mysteries of nature but rather as a literal ‘making’ of scientific facts. This very making or construction of facts is interpreted as a complex process of literary in- or transcription

10 Foucault seems to delineate a proto-actor-network when he outlines his conception of the dispositif as “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid” with the dispositif itself constituting “the system of relations that can be established between these elements” (Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh” 195). Given that the dispositif may be considered as the macro model in Foucault’s analysis of power, it is interesting to see that also Callon has termed ANT “a new approach to the study of power” (“Some Elements” 196).

11 It may be worth a study in its own right to elucidate the way in which scientific research within the Salk Institute’s laboratories is crucially shaped by, interweaving with, and assembling within Louis Kahn’s architecture of the institute complex.

12 By changing *Laboratory Life*’s subtitle from *The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (1979) to simply *The Construction of Scientific Facts* in the study’s second edition in 1986, the authors have purposefully distanced their work from the field of social constructivism (generally excluding the material world) and have so sought to align it more with the then emerging field of ANT that had been inspired by and developed for a good part out of this selfsame study.

by way of which the 'fact' is continuously transferred into another medium and thus changes its materiality and shape. The fabrication of scientific facts or data thus involves a long chain of transcriptions: an organic source material is 'transcribed' into small samples in aperatures, these into measured data, these into curves, graphs, or diagrams, these into interpretations and hypotheses, these into publications and presentations and these eventually into an accepted scientific doctrine. The fundamental function of laboratories may therefore be described as transforming vague statements and speculations into scientific facts. However, this fundamental and routinely conducted practice of science is not a pure line of 'objective' scientific reasoning but is rather revealed as a process based in its entirety on a chain of transcriptions involving a great many organic materials and technologies and thus a great many nonhuman actors equally associated to and participating in the construction of facts. The process of transcription outlined here thus appears as an early precursor to one of ANT's central concepts, namely the process of translation which describes the transformation of an actor or rather its specific 'script', its changing shape, materiality, and scope, every time a new association is forged with another actor. The scholar's task in ANT is thus to follow an actor, retracing the path of its many translations, its mediation through various other media or actors that it becomes associated to.¹³ Similar to McLuhan's famous dictum that the medium is the message, one may also conclude that for ANT no mediation or rather translation process constitutes a neutral transmission of information, that every medium, every newly associated actor may 'inscribe' itself on the other actors and transform their shape just as much as it may transform, blur, or intensify their content or 'message', i.e. their scripts and programs (McLuhan 7–23).

Turning to the specific historical account of the 'discovery' of the TRF(H) peptide by Roger Guillemin and his team at Salk Institute during the 1960s, Latour and Woolgar demonstrate in detail how the peptide was constructed as a scientific fact by way of a large set of social, technological, financial, and prestige-based circumstances (or rather co-actors). TRF(H) is thus not a pre-existing object only waiting to be discovered by science but is rather revealed as a meticulously fabricated product whose facticity, indeed its whole existence, is

13 Latour even states that the actors may provide a better sociology of their world and actions than any scholar could do: "Actors do the sociology for the sociologists and sociologists learn from the actors what makes up their set of associations." And he goes on: "actors themselves make everything, including their own frames, their own theories, their own contexts, their own metaphysics, even their own ontologies" (Latour, *Reassembling* 32, 147, see also 11–12).

crucially co-defined by e.g. the technological equipment and methods applied in the process of sequencing it, the financial budget limiting further modification of hypotheses concerning its structure, or Guillemin's credibility as a scientist as well as the prestige of the institution (Salk Institute). When stressing TRF(H)'s essential contractedness, Latour and Woolgar, however, do not want to "deny its solidity as a fact" but rather to "emphasize how, where, and why it was created" (Latour/Woolgar 127). Once "a statement [has been] transformed into a fact and hence freed from the circumstances of its production" it seems to obscure its complex chain of construction as well as the entire network of a myriad of actors involved in and constituting it (105). At the same time, scientists like to revert to 'moment of discovery' accounts, mythologizing the very moment they unraveled or revealed a seemingly a priori existing fact of nature in favor of specifying, indeed denying the long list of human and nonhuman actors along with their programs involved in the construction process, such as the size of the research budget, the specific technologies used, the collaboration of assistants and colleagues, their own credibility, as well as the prestige of their research institution or even the competition among themselves.

It is thus that Latour and Woolgar describe the process of black-boxing – a concept central to both ANT and STS – i.e. the transformation of an intricate network of actors into a solid, 'closed' fact, a black box, that neither needs to be opened again nor questioned any longer and thus considered as a constructed network. On a later occasion, Latour has explained the very process of black-boxing as

the way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become. (Latour, *Pandora's Hope* 304)

It is only when a technological black box fails and breaks down or a scientific one (a fact) proves inadequate in research and practice that one is forced to reopen it, thus not only at once laying bare its essentially constructed network structure but also producing a whole "swarm of new actors" (Callon, "The Sociology of an Actor-Network" 29–30).

With the basic conceptual framework and notions (although in some cases termed differently) thus already in place, Latour and his French and British colleagues went on to flesh out and specify *Laboratory Life's* insights into a coherent theoretical approach that came to be known as Actor-Network Theory during the 1980s. Within this period, the proponents of ANT also provided a

good number of case studies of selected scientific inventions or technological innovations (both successful and failed) in order to demonstrate the viability of their new approach. In his 1984 study *The Pasteurization of France*, Latour himself did so by way of a detailed account of French chemist Louis Pasteur's discovery or rather construction of the microbes as a new fact and actor around the middle of the 19th century that would henceforth revolutionize a range of fields from biology to medicine and hygiene. It is in these studies that its creators ceased making reference to 'social' factors, circumstances, or society at large (such as Latour and Wooglar still did in *Laboratory Life*) in favor of regarding these well-established aggregates of the social sciences as obscuring black boxes that need to be revealed and studied in their contractedness as networks of human and nonhuman actors. In this way, ANT not only clearly distanced itself from a social constructivist tradition centering on human agency only but also emancipated itself as an autonomous theory within the STS field whose applicability does not necessarily need to be limited to the study of science and technology.

The many studies of the late 1980s and early 1990s that crucially shaped and popularized ANT within the social sciences field and well beyond mostly comprise in-depth accounts of a selected range of sometimes large-scale projects of technological innovation and sometimes rather mundane everyday objects: From Michel Callon's study on the cultivation of scallops in the Breton St Brieuc Bay (Callon, "Some Elements") as well as on the construction of the VEL electric vehicle in France during the 1970s ("The Sociology of an Actor-Network") up to his collaborative study with John Law on the ultimately failed plan for designing the new British TSR 2 military aircraft during the 1960s (Law/Callon, "Engineering and Sociology") as well as to Bruno Latour's classic and oft-quoted analyses of the "sociology of a door-opener" at a university institute (Latour, "Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together"), the use of weighted key chains in hotels ("Technology is Society Made Durable") or the strange case of the double-bit key used in Berlin tenement buildings ("The Berlin Key"); his famous accounts of guns and speed bumps ("On Technical Mediation") down to his meticulous analysis of the planning, testing, and ultimate failure of the Parisian Aramis system for personal rapid transit (*Aramis or The Love of Technology*) – these accounts were provided as part of a range of articles and monographs.

Compared to standard sociological accounts of the social construction or dimension of such technological objects and innovation processes, these ANT studies refrain from initially defining and categorizing their objects of study by way of a set of classical sociological aggregate labels for individual entities (groups, institutions, systems, or structures) or processes (stabilization, individuation, or autonomization). Rather, they look at the individual actors (no matter whether

human or nonhuman) as well as at their specific composition from an as abstract and thus neutral perspective as possible and follow them through a number of associations and networks, paying close attention to the transformations, renamings, and changing degrees of agency they undergo in the process without ever imposing sociological terms or interpretations on them that do not stem from the actors themselves. Rather, these accounts allow the actors themselves to provide them with their own sociology instead of pressing the actors and their transformations into a prefabricated analytic framework. Thus, one could argue that these ANT accounts begin way before and also end before traditional sociological studies normally start off, believing that a close description and retracing of the actors involved together with their mutual associations and translations provides a more truthful and fruitful account of the technologies and processes in question than any standard sociological approach could ever allow for. ANT has thus denounced traditional sociological studies of science and technology as merely dealing with a “ready made”, an already assembled and black-boxed object, whereas ANT itself is more devoted to studying science and technology “in action” or even more precisely “in the making”, i.e. the intricate process of an object’s planning, its construction, and assemblage happening before it may eventually be black-boxed into a seemingly solid product (Latour, *Science in Action* 4–10, 258).

What in some cases or at first sight may complicate the actually quite straightforward ANT approach is mostly due to both its idiosyncratic and abstracted terminology (“infra-language” (Latour, *Reassembling* 30)) that is in part derived from linguistics. The basic ANT method and terminology may be demonstrated in the following way: one starts with an individual actor or a group of actors that share an interest or a program. Realizing this program, however, makes the involvement, i.e. the association and translation of a group of other actors, human or nonhuman, necessary. In order to do so, they need to devise a plan for building an “actor-world” of their own design, which in fact amounts to devising a sociology of all the actors involved (Callon, “Some Elements” 202). This first entails listing and defining all relevant actors necessary to be enrolled in their scheme. In a second step, they have to allocate certain roles and functions to each of the actor groups that would guarantee the success of their program of action or script. Each group of actors within that hypothetical actor-world is thus ‘inscribed’, i.e. convinced of the general and personal desirability of their joint endeavor and thereby made to act according to their script.¹⁴ This hypothetical

14 Madeleine Akrich has elaborated on and greatly clarified ANT’s terminology with regard to the processes of trans- and inscription in her 1987 article (see Akrich, “The De-Description of Technical Objects”).

allocation of roles based on each actor groups' special "interessement", i.e. their personal interest to cooperate, constitutes the initial actors' first great achievement (see 204–206). Yet once they have defined and thus inscribed and translated all actors according to their program of action and thereby built a hypothetical actor-world, they have to devote themselves to the far more arduous task of actually enrolling them: now they need to enter into negotiations with each individual or group involved, convince them of their script and make them accept the role allocated to them in their hypothetical actor-world. The entire process of the actual enrollment and subsequent transcription of all actors involved thus amounts to associating all of them into a joint network (first hypothetical, then actual) and is generally referred to as translation in ANT terminology. Once a stable network among all actors with the aim of realizing their initial program is successfully forged, it may well seem, after some time, that this network, e.g. a new technology, a company or institution (now labeled with a specific, well-established name), may have existed in this form since forever, while in fact, being no more than a mere black box hiding away a complicated history of planning, enrollment, network-building, and translation involving the most diverse actors and elements.

As demonstrated in a range of studies, such translation processes may not always be successful. In large-scale technological projects, such as the construction of a new military aircraft by the British Army in the 1960s, the VEL electric car in 1970s France, or the implementation of the Aramis transport system in Paris during the 1970s and 80s, these projects ultimately failed because one or several actors refused to accept their role as devised for them in the hypothetical actor-worlds developed by the original initiators and planners. In most cases, some of the actors that planners initially attempted to enroll for their projects were in turn successful in devising actor-worlds of their own where the original action programs and thus the innovations in question seemed unnecessary, unrealizable, or too expensive and were thus canceled entirely or realized in a very different form (see Callon, "The Sociology of an Actor-Network", Law/Callon, "Sociology and Engineering", Latour, *Aramis or The Love of Technology*).

Yet ANT is not only able to explain the success and failure of large-scale techno-scientific projects; it may be similarly applied to the study of much smaller and much more mundane cases, such as individual technical objects of everyday use that do not so obviously appear as complex actor-networks but rather as solid and indeed passive things. However, when the process of their 'construction' is studied according to ANT, they may be quickly revealed as mere

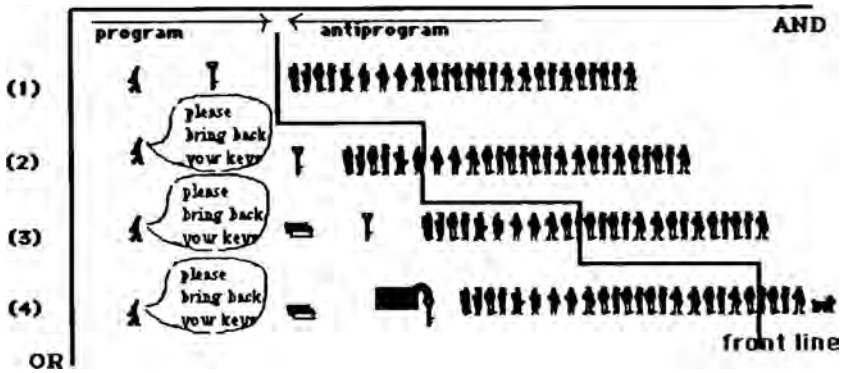


Illustration 1: Sociology of the Key Chain: Each Connection with a New Actor (Speech Act, Sign, Key Weight) Allows the Hotelier to Enroll More of His Guests in His Action Program and to Discourage Them from Following Their Antiprograms (Latour, “Technology is Society Made Durable” 107).

black boxes shielding away complicated networks of competing actors and a long line of translations, of shifting shapes and materials.

Bruno Latour has shown this in his famous and much-quoted study of weighted key chains, as used in many hotels so as to make their guests leave their room keys at the hotel reception and not carry them around and possibly even lose them (Latour, “Technology is Society Made Durable”). Latour follows the ‘making’ of the weighted key chain from the perspective of the hotelier who quite understandably has a huge interest in keeping as many keys as possible in the hotel in order to avert their loss which would force him to replace the entire lock of the room in question in order to guarantee the safety of its future occupants. The hotelier’s desire to make his guests take care of the keys and not to lose them carelessly thus defines his action program or script that he would like to inscribe into all of his guests.

As may be grasped from the socio-technical graph that Latour adds to illustrate and clarify his line argument (107, see Illustration 1) in the initial situation (1) the hotelier stands alone with his silent desire for retaining all his keys with no guest following his program; instead all of the guests seem to follow their own interests diametrically opposed to those of the hotelier (anti- or counterprogram), mindlessly carrying out their keys and apparently oblivious of the danger of losing them and the trouble and costs they may cause the hotelier in that case. Unsatisfied with this initial situation (1), Latour’s hotelier has to devise a range of schemes that will allow him to inscribe and thus enroll as many

guests as possible in his program/script. Once more an actor delivers a whole sociology all by himself if one simply follows his psychological deliberations, his definition of roles as well as the assessment of the other actors' interests. In every step (1–4) outlined in the diagram he reassesses his scheme anew and tries to enroll a larger group of guests by adding new actors, human, nonhuman, and verbal, to his newly enacted network based on his initial program. In fact, this network undergoes a whole chain of associations (AND, horizontal axis) and substitutions or translations (OR, vertical axis) until finally a weighted key chain comes into play, helping the hotelier to enroll the vast majority of guests into his program (see 106). In a first attempt to discipline and thus enroll his guests (2) he simply voices his desire by telling or making a receptionist tell every guest leaving the hotel to please bring back his or her key. Adding an admonitory speech act into the network, he is able to transform, indeed translate his program and make it more powerful. However, only a few of his guests allow themselves to get enrolled in the hotelier's program through simple verbal admonition. The great majority still follows their private antiprograms carrying along and possibly even losing their keys. Once more the hotelier adds a new actor into the chain of actors by setting up a large sign that reads "Please leave your room key at the front desk before you go out!" at the reception, thus inscribing and translating a new nonhuman actor according to his program (3). With the joint force of the hotelier, his admonitory speech acts (by now a human-nonhuman actant) and the sign still more guests seem to give up of their antiprograms and allow themselves to get enrolled by leaving their key at the front desk. Once more the hotelier as well as the verbal (his admonitions) and textual-material (the sign) delegates of his program are able to shift "the dividing line between programs and anti-programs [that] corresponds to the front of the tiny controversy we are following here" (107). With still almost half of his guests disregarding his verbal and written program, the hotelier has to think of yet another scheme to add to his already existing array of human and nonhuman accomplices in his fight to retain as many keys as possible from his mindless guests. Only now does he (or has an "innovator" paid to do so) really consider the guests' interests in his plans in how to best realize his program. He or rather the innovator suggests literally casting his desire in iron by adding yet another material actor and having a metal weight chained to each key, thus stirring an actual interest in the guests to not carry an uncomfortable and heavy object attached to their keys around with them (4):

Customers suddenly become only too happy to rid themselves of this annoying object which makes their pockets bulge and weighs down their handbags; they go to the front

desk on their own accord to get rid of it. Where the sign, the inscription, the imperative, discipline, or moral obligation all failed, the hotel manager, the innovator, and the metal weight succeeded. (104)

Only after introducing the weighted key chains is the hotelier able to enroll almost every guest in his program whose process of association and substitution one can neatly follow in Latour's diagram. From situations 1 to 4 the chain (one may also model it as a network) of actors – human (the guests, the hotelier, his employees) and nonhuman (keys, signs, metal weights) – enrolled in the hotelier's program not only grows and thus makes the program more real (horizontal axis) but it also changes its shape and materiality, with several actors becoming translated into other forms and shapes (vertical axis). Along with the actors that are now enrolled in it, also the program itself changes:

[...] the order that is obeyed is no longer the same as the initial order. It has been translated, not transmitted. In following it, we are not following a sentence through the context of its application, nor are we moving from language to the praxis. The program "leave your key at the front desk", which is now scrupulously executed by the majority of the customers is simply not the one we started with. Its displacement has transformed it. [...] The statement is no longer the same, the customers are no longer the same, the key is no longer the same – even the hotel is no longer quite exactly the same. (105)

In fact, the program, once only a silent desire of the hotelier, has become a powerfully enacted reality, an arduously and meticulously forged network of mutual associations and translations among a great many actors, all contained, indeed made durable and thereby also black-boxed within the seemingly so mundane object of the weighted key chain. The hotelier's program, his desire to enforce discipline among his guests so they may not carry their keys out of the hotel has become real through an intricate and strenuous process of negotiations among all actors involved and has finally found its most resistant durability in a metal weight. It is thus that Latour can argue that technology – just as much as architecture, machinery, and any other artifact, as mundane as it may be – is in fact "society made durable" and that, as he claims in a still later article, "[a]ny time an interaction has temporal and spatial extension [and thus durability], it is because one has shared it with non-humans" (Latour, "On Interobjectivity" 239).

In much the same manner as with the weighted hotel key chains, Latour has demonstrated how in a whole range of other everyday objects complex social programs and actor-networks are at work every time they are used and how in all these cases one is able "to do words with things." In this way, the double-bit key used in many 20th-century Berlin tenement buildings literally enforces

every tenant to lock each door once they have opened and passed it (otherwise not being able to release the key from the lock). Each tenant thus automatically enrolls in the strict security policy of proprietors and janitors who are momentarily freed from their duty to check on every front or yard door whether it is locked or not, and do not need to admonish tenants verbally or by way of signs to keep certain doors locked at all times (see Latour, “The Berlin Key”). Similarly, speed bumps manage to enforce motorists’ adherence to speed limits on certain streets, thereby black-boxing and perfecting, indeed ‘concretizing’ the work of an army of policemen and road signs admonishing motorists to mind speed limits. By making it highly unattractive to speed through traffic-calmed areas unless one ruins one’s car on one of these bumps, they prove extremely effective in enrolling the vast majority of drivers and thus possess a more powerful disciplinary agency than any human police force or even a forest of traffic signs may ever do (see Latour, “On Technical Mediation” 38–41). ANT can thus elucidate the hybrid human-nonhuman nature of such ‘banal’ things of everyday life and demonstrate how human power is intricately interwoven with and routinely delegated to material and technological objects, thereby effectively undercutting all models of reality that neatly separate a purely human society from a purely material realm of objects and technologies. Latour may thus summarize:

A social dimension to technology? That’s not saying much. Let us rather admit that no one has ever observed a human society that has not been built with things. A material aspect to societies? That is still not saying enough: things do not exist without being full of people, and the more modern and complicated they are, the more people swarm through them. A mixture of social determinations and material constraints? That is a euphemism, for it is no longer a matter of mixing pure forms chosen from two great reservoirs, one in which would lie the social aspects of meaning or subject, the other where one would stockpile material components belonging to physics, biology and the science of materials. (Latour, “The Berlin Key” 10)

The secret of these hybrid objects described by Latour is indeed their capacity to black-box a complicated network of a great many actors and actants involved. As Callon has succinctly pointed out, black-boxing an actor-network is, however, based on the condition of at least temporally perpetuating it by way of producing both convergence and irreversibility among its components (Callon, “Techno-Economic Networks” 148–150). The initiator(s) or ‘spokes-person(s)’ of an actor-network (the hotelier in the case of the weighted key chains) may turn ‘their’ network convergent when they can make sure that their program or script is actually and successfully inscribed in all actors involved and when their inscriptions have effectively turned into prescriptions faithfully followed by all actors – e.g. drivers minding speed limits due to speed bumps or Berlin tenants

obediently locking all doors because of their keys. Apart from this, the network's spokespersons have to install a certain degree of irreversibility with regard to their programs and the roles allocated to the individual actors. Only when the very relations among the actors of a network as well as their individual roles are stable enough and generally accepted, can one be sure that the network stays more or less resistant with regard to any kind of attempt to enroll and translate the actors in accordance with other programs (antiprograms) and thus to destabilize, weaken, and de-realize the original network, so as to reverse its initial program (e.g. hotel guests disregarding all admonitions, removing the key chain or carrying it out). Callon makes clear that only

[w]hen a network is strongly convergent and irreversibilised, it can be assimilated to a black box whose behaviour is known and predicated independently of its context. It may then link itself to one or more "external" actor-networks with which it exchanges intermediaries. Under such circumstances it is *punctualised* in these other networks. (Callon, "Techno-Economic Networks" 152)

With its complexity thus abstracted, a black-boxed actor-network is henceforth regarded as a more or less stable actant that may now easily be associated and translated within actor-networks on a macro level. Complicated actor-networks, now black-boxed into a single punctualized actant, may thus be integrated into larger schemes, with each 'micro' actor/actant (point) enrolled in a new program and inscribed with a new role and function within the macro network. In that sense, the hotelier may integrate the actant of his weighted key chains into larger and more complex schemes for disciplining his guests, regardless of the specific program and relations involved in the black-boxed network of the key chains. Similarly, the proprietors who introduced the double-bit key may think of still other ways to discipline their tenants and then associate and translate the keys into new and larger networks so as to install a still more powerful security and control policy within their buildings.

In fact, only when fully black-boxed can such objects truly attain the status of "immutable mobiles", objects that are solid and resistant ("immutable") enough with regard to their initial inscription so as to be able to move across vast distances within larger macro networks, thus constantly binding together the network's center and its parts by forging new or strengthening old associations (Latour, "Drawing Things Together" 26–35). Objects such as the Berlin key, the weighted key chain, or the speed bump (in a smaller context) as well as scientific tools, such as books, maps, or databases (in larger contexts) represent perfect examples of immutable mobiles that may circulate freely and disseminate their individual program (power, knowledge, discipline etc.) everywhere within an extended

network, while at the same time remaining deeply rooted to the center and its original program. Yet they may do so only if the actor-network that constitutes them is sufficiently solidified and thus black-boxed; in this way they spare one the effort of retracing and reassembling the whole process of association, inscription, and translation involved in constructing that very object, every time one desires using it or accessing its information/program. The black-boxed object hides away its hybrid constructedness in order to foreground the basic content of its inscription, i.e. its functionality or message.

Black-boxing, however, is not only a phenomenon described by ANT; it also represents an important methodological strategy of ANT itself, especially when it becomes necessary to move one's argument or perspective from a micro to a macro scale and thus to reduce the complexity of every single micro actor-network involved in order to simplify following associations and translations on the macro level. In fact, as a consequence of ANT's entirely relational and constructed cosmos, there is hardly an entity that may not appear as a black box 'containing' yet another complex network of actors which in themselves again constitute black boxes on a yet smaller level and of yet smaller components. In order to reduce the complexity of that very ontological framework as well as to avoid the effort of unpacking and specifying every black-boxed actor under study, ANT (just as does any other theory) demands of its practitioners to routinely de-complexify their endeavors by way of strategic black-boxing, while at the same time (and differently to many other theories) being well aware of this fact. After all, if black-boxing is a strategy which features so prominently in the 'sociologies' one is provided with by the actors themselves, why should black-boxing not also form a strategy for analyzing actor-networks by the "sociologist of associations"?

Another problem frequently encountered in the practice of ANT is thus that of relativism. While black-boxing allows or indeed demands the practitioner of ANT to choose a certain scale, micro or macro level, with regard to the actors and networks whose associations and translations one plans to trace, it also seems necessary to choose an actor or actant from whose perspective one would like to follow the definition of a program, the enrollment of other actors and the forging of a new network. It is true that every chain of association and translation followed in the examples by Latour and Callon may well be traced from the point of view of any other actor involved, even though it may start at a different point of time and involve other programs. Instead of tracing the construction of coercive networks and programs for disciplining hotel guests, tenants, or motorists by hoteliers, landlords, or municipalities in the tradition of Foucault, one may well switch one's perspective and rather follow the design and enrollment of those

antiprograms devised by tenants, customers, and consumers so as to counter the realization of hegemonic programs in the sense of Certeau (see also Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 91–106).

From the early 1990s onwards, especially Latour has shifted his focus from providing further case studies of individual technical projects and scientific research to extending ANT into a fully-fledged and autonomous philosophical approach to theorizing reality. In his influential monograph of 1991, provocatively entitled *We Have Never Been Modern*, he problematizes at length modernity's arbitrary division of an a priori existing realm of nature and technology on the one hand and a 'constructed' domain of society and culture on the other. The great divide installed between these two seemingly ontologically distinct realms by the moderns has generally been answered by two positions that seek to efface one realm for the other: the anti-moderns maintain that all is given (e.g. by god or nature) and nothing constructed (by humankind alone), whereas the post-moderns claim that nothing is given and in fact nothing exists outside the absolute textuality and constructedness of the human sphere. Latour, however, establishes his own position as a mediatory one that he names non-modern: he seeks to substantiate that the idea of two distinct ontological realms is illusory because they have always been and will increasingly be mixed up within the myriad of hybrid entities, both constructed and durable at the same time, that make up one's everyday reality. Where the anti-moderns fail to see the essential constructedness of the natural and objective world, the post-moderns appear blind to the fact that a good deal of human culture and society is (co)produced by and gains durability by way of being strongly associating to 'real' objects and technologies. Realizing that humanity has always been interacting with hybrid objects of a growing complexity that continually associate human and nonhuman actors, Latour has argued that we have in fact never been as modern as our modern categories, such as those of the two "purified" ontological realms, have made us believe (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 46–56).

Rather than purely belonging to nature or to culture, the entities populating our reality appear to be solidly hybrid, neither object nor subject, equally associated to human and nonhuman actors. When tracing such a "quasi-object" (or, for that sake, quasi-subject) through its various shapes, associations, and its continuous circulation, it may well appear "to us sometimes as a thing, sometimes as a narrative, sometimes as a social bond, without ever being reduced to a mere being" (86, see also 51, 89).¹⁵ In this sense, these quasi-objects lack any essential ontological core and can only be defined according to their nature as a

15 The concept of the quasi-object is borrowed from the work of Michel Serres (*The Parasite*). Having been influenced by Serres' thought early on, Latour has drawn

hybrid and decentered network or by following their specific trajectories, their forever dynamic line of becoming, i.e. the succession of states, roles, bonds and shapes they go through in the process of continual association, reassembling, and translation.

Latour's efforts to approximate the transitory nature of reality throughout the 1990s finally culminated in his 1999 work *Pandora's Hope* which was intended as no more than a quest for a "more realistic realism" (Latour, *Pandora's Hope* 15). By drawing on semiotics, Latour now tried to remodel the relation between a quasi-object's various shapes and translations as passed through on its specific trajectory as the dynamic relationship between signs and their referents. Not unlike his early study on the construction of TRF(H) in *Laboratory Life*, he demonstrates here how an intricate chain and network of referencing and signification processes helped to come up with fairly accurate representations of the Amazon rainforest. From soil samples to scientific analyses in laboratories to articles and geographical maps based on these results, one may read the rainforest's trajectory of translations from referent to sign and back again as a continual circular movement in which each sign may serve as referent to the next act of representation or rather translation. When closely tracing the meandering trajectory of the quasi-object's various translations and displacements from referent into sign into referent and back into sign and so on within a complex and most heterogeneous network of actors, it becomes clear that reality is to be found in the very process of circulating reference itself (24–79). Reality is thus not primarily based on the existence and action of hybrid actants and their networks but rather by the dynamic and highly complex processes that happen between them and bring them about; the real is thus articulated performatively or in action. The driving force of reality is neither the networks nor the individual actors in themselves but the continuous process of their constant and ever-dynamic interaction and thus constitutes a universal performance. This most radically dynamic and relational model of reality stands at the end of Latour's efforts to extend ANT into an autonomous ontology of the real during the 1990s.

With the growing popularity of ANT from the 1990s onwards as well as its theoretical solidification and philosophical extension beyond the realms of STS especially through the efforts of Latour, it became increasingly attractive to scholars from diverse disciplines who started to apply ANT's radically relational approach onto their fields' traditional objects of study during the 2000s. In doing

inspiration from and at times also collaborated with Serres throughout his career (see Blok/Jensen 15–16).

so, they often not only introduced a radically new and different perspective onto familiar concepts and methods but also helped to redefine most often helplessly static and representational models into strongly relational and highly dynamic ontologies in much the same way as ANT did in its early days with regard to the classical social sciences and its established models and categories. Maybe it is because of the very radicality of the change of perspective demanded by ANT as well as the totality of rethinking and redefining whole fields of study and their objects that up to now these ANT-inspired scholars still remain marginal voices within their disciplines.

ANT's adaptation into two fields of study is of particular interest to my present study, namely to those of architectural theory and urban studies. Both fields suffer from the fact that their objects of study, namely buildings and the city, not only appear extremely solid and static in a literal way but also the tools for conceptualizing and analyzing them have greatly added to and indeed perpetuated this overwhelming impression of stasis.

Rethinking the study and description of architecture with the help of ANT's radically symmetrical and relational ontology has by and large been the endeavor of Albena Yaneva for about the last fifteen years. Studying under Latour at *École normale supérieure des mines* in Paris during the 1990s, she has henceforth advocated an ANT-inspired relational approach to the study of buildings including their forms, their planning, and building processes just as much as their actual usage. In a manifesto-like 2008 collaborative article, Yaneva and Latour specify what "an ANT's view of architecture" would entail for the study and conceptualization of buildings. With regard to traditional approaches to the study of architecture, they single out two major problems which are to be solved by an architectural studies committed to ANT.

First of all, they too recognize the already mentioned problem that buildings not only "look desperately static" but are also generally studied as if existing in some ahistorical, non-contextual abstracted Euclidian matrix, evacuated of any movement and change (Latour/Yaneva 80). The other problem, related to the first one, may be seen in the theoretical inability of standard architectural theory to account for the interference or indeed interaction of architecture and society, buildings and their users in any satisfactory way: "[W]e either see the uncontested static object standing "out there," ready to be reinterpreted, or we hear about the conflicting human purposes, but are never able to picture the two together!" (86).

The task for an architectural theory and praxis that has learned from ANT would then be to come up with a theoretical model that would be able to conceptualize a building "as a movement, as flight, as a series of transformations"

and thus in radically dynamic and relational ways just as much as an inherently diverse and complex network of actors, a conflict zone that may relate traditional aspects of 'objective' architectural study, such as form, statics, design, and materiality to 'social' aspects such as human coercion and subversion, in short to "do justice to the "thingly" nature of buildings", if things are to be understood as "contested gatherings of conflicting demands" issued by human and nonhuman actors alike (80, 89, 81).

In fact, depicting and modeling a seemingly so static and inert object as a building would demand a theory that could operate as an equivalent to Jules Marey's famous photographic gun by which he sought to dismember movement into a series of static pictures that would make it possible to study rapidly moving entities such as a galloping horse or a running man in greatest possible detail. In that sense, Latour and Yaneva argue that "we too need an artificial device (a theory in this case) in order to be able to transform the static view of a building into one among many successive freeze-frames that could at last document the continuous flow that a building always is" (81).

Modeling a building as an ever-dynamic network within a topographic Riemannian (instead of a static Euclidian) space and tracing it as a full-blown quasi-object through its various associations, dislocations, and translations would then amount to visualizing "the building's extensive list of controversies and performances over time", what it does and what is done to it, how it coerces its users and directs their movements but also how it is subverted and creatively misused by others (86, also see Deleuze/Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 482–488). It is thus that an architectural theory truly informed by ANT will

be able to picture a building as a *navigation* through a controversial datascape: as an animated series of projects, successful and failing, as a changing and criss-crossing trajectory of unstable definitions and expertise, of recalcitrant materials and building technologies, of flip-flopping users' concerns and communities' appraisals. That is, we should finally be able to picture a building as a moving modulator regulating different intensities of engagement, redirecting users' attention, mixing and putting people together, *concentrating* flows of actors and *distributing* them so as to *compose* a productive force in time-space. Rather than peacefully occupying a distinct analogical space, a building-on-the-move leaves behind the spaces labeled and conceptualized as enclosed, to navigate easily in open circuits. (87)

Just as Latour and other proponents of ANT have often dwelt on controversies in order to make their point, Yaneva has demonstrated how popular controversies over public and prestigious building projects offer ideal points of departure for the study of architecture, as they lay bare within newspaper articles, public debates, or protests exactly that "controversial datascape" as well as the

“criss-crossing trajectory of unstable definitions and expertise” within which the building in question is not only continually transformed but only actually comes into being. What is more, these controversies over buildings render strikingly obvious just how intricately the otherwise ‘objective’ realm of architecture, construction, and raw materials mixes with the similarly well-demarcated fields of society, economy, culture, and politics (see Yaneva, *Mapping Controversies* 60–82). Yaneva’s discussion of famous architectural controversies, such as those surrounding the Welsh Assembly Building in Cardiff (2001–06), the Sydney Opera House (1959–73), the London Olympic Stadium (2008–11) or the Whitney Museum extension in New York (2010–15) vividly depict how a whole variety of actors from architects, engineers, and building contractors over state and city authorities down to journalists and the tax-paying citizenry connect themselves or become connected to a complex and inherently hybrid network in continuous flow (9–24, 49–59, 83–92, *The Making of a Building*). Resisting drafts, reworking designs and floor plans, politicizing building materials and ornamentation, protesting against cost explosions, stressing the significance of extraordinary architectures for city branding, building annexes or redefining usages are just some examples of how all these actors steadily partake in enrolling and translating these contested buildings in often-contradictory schemes and definitions in every single stage from the initial submission to the final demolition within the building’s movement through a dynamic matrix that easily undercuts all artificially established boundaries between architecture and such fields as politics, economy, and a nation’s collective identity.

Surely also a building’s urban environment, its specific context, is intricately associated to and bound to change along with a constantly ‘moving’ building placed in the middle of and thus associated to it. No wonder then that the study of urban space and its geography constitutes yet another field in which a number of scholars have taken up impulses from ANT in order to redefine the concepts and methods of their discipline in radically relational terms.¹⁶

A first volume edited by Ignacio Farias and Thomas Bender in 2010 has collected articles from urban scholars that both assess the possibilities and gains of

16 In many ways, Carl Sabbagh has already delivered a detailed proto-ANT study of Manhattan’s Worldwide Plaza’s planning and construction during the 1980s with his monograph *Skyscraper. The Making of a Building* that meticulously follows the assemblage of the skyscraper through a most controversial datascape of powerful interests and tenacious protests (see also J. N. Schmidt 99–105). Shirley Clarke’s short documentary film *Skyscraper* (1959) follows a similar approach in its coverage of the planning and construction of the office skyscraper 666 Fifth Avenue in 1957/58.

an ANT-inspired approach to the urban and provide first case studies of urban phenomena in the spirit of ANT. In his introduction, Farias stresses that ANT would allow a redefinition of the city as both an infinitely large and an infinitely detailed network or rather assemblage of a myriad of most diverse actors, both human and nonhuman. It thus offers a radically different ontology of the city as compared to common models and theories of the city that either champion space (e.g. Lefebvre, Soja), economic factors (e.g. Weber, *Economy and Society*, Castells *The Informational City*, Sassen), or cultural and psychological features (“the city as a way of life/state of mind” in e.g. Simmel, Park/Burgess, Wirth, Certeau) as the defining moments (all heavily black-boxed aggregates in themselves) by which to describe and analyze the city. Cities or the ‘the urban’ are hence no longer understood as socially, economically, or culturally constructed but rather as infinitely large and complex assemblages enacted into being within and by networks of bodies, materialities, technologies, objects, and humans.¹⁷ Instead of constituting a static and highly abstracted object of study, the city can now be understood as a process, in fact a continuous performance of a myriad of actors’ interactions that bring it into being. The city therefore has to be modeled first and always as something in movement, bound to continual change, as “a contingent, situated, partial and heterogeneous achievement” (Farias 15). As a consequence, Farias champions the notion of the city as “urban assemblages” that denotes it as something manifest (“assembled”) and processual or emergent (“assembling”) as well as something inherently multiple and diverse (encompassing human and nonhuman, ‘cultural’ and ‘economic’ actors etc.) at the same time. Thomas Bender may therefore summarize in the volume’s postscript that

ANT redefines aggregates, but aggregates with open borders, capable of continual transformation. The actor-network is generative; it makes things happen. The capacity of ANT to reveal the interconnections of active, continually transforming networks seems to recommend it as a way of exploring urban life. Although practitioners of ANT were not focusing their work on cities, deploying ANT in urban analysis seems to be a natural extension of it, a significant move forward in urban studies. (Bender, “Postscript” 304)

As both a building and a ‘vertical city’ (a recurring metaphor used from early on), it should thus appear only straightforward to also reconceptualize the skyscraper as a dynamic network or assemblage of a vast array of human and non-human actors, themselves constituting intricate actants in the form of modern technologies that make the building work in the first place. The following section

17 The notion of the assemblage is yet another concept borrowed into ANT from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (see *A Thousand Plateaus* 3–25, 71 and also Berressem 69).

will therefore be devoted to opening the black box that is the skyscraper as well as to retracing in detail a whole swarm of actors assembling into technologies and spatial structures that made the skyscraper a reality by the late 19th century.

1.2 Reassembling the Skyscraper as an Actor-Network

In the collection of his *Chicago Poems* published in 1916, three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning American poet and historian Carl Sandburg (1878–1967) captured powerfully energetic prose poem snapshots of the great Midwestern metropolises' vibrant urban life. Not unsurprisingly, he devoted one of the collection's longest poems to the skyscraper, that originally American contribution to world architecture first devised and realized in Chicago. For this study's purpose, the poem seems to be of special interest for its almost proto-ANT vision of the skyscraper as an inherently diverse and highly dynamic network of actors.

SKYSCRAPER

BY day the skyscraper looms in the smoke and sun and
has a soul.

Prairie and valley, streets of the city, pour people into
it and they mingle among its twenty floors and are
poured out again back to the streets, prairies and
valleys.

It is the men and women, boys and girls so poured in and
out all day that give the building a soul of dreams
and thoughts and memories.

(Dumped in the sea or fixed in a desert, who would care
for the building or speak its name or ask a policeman
the way to it?)

Elevators slide on their cables and tubes catch letters and
parcels and iron pipes carry gas and water in and
sewage out.

Wires climb with secrets, carry light and carry words,
and tell terrors and profits and loves--curses of men
grappling plans of business and questions of women
in plots of love.

Hour by hour the caissons reach down to the rock of the
earth and hold the building to a turning planet.

Hour by hour the girders play as ribs and reach out and
hold together the stone walls and floors.

Hour by hour the hand of the mason and the stuff of the
mortar clinch the pieces and parts to the shape an
architect voted.

Hour by hour the sun and the rain, the air and the rust,
and the press of time running into centuries, play
on the building inside and out and use it.
Men who sunk the pilings and mixed the mortar are laid
in graves where the wind whistles a wild song
without words.
And so are men who strung the wires and fixed the pipes
and tubes and those who saw it rise floor by floor.
Souls of them all are here, even the hod carrier begging
at back doors hundreds of miles away and the brick-
layer who went to state's prison for shooting another
man while drunk.
(One man fell from a girder and broke his neck at the
end of a straight plunge--he is here--his soul has
gone into the stones of the building.)
On the office doors from tier to tier--hundreds of names
and each name standing for a face written across
with a dead child, a passionate lover, a driving
ambition for a million dollar business or a lobster's
ease of life.
Behind the signs on the doors they work and the walls
tell nothing from room to room.
Ten-dollar-a-week stenographers take letters from
corporation officers, lawyers, efficiency engineers,
and tons of letters go bundled from the building to all
ends of the earth.
Smiles and tears of each office girl go into the soul of
the building just the same as the master-men who
rule the building.
Hands of clocks turn to noon hours and each floor
empties its men and women who go away and eat
and come back to work.
Toward the end of the afternoon all work slackens and
all jobs go slower as the people feel day closing on
them.
One by one the floors are emptied... The uniformed
elevator men are gone. Pails clang... Scrubbers
work, talking in foreign tongues. Broom and water
and mop clean from the floors human dust and spit,
and machine grime of the day.
Spelled in electric fire on the roof are words telling
miles of houses and people where to buy a thing for
money. The sign speaks till midnight.

Darkness on the hallways. Voices echo. Silence
 holds... Watchmen walk slow from floor to floor
 and try the doors. Revolvers bulge from their hip
 pockets... Steel safes stand in corners. Money
 is stacked in them.

A young watchman leans at a window and sees the lights
 of barges butting their way across a harbor, nets of
 red and white lanterns in a railroad yard, and a span
 of glooms splashed with lines of white and blurs of
 crosses and clusters over the sleeping city.

By night the skyscraper looms in the smoke and the stars
 and has a soul. (Sandburg 27–28)

Despite its extreme focus on and almost Futurist adoration of modern technology and its dynamics, Sandburg's prose poem appears remarkable in that it reads the skyscraper in purely pragmatic-relational and not in representational or metaphorical terms. Only in its first and last stanza does it feature a classical sublime vision of the skyscraper from the outside (either from its foot or from far away). Yet instead of reading the skyscraper as a symbol or metaphor standing in for something else – as so many other literary texts do – Sandburg's poem treats its subject simply as what it is: a complex, hybrid, and dynamic network of humans and nonhumans. Even its most metaphysical motive, the ascription of a soul to the skyscraper, is in fact a pragmatic statement, as that soul is not explained by reference to an outside metaphysical force but rather from within, in situ, as the total assemblage of its physical and thus most profane actors along with their individual scripts. Nothing metaphysical is added here; the skyscraper's soul is explained from within, its proclaimed metaphysics firmly grounded in physics.

By closely following a single day's activities as well as recalling short snippets from its construction history, Sandburg is able to open the black box of the skyscraper and renders visible the masses of actors and actants, both human and nonhuman, swarming through it at every time of the day as well as at every point of its history. With the swarm of actors thus released, the poem can follow a great number of them through all kinds of associations and translations with, of, and by the other actors and actants, thereby turning every stanza into a new freeze frame of the skyscraper's constant movement. It is thus that Sandburg's skyscraper appears as a dynamic and living organism and not as a solid and solemn object of aesthetic admiration and interpretation; in fact, the poem explains by simply following actors and closely describing their actions and, excerpt for a few exceptions (soul, prairie, and valleys), never interprets anything, thus operating just as demanded by ANT.

And the poem also understands strikingly well that the skyscraper is not only made by and of human actors but that it also associates with and is translated by a whole range of material, spatial, and technological actors and that agency is hence symmetrically distributed among all actors, no matter if animate and inanimate. Surely there is that large group of human actors, some more anonymous, others more individualized, that designed and constructed the building, that constantly swarm in, out, and through it or simply work in it. From the mason, hod carrier, and construction worker to the architect, from the elevator men to the cleaning crew and night watchmen, from the “[t]en-dollar-a-week stenographers” to the “corporation officers, lawyers, efficiency engineers” up to “the master-men who rule the building”, they all assemble here to forge new assemblages and simultaneously pursue their own programs while getting enrolled in others (“grappling plans of business”, “plots of love”, “a driving ambition for a million dollar business”).

But there is also a long list of nonhuman actors at work in the building. Above all, the poem names those modern technologies and materials that made the construction and habitation of a vertical city possible in the first place. From the steel-frame girder cage that “hold[s] together the stone walls and floors” and the elevators that carry people up and down over the telephone wires and pneumatic tubes channeling information within and outside of the building, the pipes that pump in water and gas down to the soundproof walls that “tell nothing from room to room” and “the mortar [that] clinch[es] the pieces and parts to the shape an architect voted” – these hybrid actants (all complicated black boxes in themselves) exert an agency of their own, operating on the programs and scripts made durable in them, thus associating with and translating other actors, human and nonhuman. They too (even though Sandburg does not explicitly say so) along with the thousands of humans swarming through them, their interests, passions, and needs inscribed in them – and not only the “man [who] fell from a girder and broke his neck at the end of a straight plunge” and thus literally went into the building – co-produce the skyscraper and form part of its “soul”. Yet there is also the current and vibe of the city street that pours in people and noise from outside, linking the building to its urban environment just as much as the natural forces connecting it to the elements and time spans beyond human reach similarly working on the building: “the sun and the rain, the air and the rust, and the press of time running into centuries, play on the building inside and out and use it.”

It is all these human, technological, material, and natural actors that mix and associate into hybrid actants that themselves assemble in larger networks, thus jointly producing the skyscraper: caissons “reach down to the rock of the earth

and hold the building to a turning planet”, workers produce and fill in “mortar [that] clinch[es] the pieces and parts to the shape an architect voted.” At the same time, the skyscraper itself turns into a catalyst, bringing together actors, bundling their interests, and mediating their programs through its channels and technologies: Secrets and business plans are spoken into telephones or written into letters and turn into information that is made to circulate through the building, city, country, or even the whole world by pneumatic tubes and electric wires.

Throughout all these processes of continuous association and transcription, Sandburg is well aware that all actors and not only the human ones are able to exert agency: it is thus that an advertisement sign on the skyscraper’s roof speaks “telling miles of houses and people where to buy a thing for money”, that “wires climb with secrets, [...] carry words, and tell terrors and profits and loves”, that tubes catch letters and parcels, that caissons reach down and hold the building, that walls keep quiet and that “the sun and the rain, the air and the rust, and the press of time running into centuries, play on the building inside and out and use it.”

The poem even knows about the scales of networking, of the skyscraper’s micro network of actants (the human programs and efforts made durable in technologies and thus the building at large) just as much as of the macro network connecting the building to the city or even the world at large by way of its channels of communication, the long-distance calls and “tons of letters [that] go bundled from the building to all ends of the earth.”¹⁸

It is not only therefore that Sandburg’s skyscraper ultimately echoes James’ “swarming city in itself” (*The American Scene*, 81) and thus indeed offers a much more sublime vision than the generic ‘outside’ vision of the looming tower as a black box (both in a literal and an ANT sense) in the smoke, as known from many classical New York photographs, such as those by Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen. The sublime vision of the skyscraper’s “soul” that only emerges when its black box is opened, is a different one: the infinite complexity and magnitude of its actor-network, its ever-moving assemblage of actants both on a micro (local) and a macro (global) level, as captured by Sandburg.

After all, Sandburg’s poem demonstrates that the network (or, alternatively, the assemblage) seems to be the only model adequate of capturing the skyscraper in all its hybrid complexity and dynamics. Only the actor-network model, it

18 Latour stresses that actor-networks – and one may add: the ones of the skyscraper in particular – stay local at all points, no matter how long, far-reaching and thus global they are (see Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 117–119).

appears, may accurately retrace that quasi-object's navigation through all those various material, technological, infrastructural, economic, human, social, psychological, artistic, discursive, and symbolic definitions and translations. At the same time, it accounts for the network's vibrant scales reaching from the micro intricacies of wiring and steelwork up to the macro levels of the great metropolis below and around as well as those of global business and communication networks within one unified, yet non-reductive picture (or rather matrix), such as demanded by Latour and Yaneva in their call for an ANT-inspired study of architecture (Latour/Yaneva 86).

Having achieved a first structural overview of the building's complexity and dynamics I should now take a closer look at the historical evolution of the skyscraper and thus at how and why that massive actor-network got assembled in the first place. As with almost all technological and architectural innovations in history, the skyscraper neither entered the world stage in one specific year, nor was it the work of one particular inventor or genius architect. Rather, it was the product of a long period of experimentation combined with a succession of innovations in engineering and technology and thus a great many actors and actants, both human and nonhuman, that all had to assemble into a more or less stable (meaning: irreducible and convergent) network to make the skyscraper a reality during the second half of the 19th century. Surely, ANT demonstrates that a building – for all its basic durability – is always a process, an entity in continuous movement with new actors added to its network and thus new translations (new technologies, new designs, new usages) occurring all the time. In that sense, the history and evolution of the skyscraper, both that of the building type in general and that of each individual building, is never finished and remains in continuous flow. And yet, there is a point towards the very end of the 19th century that the skyscraper's basic program, a constructional and technological formula that makes building structures of great height possible, is realized in a durable network. With that basic program translated into a more or less stable network and thus successfully black-boxed, it has been treated as an actant of its own right and turned into a compulsory component adapted and imitated in the construction of almost every building of massive height. It is up to this point that the successful black-boxing of the skyscraper's basic network of actors necessary for its construction, which also marks the point that it attained a stable identity (especially a commonly accepted name) and became a fairly 'normal' thing to use, to work in, and to encounter in the great cities of America, that I would like to retrace its historic assemblage process to in the following.

The earliest buildings that are nowadays regarded as the first examples of the skyscraper or rather, to stay in the language of these early days, the "tall

office building” were assembled during the 1880s. The reasons for their emergence and thus the initial assemblage of their hybrid networks lay in a specific historical situation in which the downtown business districts of Chicago and New York found themselves and in which these buildings, as Sullivan, one of their early architects, famously put it, came as an “answer to a call” that had its origin in “a new grouping of social conditions” (Sullivan 403).¹⁹ In order to clarify this very situation one needs to open and briefly look into the black box of Sullivan’s “new grouping of social conditions”: 19th-century America witnessed a tremendous urbanization process which expressed itself in sharply rising urban populations and increasingly limited space. Chicago’s population alone rose from about 200 people upon its founding in 1833 to 500.000 in 1880 and to over a million in 1890. Especially American cities’ busy downtown districts were crammed with commercial buildings, residentially used edifices and sometimes even factories side by side. As a consequence of rising downtown populations and limited vacant space, ground values and rents in these areas skyrocketed and greatly fuelled speculation. Not unsurprisingly, real estate developers and landholders had a huge interest in extracting as much profit as possible from their ground and building projects in order to recoup the vast sums they had paid for buying lots and building on them.

It is thus that one may define these groups, the landholders and real estate developers active in these downtown districts, as the driving actors behind the erection of early ‘sky-scraping’ buildings as only such edifices that would

19 The urge to determine the first building considered a ‘skyscraper’ and thus also to name its ‘father’ has been as old as the first engagements with this building type’s history (see e.g. Schuyler). The decision over what building and architect to credit with that privilege has ultimately always depended on how the skyscraper was defined, i.e. what quality one chose to decide on its status as a skyscraper, such as an elevator, a steel frame, both of them together or even a certain height or use etc. (see e.g. Weisman, Bender, *The Unfinished City* 34–36, Peet). And surely, there also seem to be forerunners in almost every era of world history: From the ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia and the Roman insulae tenement blocks down to the medieval tower houses of Tuscany and Gothic cathedrals. The task of defining the skyscraper and writing its history has hence always been a highly problematic endeavor, so much that Charles Jencks has almost desperately concluded that “[t]he history of the skyscraper has, in the past, proven hard to write – and even harder to think about. The more that historians and scholars grapple with this voluminous subject the more elusive it becomes, disappearing into the mists of uncharted territory and contradictory definition. One finally concludes in exasperation that the history of the skyscraper is an impossible subject to clarify because it doesn’t exist” (Jencks, *Skyscrapers* 6).

vertically multiply their basal floor area as many times as possible were ultimately able to turn their developments into profitable enterprises. They thus became the initial spokespersons for the program of realizing the skyscraper-network as well as of, in a broader sense, reassembling their cities skyward. As with any group of actors wishing to realize its program, it first had to assess the interests and define the roles of a variety of actors that it wished to enroll in its basic program.

As most of their developments in business districts concerned commercial architecture directed at businesses, it was this group, companies of various size or individual entrepreneurs, that they needed to enroll as possible future tenants or owners of these preferably tall buildings. Considering the specific interests of this group of actors, however, it did not seem too hard to secure their successful enrollment in the program of high-rise building and renting: American corporations, especially those involved in banking, insurance, and real estate, had an enormous demand for vast downtown office space in order to house a growing workforce employed in their booming businesses. A central downtown location was of specific importance to these corporations of the new service sector but also to a burgeoning press and publishing industry as well as to the administrative sections of industrial companies (which no longer needed to be located in immediate proximity to their production plants) in a double sense: Firstly, these businesses preferred to settle among or in close reach to each other. It was much easier to discuss new credits, debate legal cases, or broker new business deals when banks, lawyers, or business partners resided in close proximity to one's own offices or, even better, resided within the same building. Secondly, downtown districts, such as those of New York City or Chicago were highly prestigious locations that American corporations sought to present themselves on. In order to make a dent on customers or just passing visitors they often wished for particularly monumental and spectacular (and that often meant as high as possible) buildings to house their headquarters or offices; after all, these buildings not only formed "the administrative face of the corporation" but also functioned as highly visible large-scale advertisements on the cities' emerging skyline as long as they were high and/or prominent enough (see Zunz 105, 113–114, Nye 89–91). Given the enormous wealth of many of these companies as well as their great demand for downtown office space, it should not surprise that they were among the buyers and owners of favorable downtown lots and also acted as building contractors by themselves. They thus also often belonged to the group of spokespersons for the program of assembling the skyscraper and similarly sought to enroll smaller businesses as tenants in their new buildings that in many cases were too spacious in order to be used to capacity just by their own offices. A much greater challenge than enrolling business tenants in their

program proved to be that of enlisting viable constructional methods, materials, and technologies in the emerging network and thus the very actants that were capable of making the skyscraper a reality on a purely technical level.

At least one important technological innovation, however, seemed to be at hand as early as the 1860s, namely that of a safe way of transporting people up and down buildings of growing heights. While elevator systems had been devised since antiquity, it was not until Elisha Graves Otis presented his safety elevator at the 1854 New York World Fair that a truly safe vertical transport could be guaranteed to elevator passengers. In a spectacular presentation at the World Fair, Otis had himself elevated on a platform pending on a rope that was then cut upon his command. After only a short fall, the platform was halted by a locking mechanism and thereby demonstrated the supreme safety of his elevator to a thrilled crowd (see Koolhaas 24–27).²⁰ In many ways, Otis' dramatic public presentation of his safety elevator is comparable to Latour's famous account of Pasteur's public vaccination of sheep in front of a group of experts and officials at the small village of Pouilly-le-Fort in 1881 (see Latour, *The Pasteurization* 4–5, 87–96). In each case, these public demonstrations crucially translated the respective innovations, Pasteur's microbes just as much as Otis' safety elevator by greatly and instantaneously enlarging the number of actors involved in the evolving network of their innovations, thus making them a great deal more real. In that way, however, also tall buildings became more real, as Otis' breath-taking demonstration convinced the public of the safety of vertical ascent in an elevator and thus enrolled them in any program that aimed at constructing and populating ever-taller buildings. The safety elevator in fact proved to be the greatest ally in countering people's antiprograms of resisting to climb a building higher than five stories by staircase several times a day, as well as to step into an elevator

20 In his cultural history of the elevator, Andreas Bernard has convincingly revealed much of that very 'primal scene' of the elevator's history as a product of retrospective mythologizing on the part of Otis' sons and the Otis Elevator Company which was founded in 1898 and quickly rose to the status of market leader in elevator construction. Different to Elisha Otis' now largely canonized role as inventor and father of the modern elevator as well as the initiator of a linear history of economic success from his presentation 1854 over his sons' founding of the company to its ascent to a market leader, it appears that Otis' shows at the 1854 World Fair proved fairly unspectacular and thus remained largely unnoticed by the press. In much the same way, early commentators and historians of the elevator generally overlooked Otis' invention and rather emphasized the crucial role of Bostonian inventor Otis Tufts for the emergence of that new technology (see Bernard 5–13).

that would threaten their lives once the cable broke. By successfully countering these antiprograms and stabilizing its own hybrid actant-network into a technological black box by the late 1850s, the elevator technology has rightfully been regarded as “the earliest and the most indispensable of the factors which have enabled the construction of these mighty monsters,” as Montgomery Schuyler argued already in 1909. And he added: “The beginnings of the elevator were, it is quite true, the beginnings also of what, in their earlier stages, were known as the “elevator buildings”” (Schuyler 421, 423).²¹

Only three years after Otis’ presentation at the World Fair, in 1857, the newly-built Haughwout Building, a five-floor retail sale building for porcelain and silverware on Broadway, became the world’s first of these “elevator buildings” with a passenger elevator installed by Elisha Otis.²² The new Fifth Avenue Hotel (1856–59, demolished in 1908) followed two years later with a “vertical screw elevator” designed by Otis Tufts and in 1870 the Equitable Life Building (1868–70, destroyed in 1912), located on 120 Broadway, became the first office building equipped with several safety elevators (see Landau/Condit 62–66, Bender, *The Unfinished City* 35–37). However, while these early “elevator buildings” counted as comparably tall structures in their time, they did not surpass seven stories and were hardly the type of tall building envisioned by the developers and companies of the 1880s and 90s nor did these bulky masonry structures embody Sullivan’s architectural ideal of loftiness. Also, hydraulic elevators, then in use, were limited to reach a height of no more than ten stories. Only the electrical elevators available from the 1890s onwards virtually freed vertical ascent from any possible limit.

Yet even if elevators enabled going higher than the usual five to seven stories of these early “elevator buildings”, the constructional methods and materials then commonly used did not. Extending a masonry building, such as these elevator buildings were, as high as their elevators could possibly go (twelve stories by the mid 1870s), however, would entail reinforcing the lower masonry walls to such

21 Koolhaas has stressed the importance of a safety narrative with regard to technologies: “Like the elevator, each technological invention is pregnant with a double image: contained in its success is the specter of its possible failure. The means of averting that phantom disaster are almost as important as the original invention itself” (Koolhaas 27).

22 In fact, so new and still dangerous did vertical transport seem to most people in these early days that Otis’ elevator was removed from the Haughwout store only three years later as customers refused to use it. This and other episodes cast doubt on the widely accepted narrative of an unbroken success story of Otis’ safety elevator (see Bernard 7).

an extent in order grant a minimum of stability to the increasingly high and thus also increasingly heavy building that any profit to be expected from renting out the additional space on top could never surpass the sum of money to be spent on the massively reinforced ground walls, thus turning any skyward extension into something utterly uneconomical. For several decades, it was this constructional problem that proved to be the most tenacious antiprogram to the assemblage of a network able to ultimately realize buildings which would truly scrape the sky.

Any chance of realizing this program after all lay in the recruitment of a new constructional method and it was in Chicago that this groundbreaking method finally emerged as a viable solution to potentially limitless vertical constructions during the 1880s. After large parts of Chicago were destroyed by a massive conflagration in 1871, the devastated city center turned into a veritable laboratory for architectural and constructional experiments in the course of its large-scale reconstruction. Not only did Chicagoan architects and engineers come up with new fireproof building materials but they also experimented with extremely light steel constructions instead of heavy masonry walls as basic carriers of a building's weight. It was soon discovered that a skeleton of steel girders would evenly distribute the entire building's weight and thereby remove it from the outer masonry that thus no longer needed to be reinforced with rising height. By enabling such a crucial weight shift within the building and weight loss in general (steel frame-buildings proved three times lighter than masonry-built structures!), the steel skeleton or girder cage became the long awaited actant to be enrolled into the network, promising to make the program of assembling the skyscraper a good deal more real. To be sure, the shift from masonry to steel frame constructions was not an abrupt but rather a gradual process that went through several transitional phases, with many tall buildings newly erected first in Chicago and then also in New York during the 1880s and 90s mixing both techniques.²³ This is also true for Chicago's Home Insurance Building, built in 1884 by William Le Baron Jenney, which has long been credited by architectural historians as the world's first real skyscraper due to its combined use of a steel frame and elevators. But as later analysis has suggested, the initially ten-floored 43 meter-office building which was extended to 12 floors and a total of 55 meters in 1890 and demolished

23 Even the technique of steel frame construction had not been entirely new; it had been used in the erection of factories, for instance, since the late 18th century. Moreover, such prominent structures as the Crystal Palaces of London and New York (that which had housed the 1854 World Fair) were also based on steel skeletons. In this sense, it was already a black-boxed actant that simply had to be enrolled into and specifically adapted to the skyscraper network in the making.

in 1931, did not entirely rely on metal frame construction but was also supported by masonry, granite piers, and brick. More than the Home Insurance with its still bulky box-like appearance, it was another Chicago multi-use edifice built between 1890 and 1895, the still-existing Reliance Building that first seemed to fully embody the ideal of a light and soaring tower-like structure with its 15 stories and a height of 61 meters, elevators and steel skeleton as well as its non-masonry terra-cotta clad and heavily windowed facade.²⁴

The decisive steel frame construction method that virtually declared the sky the limit for any newly erected building, was however quickly transplanted to New York City, the densely populated metropolis on the eastern seaboard which only too willingly embraced it as a way to release the pressure of real estate speculation and a still soaring demand for downtown office space. Within only a few years' time it had surpassed the towers of Chicago with the completion of the 94-meter and 20-storied New York World Building (commonly known as Pulitzer Building after the famous publisher who had built it to house his press empire) in 1890 (demolished in 1955).²⁵ It was thus also the first building in the city that surpassed the spire of Trinity Church (86 meters), thereby marking the inevitable dominance of commerce over religion on the city's soaring skyline – a sight that had left Henry James so puzzled upon his return to New York in 1904.²⁶ However, it did not remain uncontested for too long; the Manhattan Life

24 As opposed to the majority of tall office buildings erected in Chicago and especially in New York that generally quoted heavily from historically accepted architectural styles in their outward and interior designs, both the Home Insurance and the Reliance Building may be regarded as prime examples of the Chicago School of architecture that favored a rather functionalist (proto-modernist) design not adhering to classical conventions, such as the three-part division of the facade. Rather, these buildings' designs seemed to reflect their rational construction methods and commercial uses, thus adhering to Sullivan's ideal of architectural form following functionality, as first formulated in his famous article of 1896 (see Giedion 303–305, Condit 14–20, J. N. Schmidt 103–105).

25 From the 1890s onwards, New York's buildings permanently outreached those of Chicago where height regulations were introduced as early as 1893 with height limits varying between 39,2 meters (1893), 79,2 meters (1902), and 61 meters (1911) (see Barr 20). Only by the late 1960s did Chicago skyscrapers, such as John Hancock Center (1965–69) and Sears Tower (1970–74) again compete with and finally even surpass Manhattan's towers for the next forty years.

26 One could of course also read Americans' race for the sky as emblematic of German sociologist Max Weber's famous thesis on the crucial impact of the Protestant-Puritan work ethic on the rise of capitalism based on the belief that economic success may be the safest marker of being among the few people chosen by God to enter heaven. It is in

Insurance Building (1893–94, demolished in 1963) of 106 meters and 18 floors and the Park Row Building (1896–99) of 119 meters and a staggering 30 floors followed quickly thereafter and easily surpassed the magical limit of a hundred meters of height. The extraordinary leap skyward taken by New York office buildings with the aid of steel frame construction from the 1890s onwards truly challenged people's sense of dimension when suddenly dwarfing the majority of the city's built space. In 1903, Schuyler could thus remark:

It is the skeleton structure which has enabled builders to go, not as with the pioneers of the elevator architecture, only half as high again, but three times, four times, five times as high as builders went before; and while the Western Union [completed 1875, 70 meters] and the Tribune Building [completed 1875, 79 meters] towered only head and shoulders above their fellows, the newer skyscrapers stand waist deep, knee deep, ankle deep in such relics as are left of the old-fashioned commercial building. (Schuyler 444)

And he was not alone in his amazement. Pioneering photographers of the day, such as Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, and Alvin Langdon Coburn, enshrined the both amazingly and frighteningly sublime vision of these new giants especially in their famous photographs of a staggeringly slim Fuller Building, commonly known as the 'Flatiron' (1900–02, 91 meters, 20 floors) and remained visual chroniclers of the city's skyward growth throughout their long careers (see Lindner, *Imagining New York City*, 64–74).

The unbroken rush for the sky during these first years of the 20th century which also saw the demolition of only recently erected buildings for the construction of still higher and more profitable ones – proof of an almost obsessive thrust for change so bemoaned by James upon returning to his hometown in these selfsame years – was crowned by yet another trio of iconic skyscrapers that first went near and then also passed the head-spinning mark of 200 meters, thus also making each of them in consecution the highest edifice in the world: All of them commissioned by wealthy corporations and meant to tower the skyline of New York as giant symbols of their economic power, the Singer Building (1906–08, demolished 1968) went up to 187 meters and 47 floors, only to be surpassed a year later by the Metropolitan Life Tower (1907–09) with 213 meters and 50 floors, which was in turn outreached by the Woolworth Building (1910–13) with an unbelievable height of 241 meters and 57 floors, the latter one staying the

the skyscraper (whose early designs suspiciously often also emulated European church architecture) that the strife for economic success (to be measured in the height of and view from one's office in the tower) coincided with the desire to be closest to the sky and thus symbolically to God and the heavens (see Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*).

highest until 1930, when yet another race for the sky broke loose with the erection of the Chrysler (1928–30, 319 meters, 77 floors) and Empire State Building (1930–31, 381 meters, 102 floors).

So while the program of settling the urban skies gained in reality with the enrollment of the steel frame construction method into the emerging technohuman network by the 1890s, one should not forget that a whole range of other technological elements, often also innovations of their time, only truly made working and living within these built giants a comfortable and economical affair. Beside the common usage of fire proof building materials (which in most cases did not really defeat the phantom of the high-rise firetrap) as well as the general electrification (not only of the elevators) of tall buildings by the 1890s, it was the installation of amenities such as central heating, air-conditioning, sound-abating walls, and complex networks of water and gas pipes, electric wires, and air shafts that made life high above the city a practical reality in the first place. In many ways, the skyscraper and these various complex technologies can thus be said to have co-produced each other in a significant way during this period (see Landau/Condit 168).

Apart from that, the question of communication within and beyond the confines of the tall building demanded to be answered with a number of innovative media technologies to be integrated into the skyscraper network. After all, how should a business be successfully run within such a building if its employees could not rely on an almost instant way of exchanging information among each other as well as between different floors within the building? Sending out human messengers to deliver every tiny bit of information by constantly running between floors would have required companies to employ a whole army of additional people that would have quickly clogged all transport ways (see Sola Pool 140–141). Whereas systems of pneumatic tubes allowing the circulation of written documents within or even between buildings were in use from around the mid-19th century onwards and had thus already proven to be a black-boxed technology by that time, it was, above all, the increasing implementation of electric telephone technologies as of the 1880s that revolutionized and crucially translated business communication not only within tall office buildings but business practices in general by way of a great acceleration of information flows.²⁷ One may thus rightfully regard the adoption of the telephone into the

27 As is the case with so many technological innovations (see e.g. the elevator) it is hard to determine one year as that of the telephone's invention as well as to credit one person with the status of its inventor. While it appears that the telephone itself was assembled within a complicated network consisting of a long list of different inventors

skyscraper's actor-network in the making and its subsequent translation into a space of an "incessant flow of communications" as another crucial moment in making it both a great deal more real and more durable (Gottmann 310). As a consequence, not only contemporary observers argued that "Bell and his successors were the fathers of the modern commercial architecture – of the skyscraper" (J.J. Carty quoted in J.K. Mumford 23) but also modern scholars emphasize that

[t]he telephone appears to have made office work footloose, liberating it from old locational shackles. The result has been the concentration of offices in selected districts of cities and towns and also huge congestions in certain cities. This trend produced the specific architectural form of the skyscraper and the skyline. It should be recognized that loft, dense skylines exist as much owing to the telephone as to the elevator. (Gottmann 309–310)

With the vast majority of technological antiprograms (no safe elevators, no communication technology, no technique to build higher than ten stories, no infrastructures) countered, most businesses could be convinced to move into or were greatly encouraged in their own will to erect impressive skyscrapers as home to their headquarters. Yet, there was still another obstacle to overcome, one well familiar from almost every moment in history when new technologies and media are introduced: people's fear of the new as well as their anxiety concerning the insecurity and possibly damaging effect of unknown ('modern') objects or structures on their physical or mental health. From the age-old preference of living on the first and second floor (*bel étage*) and relegating upper floors to household staff and storage rooms (living and working up high as a social stigma) to a widespread suspicion regarding the elevator, as famously expressed in James' discomfort when stepping "into some tight mechanic receptacle, fearfully and wonderfully working, [...] the packed and hoisted basket" (James, *The American Scene* 187) – the spokespeople of the skyscraper network initially faced a great many fears and social prejudice regarding great heights combined with a mistrust in the statics and general safety of these tall structures. With the growing height and spread of high-rise architecture during the second half of the 19th century, however, a striking long-term change of mentality with regard to living and especially working in great heights was to be detected among urban populations in the United States. While the lawyers in Manhattan's first office

and engineers along with a whole range of technologies and their various modules, it was certainly Alexander Graham Bell's 1876 patent grant that proved decisive for the commercial development and spread of a telephone system in the United States.

elevator building, the Equitable Life Building (1870), still had to be arduously convinced of the quality of working up high above Broadway, publisher Joseph Pulitzer already demanded his executive suite to be located in the second floor of the dome topping his 94-metered Classicist Baroque New York World Building (1890), from which he had a good view over the entire city, a privilege by then and henceforth considered an ultimate status symbol in business circles (see Bernard 116–120). As soon as height came to connote economic success and power as well as high social status in late 19th-century urban America, more and more people were willing or even outrightly desired to work and live as high as possible in the soaring buildings of their cities; in other countries this process took much longer.

Having traced the steady growth and various translations of the skyscraper's actor-network over a period of more than half a century, it seems that by at least the early 1910s it reached a point of reality and solidification that truly turned it into a black box which could henceforth appear as a powerful actor in itself, such as, for instance, in the great modernist urban visions of the 1920s and 30s. It is not only the point at which all major antiprograms are countered and all relevant technologies integrated into the network, it also seems to be the moment when it finally achieves a stable name in the term 'skyscraper.' While in use for various tall things and people since the 18th century, it seems that its first provable usage in which it denoted a tall building stems from an 1883 article in the *Chicago Daily* newspaper (see also Peet 19).²⁸ Whereas Sullivan still talked of the "tall office building" in 1896, Schuyler already used "skyscraper" as early as 1899 and then throughout his publications; James, however, still switched between "tall building" and "sky-scraper" in 1907. At least by the 1910s, it seems, 'skyscraper' appeared as the one commonly accepted term for the complex and hybrid network whose making I have followed up to here.

In the following, I summarize the three most basic additions to and translations of the skyscraper's actor-network – each of which connected with a new name attached to the building during these – however simplified – evolutionary steps (see Tab. 1 and Illustration 2).

Within each historical step the actor-network in the making gained in reality by enrolling new technological actors in its program; in doing so, it was itself

28 The *Oxford English Dictionary* mentions that the term "skyscraper" – before being used in reference to extraordinary large buildings – "was already in use for things sticking into the air, such as a triangular sky-sail (first recorded use in 1794), a high-standing horse (1788), a very tall man (1857), a rider on one of the very high cycles formerly in use (1892) or a tall hat or bonnet (1800)."

Tab. 1: Evolutionary Stages of the Early Skyscraper

Step	Name	Time	Actor-Network
1.	“elevator building”	1857–1884	masonry building (5–10 stories) + mechanic/hydraulic elevators
2.	“tall (office) building”	1884–1896	masonry and metal frame building (10–20 stories) + hydraulic elevators
3.	“skyscraper”	1896-	all steel frame building (30+ stories) + electric elevators + electric light + telephones + various other technological innovations



Illustration 2: Skyscraper Evolution

1. “Elevator Building”: *Equitable Life Assurance Building* (1868–70), New York, 40 meters, 7 stories (masked into 5 by the facade); first office building to bear safety elevators.
2. “Tall Office Building”: *Home Insurance Building* (1884/90), 42, later 55 meters, 10, later 12 stories, Chicago; first building with a metal skeleton.
3. “Sky-scraper”: *Park Row Building* (1896–99), New York, 119 meters, 30 stories.

translated by new technologies, as is reflected in its changing names. Although not visualized here, with every step the network has also enrolled significantly more human actors in its program (just as in Latour’s diagram of the key chain) – either as new inhabitants of and employees in the vertical city or as co-actors in specific technological actants, such as architects, engineers, inventors, and construction workers (involved in the building’s planning and erection) but also such actors as elevator operators, concierges (regulating or

fixing the building's basic facilities) or night watchmen (securing the building at night).

Yet while the skyscraper's intricate network had been more or less successfully solidified as a black box by the 1910s, it did not stop moving through a vast "controversial datascape" of interests, discourses, and controversies that constantly kept reopening it, adding new actors, inscribing new programs into, and thus translating it (Latour/Yaneva 87). That was true for the skyscraper's inner design and infrastructures just as much as it was for its outer shape and its recruitment in various urban schemes aimed at assembling a truly modern metropolis. This shall be demonstrated with regard to the controversy surrounding the skyscraper's role as an actor in its own right within the network of its immediate urban environment.

Once added to the urban assemblage of a certain street or urban neighborhood, the skyscraper often effectuated translations of that assemblage which did not remain uncontested by many other actors involved: The construction of one or several of these massive buildings could not only plunge whole streets and neighborhoods into permanent darkness but also seriously alter the pulse of life in them. With a huge mass of people working in these built giants, extreme congestion of urban traffic networks at certain times of the day was often inevitable. At the same time, skyscrapers were accused of emptying streets and depriving neighborhoods of their former vibrancy and life quality by simply absorbing people and business into their inward vertical cities. To many urban planners, journalists, and critics it stood out of question that skyscrapers had to be abolished from certain parts of the city and that their size and shape had to be restricted by law. It is thus that Schuyler, generally endorsing the skyscraper, could write in 1909:

Apparently it must be left to that future, not so far off, in which the multiplication and magnification of the sky-scrappers will become plainly incompatible with the well-being of the communities in which individual interest is permitted to override public interest, to devise some effectual limitation or restriction. (Schuyler 434)

While Chicago had restricted the size of its tall buildings as early as 1893, New York lacked such limitations for a long time. Surely, that lack had enabled the erection of a whole range of spectacular towers throughout the 1890s, 1900s, and early 1910s, many of them the world's highest buildings of their time. But that lack had also produced many of the urban phenomena described above: While looked at from afar, Manhattan boasted a thrilling skyline and while these massive buildings also promised luxury and comfort on their inside, the city's streets seemed to have transformed into gloomy and permanently

congested canyons. When finally the voluminous giant of the Equitable Building (following its burnt-down predecessor, the Equitable Life Assurance Building, on the same spot) was completed in 1915 and overshadowed several neighboring streets, the pressure for effective restriction became overbearing. In 1916 a zoning resolution was passed that demanded architects and engineers to gradually reduce their buildings' mass at certain heights in order to allow for enough light incidence on the streets below. This regulation and its restrictive program crucially altered the shape of Manhattan's skyscrapers for several decades to come (see Zunz 121–123). The characteristic pyramidal setback style as realized in many iconic art deco towers of the 1920s and 30s, such as the Chrysler and Empire State Building, was first proposed by delineator Hugh Ferriss in a 1922 article published in *New York Times Magazine*.

Once the skyscraper's network along with its canonical code of design had been stabilized into a sufficiently convergent and irreversible black box, that very black-boxed skyscraper actant was itself enrolled into all kinds of programs that aimed at assembling highly ambitious macro networks in the form of truly modern cities based on the principles of functionality and rationality and thus the very ideals once formulated by Sullivan in 1896 and reinvigorated by European modernist avant-gardes during the 1920s. In the urban programs envisioning newly built or functionally redesigned megacities, the skyscraper, no matter if commercial or residential, always ranked as a key actor, thus turning these visionary urban assemblages into truly vertical projects. Ferriss himself extended his virtuoso renderings of setback towers into visionary coal sketches of monumental futuristic cityscapes reigned by massive setback skyscrapers. It were these radically modernist visions of a utopian high-rise megalopolis collected in his influential 1929 publication *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* along with similar proposals by influential architects and urban planners, such as Harvey Wiley Corbett and Raymond Hood but also illustrators like Frank R. Paul, that crucially inspired the creative minds of their day. In fact, before such radical urban schemes were (however partially) realized after WWII, it was filmmakers of the 1920s and 30s who first filled these urban programs with life (see Koolhaas 110–130, Schleier, *The Skyscraper in American Art* 85–90, Bender, *The Unfinished City* 50–54).²⁹

29 In Europe, these radically modern visions of a vertical metropolis were shared by young architects, such as Le Corbusier. Already in 1924, the latter had proposed a Paris city center of several monumental modernist skyscrapers in his famous Plan Voisin. However strong Le Corbusier's influence was on postwar urban planning (especially via the *Athens Charter* of 1933) and its predilection for building high, his radical urban visions of a skyscraper city were never fully realized.

German director Fritz Lang's 1927 dystopian silent movie *Metropolis* seemed to be inspired as much by Manhattan's contemporary art deco architecture as it was by Ferriss', Corbett's, and Hood's bold visions of a future megacity. Even more loyal to their plans appeared to be only the early American film-musical *Just Imagine* (1930) that humorously, yet not uncritically imagined a monumentally vertical New York City in the year 1980 complete with individualized air travel. While already present in sketches and cartoons of the early 20th century, these visionary drafts and movies of the 1920s – themselves inspired by Manhattan's staggering skyward growth – came to define a certain standard, indeed a true vernacular of imagining the future in fiction, no matter if utopian or dystopian, science fiction, cyberpunk, or (post-)apocalyptic, that not only had to be decidedly urban but also radically high-rise in design. From the Martian City of early Soviet science fiction movie *Aelita* (1924), Lang's eponymous *Metropolis* (1927), and the New York of 1980 in *Just Imagine* (1930) via DC Comic's Gotham City, the all-urbanized planet Coruscant in the *Star Wars* universe down to *Blade Runner's* gloomy high-rise Los Angeles of 2019 (1982) or *Brazil's* postmodern vertical cityscapes (1985), to name but a few striking examples – 20th-century cinema seemed almost obsessed with these 1920s high-rise urban visions, as put forward by architects and urban planners of the likes of Hugh Ferriss, Harvey Wiley Corbett, Raymond Hood, Francisco Mujica, Antonio Sant'Elia, and Le Corbusier (see Thomsen 28–35, 93–96, Bukatman 123–130).

1.3 The Frontier in the Sky: The Skyscraper as Heterotopia

A range of technological innovations in the fields of construction, transport, and communication crucially translated and extended the urban assemblages of quickly growing (both horizontally and vertically) cities in the United States of the late 19th and early 20th centuries: With the hence increased, concentrated, and greatly accelerated flows of people, goods, information, and business, urban life gained a vibrancy, rapidity, density, and diversity formerly unknown. People, goods, and messages from all around the world streamed into cities that themselves extended out to the whole country, if not the entire globe through evolving business and transportation networks. Within such rapidly complexifying and condensing urban assemblages, unknown opportunities of making business, attaining knowledge and fame just as much as gaining success, freedom, and happiness (or at least the promise of these) seemed to open up for urban populations. If the U.S. had always been deemed the 'land of opportunity', the place to start anew, to do it freely and differently from the cultural, religious, political, and economic constraints of Europe and other parts of the world, then

its urban centers proved to be even more so not only in the eyes of immigrants from abroad but also to American rural or small-town populations that increasingly moved into the cities.

As a network consisting of and realized by the association and mutual co-production of a range of such innovative technologies of construction (steel frame), transport (elevator), and communication (telephone, tube systems) the skyscraper as a vertical city in itself seemed to embody the metropolitan experience of density and acceleration but also that quintessentially urban promise of unknown opportunity (even apart or against commonly accepted rules) in a most radical way. With an enormous number of people concentrated within its walls, the skyscraper represented “a new vertical universe at the heart of American cities” and was therefore also “part of a larger process of social construction” that involved a myriad of actors and actants, both human and non-human, within the building’s continual movement (Zunz 104).

Similar to the exploding populations of late 19th-century metropolises, also the emerging vertical cities at their commercial centers housed a sharply growing number of sky dwellers: “The tall office buildings of the masonry era housed about three hundred workers, the new skyscrapers [of the 1890s and 1900s] over four thousand” (114). In order to cater for the needs of such populations a massive structure like New York’s 50-floored Metropolitan Life Tower (1907–09) had to contain “forty-eight elevators that traveled a combined 124,090 miles a year” as well as “offices [that] were connected to each other and to the outside by 2,462 miles of telephone wire”, thus turning the building into “a city in itself” (116). Yet apart from providing adequate facilities of transport and communication for the successful conduct of business in its offices, corporations, such as the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, also had to build “a bureaucratic organization within the walls of its skyscraper” (114).

After all, these corporations were confronted with the challenge – not so different from the Berlin landlords in Latour’s famous study on the double-bit key – of instituting a sense of both order and discipline among their hundreds or thousands of employees all working densely together and more or less secluded from the coercive forces at work in the public realm of street level or in those classically panoptic spaces of factories, schools, or prisons, as famously described by Foucault. Given that remoteness from the moral and social pressures of the ‘world below’, did height not represent the utter opposite of discipline? Was it not synonymous with the transgression of (divine) rules, such as prominently captured in the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel? Did not other high structures of the late 19th century from hotels to lookout towers and other amusement park attractions of the day constitute spaces of leisure and entrainment?

And then: How were corporations to guarantee their moral respectability at a historic moment when ever-growing numbers of usually young and unmarried women were employed in their offices and interactions with their male coworkers seemed inevitable?³⁰

Considering this general situation that seemed to conflate height with chaos and all kinds of transgressions, there was no denying the fact that skyscraper-housed corporations (yet also landlords with regard to their residential high-rise buildings) had to devise a new network of regulatory and disciplinary installments that was principally driven by the two interconnected programs of efficiency and gender segregation. As spokespeople of this new disciplinary network in the making, companies and landlords alike had to make sure they enrolled not only their workforce and tenants but also the entirety of their buildings' architectural and technological actants into these programs.

In addition to a general rationalization of work processes in late 19th- and early 20th-century offices, also the "interior organization of skyscrapers, then, represent[ed] [...] a continuing preoccupation with flow charts and the cult of efficiency" (116). As a consequence, the very script of efficiency was so intricately inscribed into the whole design of office spaces and architecture that the human workforce was virtually unable to do anything but to follow these prescriptions and thus to work efficiently whenever interacting and 'using' its nonhuman co-actors. In the best of cases, thus, humans and nonhumans co-produced each other as efficiently working, docile cogwheels in the giant machine for working that the office itself but also the office building at large represented (see Kwolek-Folland 106–110).

Drawing on the examples of the New York Life Insurance Building (1926–28) and the PSFS Building in Philadelphia, Thompson has demonstrated with great precision how the program of acoustic non-distraction was inscribed into the

30 The increased presence of women in modern offices was feared to and certainly also did introduce an air of romantic distraction and sexual tension among the entire workforce – a tendency that was also well explored in literary texts of the time. While already in Sandburg's above-quoted poem the office skyscraper's "[w]ires climb with secrets [...] and tell terrors and profits and loves--curses of men grappling plans of business and questions of women in plots of love" (Sandburg 27), Sinclair Lewis, the first American writer to be awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature, described the office in his early 1917 novel *The Job* as a place "filled with thrills of love and distrust and ambition. Each alley between desks quivers with secret romance as ceaselessly as a battle-trench [...]" (Lewis, *The Job* 43). For more on the increasing feminization of office work during the late 19th century see Zunz 116–118, pictures 8–20 and Kwolek-Folland 41–54.

skyscraper's fabric by way of the installment of a variety of sound-absorbing materials in its walls and ceilings. Such sound-absorbing environments translated office spaces into "acoustically efficient refuges from the noises of public life" on the streets below, yet also from the clatter of typewriters and other business activities reverberating through the entire office or droning in from neighboring rooms and stories (Thompson 168). In a thus produced artificial office silence, employees were not only able to focus better and to work more efficiently without distracting noises but were also disciplined to refrain from producing any noise unrelated to work, such as colloquial chatter.

Another successful enrollment of human and nonhuman actors into the efficiency program of the high-rise office space concerned the widespread installment of non-walled-off open-plan offices that typically assembled great numbers of employees in one single large hall. In some cases, such office landscapes also allowed for possible inspection from higher floors and offices, such as was the case in the traditional design of factory buildings typically offering owners and administrators the opportunity to overlook all production processes at ground level from the windows of their first or second floor offices. Famous examples in which the factory model was successfully adapted in the design of office buildings may be the light court of Frank Lloyd Wright's early Larkin Administration Building in Buffalo (1904–06, demolished in 1950) or the Great Workroom in his later Johnson Wax Headquarters (1936–39) in Racine, Wisconsin (see Giedion 352–355, Frampton 61, 188–189).

Yet even without possible supervision from higher floors, the open-plan office constituted a classical model of a panoptic space along with its typical (self-) disciplining effects regarding the employees working therein. Far removed from present-day cube farms and the at least partial seclusion and privacy they offer, early 20th century open-plan offices as typical for large corporations of the banking and insurance sector represented spaces of utmost visual and acoustic transparency that denied any kind of privacy to its human workforce. Following the logic that a surveying eye and ear of a co-worker might be directed on him or her at any time, the individual employee on the open-plan floor was virtually forced to enroll him- or herself in the corporation's strict program of work efficiency. Eventually, the open-plan office meant that everyone was effectually disciplining each other, thus banning any sense of privacy or any possibility for relaxation or distraction by a mutually issued pressure to keep working as efficiently as possible.³¹

31 King Vidor's 1928 silent movie *The Crowd* captures the radical forlornness of the individual in the high-rise bureaucratic universe when first zooming up a monumental

Apart from inscribing a general program of efficiency in both its office space and employees, such as by the installment of panoptic and panacoustic milieus within the skyscraper, large corporations that increasingly relied on young female employees in certain job domains from the late 19th century onwards faced another challenge in keeping them as separated as possible from its male workforce. Based on his study of the “bureaucratic universe” created in Manhattan’s Metropolitan Life Building (1893) along with its adjacent 213 meter-tower (1907–09), Oliver Zunz has shown in detail how the program of radical gender segregation was inscribed into the spaces and architectures of the modern office skyscraper:

In spatial terms, the supervision of female employees at Metropolitan was achieved by cloistering them. Male and female employees entered the building through different doors, followed different hallways, and took different stairways and separate elevators. [...] In the work regime itself, the company maintained as much segregation as it could in its efforts to bolster its ideal of respectability. Strict discipline was enforced. [...] The room arrangements were such that few conversations could take place between men and women. (Zunz 119–120)

Intent on upholding their reputation of moral respectability at any price, deemed absolutely vital in the new service sector of banking and insurance, corporations like the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company saw no other solution to instituting a strict moral discipline with regard to the opposite sex in its workforce but also its customers, than by radically segregating genders within the realm of its corporate skyscraper, which ultimately demanded an almost complete division of its work and public spaces along with all facilities devoted to transport and recreation into a male and female sphere.³²

Manhattan skyscraper’s facade and then into one of its windows while cross-fading to a shot of the gigantic checkerboard of an open-plan office and zooming in on the protagonist working along on his desk. In much the same way, Orson Welles situated Josef K.’s workplace in an eerily rationalized open-plan office situated in a spacious old factory hall and thus a classically panoptic space in his 1962 adaptation of Kafka’s *The Trial*.

32 Early photographs included in Zunz’s, Kwolek-Folland’s, and Thompson’s studies of the Metropolitan Life Building and Tower as well as the New York Life Insurance Company Building prove that gender division within the skyscraper not only affected office space but also extended to recreational facilities, such as lunchrooms and gymnasiums (see Zunz, picture 14, Kwolek-Folland 122, 137, E. A. Thompson 203–204, 217).

But, as Zunz also argues, there were limits to such radical regimes of gender segregation:

Paradoxically, the segregation of women was undermined by their exclusion from the ranks of management and their regulation to a limited number of jobs. [...] Despite elaborate company rules, informal interaction between workers of both sexes also took place everyday. Sexual mores in the society itself were changing, and the skyscraper proved to be a locus for change rather than a fortress against it. [...] The revolution in mores was expressed through the design of skyscrapers in city centers just as it was, beyond them, in the development of a new world of amusement: the dance hall, the attraction park, and the new movie palaces [...]. (120–121)

After all, male and female employees were able to carve out communal space and time for themselves by recruiting spatial and architectural actants into their antiprograms, thus circumventing or even subverting the all-dominant program of strict division. Whether they met in non-segregated spaces of leisure, such as the Metropolitan's lavish roof garden or organized dance programs in lunch hours or even after work, the skyscraper proved to be far too spatially complex and diverse for corporations or landlords to inscribe their morally conservative script of gender segregation at all times as well as within the totality of its myriad of spaces (see Kwolek-Folland 124–126, Zunz, pictures 9, 10, 13, 15, 16).³³

If there is one thing that my reassembling of the skyscraper as an actor-network along the lines of ANT has hopefully revealed so far, then it should be the fact that assembling actors into networks, enrolling, and inscribing them into certain programs of action just as much as their mutual translation and co-production defines an arena of permanent negotiation, indeed of conflict, a clash of interests and a continuous struggle for power and its subversion. It should thus take one as no surprise that Callon identified ANT early on as “a new approach to the study of power” (Callon, “Some Elements” 196). The study of power, however, is a field intricately connected with and defined by the late scholarship of Michel Foucault, whose analysis of dispositives and their entanglement of power and discourses I have already highlighted earlier on as bearing

33 Kwolek-Folland points out the essential ambiguity of modern office skyscrapers as spaces that both subverted and reinforced gender segregation when she argues that “they subverted the nineteenth-century divisions of separate spheres, breaking them down and reconstituting them in the interest of commercial success. [...] In so doing, such establishments enormously complicated the nineteenth-century gender ideal of separate spheres” while at the same time “maintaining spatial, temporal, and rhetorical divisions between men and women, manhood and womanhood” (Kwolek-Folland 95–96).

strong resemblances to ANT's relational ontology. Especially in those classical ANT studies involving architectural set-ups, such as Latour's accounts of the key chain in hotels or the double-bit key in Berlin tenements, the influence of Foucault's analysis of power is always implicitly felt. Then again, Foucault's 1975 *Discipline and Punish* is not so far away from ANT as it is basically about how power relations (programs of action) are inscribed into and thus made durable not only in discourses but also and importantly in architectures, such as those of prisons, schools, hospitals, asylums, factories, military facilities, or even cities at large. Considering the above-outlined installment of panoptic and gender-segregated spaces inside the early American office high-rise, why should we not count the skyscraper, that product of the late 19th century and thus the heyday of the modern disciplinary regime, among that array of disciplinary and disciplining architectures?

There is, however, another classically Foucauldian concept that shall serve to broaden the perspective onto as well as to deepen an understanding of the skyscraper as a network not only of actors but of manifest power relations. I am referring here to the concept of heterotopia, a concept that Foucault, quite tellingly, first introduced at length in a lecture delivered in front of architects in 1967.³⁴ A rather short article entitled "Of Other Spaces" (*Des espaces autres*) based on that selfsame lecture, nowadays considered a seminal text for the spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities alike, however, only came to publication shortly after his death in 1984.³⁵ As I shall demonstrate in the following, Foucault's notion of heterotopia proves fruitful for a close description and analysis of the skyscraper in multiple ways, although one specific principle or rather distinction he proposes in the article shall be of overriding importance to the further argument of this present study.

34 Foucault already introduced the concept of heterotopia in its spatial sense, also in relation to utopia, in a 1966 radio broadcast before fleshing it out further in his 1967 lecture; another discussion of the heterotopia concept, however in the sense of a textual and not a manifest space, is to be found in the preface to Foucault's 1966 work *The Order of Things* (see Foucault xix); I will henceforth refer to its spatial meaning, as outlined in both the broadcast and lecture, only.

35 It is noteworthy for the context of this present study here that Foucault seems to invoke a turn to the study of spatial aspects by using a proto-ANT vocabulary of networks and associations when he argues that "[t]he present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. [...] We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 1).

As compared to the related notion of “utopias” which generally constitute imaginary “sites with no real place” presenting “society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down”, Foucault defines heterotopias (literally translated as ‘other places’) as those real sites within the social assemblage that appear “perfected” or “turned upside down” and thus ‘other’ from the social space that surrounds them (3). Foucault is convinced of the universality of those sites:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 3–4)

Both utopian and heterotopic sites thus appear as “counter-sites” that either differ from or radicalize the way in which the space around them seems to be ordered or unordered. Utopias, however, constitute imaginary or rather imagined places and therefore places both “without a place” (literally from Greek *ou-topia* “non-place”) and without any real existence. Heterotopias, by contrast, may be defined as “effectively enacted utopias”, that is as ‘realized’ utopias, as utopian sites made durable in reality that can be exactly located in space.

In order to further qualify the arguably rather abstract notion of heterotopia, Foucault identifies six principles that focus on specific characteristics and functions these sites bear with regard to the social (macro) space that they are realized, or rather assembled, in. Heterotopias are thus variously identified as sites of crisis and/or deviation (first principle), of shifting functions (second principle), of assembling various sites and slices of time in one single site (third and fourth principle), of isolation and partial accessibility (fifth principle) and as sites that either invert or radicalize the order of their surrounding space (sixth principle). Considering these six principles, it is not difficult to read the skyscraper as a highly heterotopic site. In fact, one can well see how the skyscraper is a site or space highly removed and secluded from the social space or urban assemblage surrounding it (due to its great height alone) while at the same time being firmly located in that space or entangled with the larger urban assemblage and as such, in that seeming dichotomy, appears more or less expressive of most of the principles elaborated by Foucault. Surely, the skyscraper does not constitute a heterotopia of crisis or deviation (first principle) in a strict sense – except if one chooses to link this certain type to the heterotopia of compensation as defined under the sixth principle, a connection that will be further clarified further below.

Considering some of the findings above, it should be clear that the skyscraper marks a site “that a society [...] can make [...] function in a very different fashion,” both over the course of time and in relation to its specific spatial and cultural context (5). It is true that the skyscraper, considering the vastness of its spaces and the high standards of its infrastructure can generally be adapted to a great variety of uses and thus also be inscribed with a great many programs from its beginnings as an office building over its increased residential use throughout the 20th century down to its housing of educational facilities, industrial workshops, sites of leisure and entertainment, or even agricultural uses in recent times (vertical farming). As a consequence, a single building-network may also be translated into ever-new uses by way of those various actants it newly associates with while becoming disassociated with others. For example, height as a site has been reserved for supernatural forces (God) and thus for most of the time eschewed by humans in pre-modern times in order not step into the divine realm and infuriate them. Apart from but perhaps also connected to this former reason, upper floors were generally left over to the poorest and most stigmatized ranks of society. As already outlined above, height in the form of spaces located particularly high up in buildings changed from that either feared or stigmatized site to a highly prestigious and desired space of work and residence within only a few decades during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This change in function and prestige of high spaces may be said to have resulted from a general discursive shift away from a pre-modern and strongly religiously informed to a secular, commercially, and technologically oriented, modern regime.

Then, of course, it is also true that the skyscraper or rather the tower, from its earliest instances onwards, has been imagined and then also attempted to be realized as a “heterotopia [that] is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (6). Just as theaters and cinemas bring together foreign places and characters in one space and just as botanical and zoological gardens aim to assemble plants and animals from around the world and thus to enact a truly universal panorama within their own fixed microcosm, the skyscraper, for all its vastness and the potential diversity of its uses and spaces, has been continuously said to both actually assemble and symbolically embody within its own single contracted megaspace a whole city (‘the vertical city’), a nation or country, or even the whole world. With regard to Foucault’s description of the garden as a traditional heterotopia, one may argue that as such a “happy, universalizing heterotopia”, the skyscraper has also and always been imagined as a single site which contains or reflects “the totality of the world” (6).

Rem Koolhaas has convincingly traced the ideological origins of the skyscrapers (of Manhattan at least) to the specific logic and thrill of popular amusement park attractions, such as those in particular of that huge amusement empire of Coney Island, located south of Brooklyn on the lower West tip of Long Island. While these parks were heterotopias in themselves, such as Dreamland with its miniature versions of Venice, Switzerland, ancient Pompeii, Japanese teahouses but also imaginary places like Lilliputia (inhabited by midgets), they also featured a great many beacons, lookout towers, and rollercoasters that literally enabled one to overlook the world in miniature to one's feet (Koolhaas 29–79). There was, however, one ambitious project in the early years of the 20th century eventually unrealized, that came to prototypically combine the tower and a compressed world as amusement park on Coney Island, thus attempting to literally fulfill “the Skyscraper’s [heterotopic] potential to reproduce the earth and to create other worlds” within its own structure (75). As a tower turned globe, the Globe Tower, designed by Samuel Friede in 1906, was intended to assemble in its column-carried steel globe (at a height of 213 meter easily the world’s highest structure of its time) an entire amusement park complete with a myriad of attractions and new ‘worlds’ on a staggering 1,5 million square meters of total floor space to be frequented by 50.000 visitors a day (71–75). While Friede’s truly megalomaniac project finally failed in 1908, it nevertheless defined the heterotopic ideal of containing an entire cosmos within a single mega-complex as well as to “establish alternative realities on any level” which would henceforth haunt not only the skyscrapers of Manhattan (87). It is that very notion of the “reproduction of the World” that Koolhaas also lists as the first of “those three urbanistic breakthroughs” that brought about the birth of the Manhattan skyscraper with its decidedly irrational, yet often veiled, program of amusement and spectacle during the first decade of the 20th century (82).

It should thus not be surprising that a long list of Manhattan skyscrapers in particular have paid tribute to its program of constituting a “happy, universalizing heterotopia” (sometimes self-ascribed, sometimes inscribed by a company or organization it housed) with regard to its literal or symbolic containment or reflection of the urban, national, or global space surrounding it. While buildings like the Metropolitan Life Building and Tower or the One New York Plaza merely seem to ‘contain’ their immediate metropolitan space, i.e. that of the city at large, other structures like the Empire State Building (referring to the state of New York’s nickname), Chicago’s State of Illinois Center, and San Francisco’s Transamerica Pyramid extend their scope of containment onto a whole state, country, or continent. Supporting Koolhaas’ argument of a bold “reproduction of the world” to be performed by Manhattan towers, by far the largest number

of New York skyscrapers including such famous buildings as New York World Building (referring to Pulitzer's 'global' newspaper), World's Tower Building, United Nations Headquarters, World Trade Center, One Worldwide Plaza, Trump World Tower, or the recent One World Trade Center all betray their heterotopic program of containing or assembling the entire world (or by specification world politics or economy) already within their names (see also Sanders 120–121).

In much the same way, many early New York skyscrapers (and their late post-modern descendants too) also seem to adhere to Foucault's fourth principle of heterotopia as they do not only assemble other and possibly incompatible spaces within them but may also contain various "slices in time" or even bring about an "absolute break with [...] traditional time", thus actually turning them into "heterochronies" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 6). While it may be evident that skyscrapers do indeed enforce their very own temporal and spatial structure onto their inhabitants, workforce, or visitors in much the same way that any vast space of enclosure does, such as by keeping out the outside weather, climate, or light conditions, there is another sense in which the tall building, especially regarding its evolutionary phases, might be described as "a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place" much like modern museums, libraries, and archives do.³⁶

Yet, above all, early skyscrapers, especially those of Manhattan, seem to fall into the category of heterochronies, as they typically emulate a whole range of historically inherited styles of European architecture, at times even many of them in one building (such as in the eclectic Beaux Arts tradition), in their exterior and interior designs – that trait of early skyscrapers so detested by observers like Sullivan and James. In a dual attempt to heighten the respectability of both their businesses and their insolently high and monumental buildings, companies and builders often opted for these accepted and dignified architectural styles commonly known from the design of other respected public edifices, such as municipal buildings, museums, or train stations. Koolhaas has also argued that apart from traditional architectural designs, builders and developers have strategically veiled the skyscraper's essentially irrational program (derived from amusement park attractions) behind a discourse of efficiency and economic reason (87–88). Historical designs and the argument of efficiency thus appear as

36 It is true that one may also rate the skyscraper just as any building and technical object a heterochrony as it represents, according to ANTI, a succession of temporal states ("freeze frames") on its continual movement through various connections, inscriptions, and translations.



Illustration 3: Heterotopias of Time – Manhattan as Architectural Museum

1. *New York World “Pulitzer” Building (1889–90), emulating a Classicist Baroque cathedral.*
2. *Metropolitan Life Tower (1908–09), emulating Venice’s Campanile di San Marco.*
3. *Woolworth Building (1913), emulating a Gothic cathedral.*

early strategies – or rather, following Koolhaas, alibis – used by the skyscraper-network’s spokespeople to turn these radically modern (at least when it comes to their constructional and infrastructural inside) and “impudently” new usurpers of urban space into acceptable structures and enroll as many actors (renters, residents, critics etc.) in their program as possible.

With the Classicist Baroque tower of the New York World Building, an eclectic Beaux Arts Singer Building, the Metropolitan Life Tower’s strikingly perfect, yet double-sized simulacrum of Venice’s Campanile di San Marco, and the Woolworth Building’s soaring Gothic “cathedral of commerce” – to name but a few of the most prominent structures – Manhattan effectively passes as the ultimate heterochrony of an architectural-historical open-air museum or archive (see Illustration 3).³⁷ It is thus that Benjamin de Casseres could write in 1925 that “stone by stone we shall remove the Alhambra, the Kremlin and the

³⁷ Apart from their rich historicist facades, skyscrapers of the period also seemed heterochronic and thus indeed hyperreal when it comes to their interior designs that similarly celebrated a fetish for past styles and icons. Nye, for instance, reports that “Woolworth’s personal office” inside of his Gothic “cathedral of commerce” was in fact “a copy of the Empire Room of Napoleon’s palace in Compiègne, and on the wall hung a portrait of Napoleon copied from the original in Versailles” (Nye 93, see also Kwolek-Folland 99–101).

Louvre and build them anew on the banks of the Hudson” (Casseres quoted in Koolhaas 81) and Le Corbusier, eminent French modernist architect, was puzzled by the hyperreality of Manhattan’s architectonic simulacra: “In New York, then, I learned to appreciate the Italian Renaissance. It is so well done that you could believe it to be genuine. It even has a strange, new firmness which is not Italian but American”, thus almost echoing Baudrillard avant la lettre (Le Corbusier, *When Cathedrals Were White*, 59–60).

Much more than any other American city, such as Chicago, famed for its largely functional commercial high-rise architecture, New York proved to be a giant architectural archive, indeed a vast heterochrony of smaller skyscraper-heterochronies assembling and mixing all kinds of styles on their in- and outsides.³⁸ Only after high-rise architecture (not only in Manhattan) had left behind the more abstracted style of art deco of the 1920s and 30s as well as the reign of a purely functionalist International Style during the postwar years and newly embraced traditional styles as part of an again-eclectic architectural postmodernism from the 1980s onwards, did skyscrapers once more and in a certain way more radically than ever turn into heterochronies as it became popular not only to quote but to playfully mix elements from most different architectural periods in the design of even single buildings.³⁹

The fifth principle outlined by Foucault then describes “heterotopias [as] always presuppos[ing] a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 7). Without going into detail here, it seems obvious that the skyscraper also constitutes a heterotopic site in that selfsame sense as it very much operates on a more or less perfect seclusion or even elevation from the world outside or rather below, while at the same offering (limited or regulated) access on various levels, such as via integrated subway stations, aircraft, and heliports at its top or via access-controlled ground

38 Koolhaas seems to have drawn inspiration from Manhattan’s real-life heterotopia and heterochrony for his utopian mock-model for a Manhattan-like “City of the Captive Globe” that is supposed to “perform” on every standard block of its city grid another architectural style, ideology, or historical epoch, thereby forming “an enormous incubator of the World Itself” that “breed[s] on the Globe,” which is itself suspended at the very center of that utopian city (Koolhaas 294). For more on Koolhaas’ and his Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA)’s ironical-provocative approach to architecture and the city in many of their early works see Vidler 192–198.

39 For more on the emergence and program of postmodern architecture see Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* 80–145, Frampton 271–302 and page 121 of this study.

level entrances, especially in the case of hotels or “vertical gated communities” (see Graham/Hewitt, “Getting Off the Ground” 79–80). Also, I have already shown how the early corporate skyscraper’s spaces were inscribed by a radical program of gender apartheid that strictly regulated the access and movement of its male and female workforce within the building by way of a complicated network of gender-specific entrances, transport ways, infrastructures, and recreational facilities.

Finally, then, Foucault delivers another definition of heterotopia in the form of a flexible dichotomy as part of his sixth and last principle that seems particularly adequate for my investigation of high-rise spaces and their heterotopic potential in this present study. The dualism of heterotopias of illusion, on the one hand, and heterotopias of compensation, on the other hand, as introduced here, is explained as follows:

The last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory [...]. Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation, [...]. (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 8)

Foucault hence defines two types of heterotopias with regard to their function or relation towards their surrounding social space, the larger social assemblage it is embedded into.

The first type, the heterotopia of illusion, defines a site that relates to its social ‘outside’ by radically subverting or even reversing its norms, values, laws as well as by questioning its order, thereby revealing all of them as illusory. While Foucault only mentions brothels as an example of that kind of heterotopia, one might easily add such sites as nightclubs, fairgrounds, amusement parks but also carnivals as well as any kind of exuberant festivity or festival (although only temporal), alternative lifestyle communities as well as those vacation villages Foucault lists under the fourth principle certainly also belong here (7).⁴⁰

40 Given their temporal lease, one may well question the subversive potential of many of these heterotopias of illusion. As they are visited or celebrated for only a rather short period of time, these heterotopias might indeed stabilize the general order and its laws precisely by overriding them temporarily. It is thus that Baudrillard may deem Disneyland a heterotopic site that by way of its own ‘illusoriness’ stabilizes one’s belief in the reality of an actually just as illusory/hyperreal world outside (see Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations* 12–13).

By contrast, the second type, the heterotopia of compensation, denotes a site that differs or relates to its surrounding social world not by subverting and questioning but by radicalizing and perfecting its very order and principles, thus compensating for all its perceived flaws and imperfections that make it seem “messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” from its own perspective. Foucault once more only refers to colonies, especially those set up by the Puritans and Jesuits in America as examples, yet one may also well include all those classically panoptic-coercive institutions described by Foucault in his later work *Discipline and Punish* (1975), namely prisons, schools, barracks, hospitals, or psychiatric asylums but also the open-plan office elaborated on further up – all of which traditionally or still constituting milieus of a strict gender segregation.

It is this very dynamic of illusion and compensation that probably best captures the skyscraper’s double heterotopic imaginary as a vertical, enclosed city and thus as a site for the urban experience in extremis with regard to both its subversive and coercive potential. On the one hand, the skyscraper marks that radical space of illusion elevated and secluded from the world below and thus also potentially far removed from all its duties and restrictions. Throughout history, soaring structures have hence been read as those dubious sites of transgression – from the sin of infuriating God by building a tower that soars to heaven in the biblical trope of Babel over the moral corruption of ‘absolute’ political and economic power residing high above country and cities up to the decadence and secrecy of hotel towers as sites for all sorts of illicit encounters and transactions.

While at the same time firmly grounded in a social space and its order, the skyscraper also provides a most perfect refuge from that said space. Not only is one able to disconnect, virtually dis-enroll oneself from all the coercive programs and roles inscribed into oneself within the urban network-assemblage of the world outside or below here, the tall building also seems to offer seemingly limitless space for literally realizing alternative, illusory realities with regard to the one outside/below upon every new story. It is that radically subversive potential of the Manhattan skyscraper and its “culture of congestion” that Koolhaas had in mind when he declared it the ultimate “instrument of a new form of *unknowable* urbanism” (Koolhaas 87). Only because that “subversiveness of the Skyscraper’s true nature – the ultimate unpredictability of its performance – is inadmissible to its own makers”, he further argues, does that built heterotopia of illusion have to be sold as both a pastiche of respectable and well-known architectural styles and an inevitable economic necessity, indeed as the very “answer to a call” voiced by a “new grouping of social conditions”, as Sullivan has so powerfully justified the skyscraper’s existence in 1896 (Koolhaas 87, Sullivan 403). Indeed, Koolhaas shrewdly concludes, as a rapidly urbanizing America appears to be increasingly

bereft of its truly and originally American heterotopic site, namely the frontier, that not-yet tamed zone between civilization and wilderness, that “only the Skyscraper offers [...] the wide-open spaces of a man-made Wild West, a *frontier in the sky*” at the very heart of its metropolises (87).

In his influential frontier thesis of 1893, eminent American historian Frederick Jackson Turner has championed the frontier as a creative-fluid milieu of innovation and freedom that has – above all other values, traditions, and institutions – crucially defined American culture and its core virtues:

American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. (Turner 2–3)

The western frontier emerges as a contact zone of European and Native American culture and thus a heterotopic site where their amalgamation into an original Americanness was able to succeed precisely because both European influence and the pressure of social coercion and racist thinking was felt less strongly the further one had removed oneself from ‘higher’

stages of civilization in the American East.⁴¹ The American frontier thus proved as an illusion heterotopia par excellence, a space of great possibility and freedom where commonly upheld dichotomies of ‘civilization’ regarding race, class, and gender could be subverted, if not even reversed.⁴² Turner argued:

41 Even though Turner appears convinced that “the disintegration of [Native American] savagery [was accomplished] by the entrance of the [European] trader, the pathfinder of civilization” and admits that each new frontier was in fact “won by a series of Indian wars,” he nevertheless conceptualizes the frontier as a unique illusion heterotopia of cultural hybridization which even allowed for a ‘becoming-Native American’ on the part of the European pioneer (Turner 11, 9): “The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, [...]. The fact is, that here is a new product that is American” (Turner 4).

42 Also Henri Lefebvre seems to connect the “obscene” area of heterotopia to the frontier when he argues: “The same might be said apropos of the general fact that

Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, [...]. [...] For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant. [...], each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons, have accompanied the frontier. (Turner 37–38)

And yet, the frontier also and at the same time constituted that “messy, [not yet] [...]constructed, and jumbled” space to be compensated for by taming and thus civilizing it – an endeavor that often required or at least effectuated a strengthening, if not even an intensification of race, class, and gender distinctions. To many and certainly even to its very first settlers, the Pilgrim Fathers, America and its untamed frontier designated a site upon which to realize a more perfect civilization, a more compensatory space than it could be found anywhere else on earth.

In a similar way, the city – and the skyscraper as a vertical and highly compressed city even more so – seemed to constitute that sort of illusion heterotopia of a fluid contact zone by bringing together a great many of people (male and female, rich and poor, black and white), thus potentially triggering hybridizations – i.e. associations and translations – on a myriad of levels while far removed from the moral and coercive pressures at work in the public spaces of street level. Yet, the western frontier on the ground and the vertical frontier in the sky appear connected not only on the basis of their structural quality as originally American heterotopic sites. In fact, a range of scholars have stressed that only at the historic moment when the western frontier vanished with the end of American westward expansion and reappeared on the skylines of large cities by the end of the 19th century, could the frontier as that untamed western wilderness emerge as a mythical place of transgression and lawlessness (see Mitchell 26, Kimmel 99–101, Cohen 78–80). And yet while that new frontier in the sky similarly offered lawlessness and all kinds of transgressions, its settlers, however, had changed into white-collar clerks, an increasing number of them female. And it was only against the caricature of an allegedly effeminized resident of the urban high-rise frontier that the mythic figure of the cowboy as

walls, enclosures and facades serve to define both a *scene* (where something takes place [public, ‘civilized’ space]) and an *obscene* area to which everything that cannot or may not happen on the scene is relegated: whatever is inadmissible, be it malefic or forbidden, thus has its own hidden space on the near or the far side of a frontier” (Lefebvre 36).

an originally male and self-reliant, untamed denizen of the old frontier could emerge.⁴³ In a way, one could thus conclude that both the old and the new frontier, the one of the prairies and the one of the urban sky, have co-produced each other as illusory-transgressive sites around 1900.

As much as the skyscraper seemed to lend itself to the realization of a frontier-like space of subversion and transgression due to its vertical seclusion, it is precisely because of that seclusion that it also offered ideal conditions for realizing a whole variety of compensatory spaces that were not only intended to reproduce but to vastly intensify and perfect the order and coercive powers of the greater urban assemblage outside of its walls. As studies by Zunz, Kwolek-Folland, and Thompson have demonstrated, corporations were highly successful in translating their high-rise offices into perfectly compensatory spaces – more silent, more transparent, more gender-segregated, and thus supposedly more beneficial to efficient work than any space outside – by way of installing a range of panoptic room concepts, sound-absorbing materials, and largely segregated office realms for its male and female employees. In a similar way, also landlords sought to discipline, i.e. to inscribe coercive programs into their tenants by a long list of measures, such as by regulating access to their buildings (e.g. placing watchmen and concierges at the entrance), installing thin walls and ceilings or issuing noise regulations (no music or talking after a certain hour). But even without their coercive efforts, living and working as densely together as in a skyscraper, with cells of people over, under and next to one's own apartment or office, often had a disciplining effect of its own. With one's own sounds and noise potentially reverberating through the entire building or at least into the neighboring units, the denizens of the vertical city were quickly (self-) enrolled into a program of keeping quiet if they desired to secure at least a small bit of privacy in their everyday lives. In her extensive study on urban domesticity in 19th and early 20th-centuries American culture, Betsy Klimasmith has thus rightfully argued that

In urban boarding houses, apartment buildings [especially high-rise ones], and hotels, [s]ound, heat, and smells traveled between residences. Urban dwellings thus exemplified permeable architecture; [...] [...] In the modern urban landscape, theatricality, voyeurism, and proximity simultaneously fragmented the broad notion of public space

43 It was none other than later U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt who not only helped to install that masculine ideal in his frontier life writings but also sought to reinvent himself as cowboy, incorporating “the stern, manly qualities that are invaluable to a nation” during his time as a rancher and deputy sheriff in the Dakotas during the years from 1884 to 1886 (Roosevelt, *Ranch Life* 56).

into individual stages, performances, and stories, and transformed private spaces into shared spaces. (Klimasmith 5)

The resonant inside of many of these densely populated “permeable architectures,” and – simply given the sheer amount of spaces and actors present within them – skyscrapers in particular, constituted if not panoptic, then certainly vast panacoustic spaces.

Yet, especially with its integration into larger urbanistic schemes, the skyscraper also proved to be an outstanding mediator of large-scale programs of panoptic coercion with regard to its outside urban environment. Not only do high-rise buildings operate in much the same way as the watchtower in Bentham’s panopticon model when it comes to the streets, plazas, and parks located at their feet, which become visible from a vast many windows and are thus translated into giant stages of utter transparency.⁴⁴ Ensuing from an engagement with Le Corbusier’s transparent architecture, Beatriz Colomina has stressed the panoptic quality of modern architecture and urban space that ultimately culminates in her reading of modern architecture as mass media:

Seeing, for Le Corbusier, is the primordial activity in the house. The house is a device to see the world, a mechanism of viewing. [...] The modern transformation of the house produces a space defined by walls of (moving) images. [...] To be “inside” this space is only to see. To be “outside” is to be in the image, to be seen, whether in the press photograph, a magazine, a movie, on television, or at your window. It no longer has so much to do with a public space, in the traditional sense of a public forum, a square, [...]. [...] The private is, in this sense, now more public than the public. [...] The traditional sense of privacy is now not only scarce but endangered, under attack. (Colomina 7–8)

Also if considered in relation to each other, skyscrapers turn into perfect agents of a disciplining regime when allowing people in neighboring buildings to possibly spy on each other at virtually any time. In fact, with every skyscraper operating as a possible watchtower, metropolitan space, both public and private,

44 In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre – obviously writing under the impression of a skyward growing Corbusian urban environment – does not tire to emphasize the coercive potential of the “arrogant verticality of skyscrapers,” their very ability “to convey an impression of authority in each spectator,” as “[v]erticality and height have ever been the spatial expression of potentially violent power.” After all, in such a hyper-transparent “space to come, where the eye would usurp so many privileges, it would fall to the Phallus to receive or produce them. The eye in question would be that of God, that of the Father or that of the Leader. A space in which this eye laid hold of whatever served its purposes would also be a space of force, of violence, of power restrained by nothing but the limitations of its means” (Lefebvre 98, 262).

turns into a giant panopticon – also at night. Many early skyscrapers, such as the Metropolitan Life Tower, were indeed topped with a (sometimes revolving) light source in their spires that virtually translated them into giant lighthouses not only flaring their beams wide across the distant country and ocean but also sending curious flashes of light into the cells of other buildings and the city streets below. In utopian cityscapes, such as those designed by Raymond Hood for the New York Regional Plan, such flashlights atop almost every skyscraper seemed to create an entire grid of light beams on the city's night sky, thus virtually reproducing the street grid in the sky. Also, the night sky thereby had the quality of a modern-day laser trap supposed to guide and render visible any approaching aircraft – a form of transport, either public or individual, commonly imagined to become a standard feature of large cities in metropolitan visions and movies of the 1920s and 30s. The space of these future cities, whether on the streets or in the sky, whether underground or within buildings, was infinitely transparent and thus knowable to controlling agencies, such as city officials, the police, or the military, delegated to guarantee the security of an abundant and thus possibly uncontrollable urban cosmos.⁴⁵

To these modernist visionaries of the future high-rise metropolis of compensation, the Manhattan of their day must have seemed all but imperfect, if not a downright “messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” space of illusion (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 8). To Le Corbusier, for instance, the great French modernist architect-innovator obsessed with the “all-consuming ambition to invent and build the New City commensurate with the demands and potential glories of the machine civilization”, 1920s Manhattan and its messy-carnavalesque towers “represent not the second (real) Machine Age but ‘tumult, hairgrowth, [and the] first explosive stage of the new middle ages...’” (Koolhaas 249–251). Le Corbusier’s effort to envision and build a truly modern Radiant City thus literally comprised of “designing the anti-Skyscraper and the anti-Manhattan”,

45 Feminist scholar Elizabeth Wilson has stressed that the desire for controlling urban space as an arena of potentially illicit opportunity and deviance on the part of women and all sorts of ethnic, sexual, and class minorities has always been at the center of urbanistic planning and visioning by predominantly white male elites in both ancient and modern times: “the controlling and surveillance aspects of city life have always been directed particularly at women [and other subaltern groups]. Urban life potentially challenged patriarchal systems. [...]. [...] cities have posed a challenge to men’s [and any other dominant group’s] ability to retain their hold. The city is the zone of individual freedom. There, the ties of family and kinship may be loosened and avenues of escape may open up” (Wilson 14,16).

to imagine it as a veritable heterotopia of compensation against the negative template of the narrow and jumbled but after all “immature, *not yet* modern” skyscrapers of Manhattan (251).⁴⁶

Whether intended or not, the designers and visionaries of the excessively rational and transparent city thus created the ultimate urban heterotopia of compensation, each of its high-rise towers placed at a generous distance to the other ones and therefore effectively operating as watchtowers with regard to both the city space in between and the other towers while at the same time constituting massive panacousticons on their insides. Should one be all but surprised that those visionary models of a truly modern and thus supposedly healthy, secure, and beneficial architecture and urban design, however incompletely realized globally in the years after WWII, inspired so many gloomy dystopian scenarios in literature and film from the 1930s onwards? From George Orwell’s *1984* (1949) over Orson Welles’ *The Trial* (1962) and Jean-Luc Godard’s *Alphaville* (1965) down to George Lucas’ *THX 1138* (1971) and Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil* (1985) – these narratives unfold within the panoptic and highly coercive spaces of a nightmarishly perfect urban heterotopia of compensation whose designs and inner logic lead directly back to those radically functionalist urban schemes devised by the 1920s modernist avant-garde of architects and urban planners (see Tod/Wheeler 150–151).⁴⁷

46 Russian-American writer Ayn Rand’s 1943 novel *The Fountainhead* (movie version 1949 by King Vidor) seems enormously relevant in this respect, as it fictionalizes the very clash of an accepted Beaux Arts vernacular and innovative modernist designs in skyscraper architecture during the 1920s. Even though the visionary modernist architect at the center of Rand’s narrative is partly (especially when it comes to the design of his non-high-rise buildings) based on eminent American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, the character of Howard Roark, however, also seems to invoke the model of Le Corbusier, similarly individualistic and self-convinced of his vision of a radically functionalist high-rise architecture which he relentlessly promoted in defiance of the disdain of many critics and customers during the 1920s and 30s until finally his ideas of functionalist architecture and urbanism were broadly adopted in the postwar period (see Koolhaas 259–281, Frampton 178–185, Filler 33, and also this study on pages 118–121; for an in-depth analysis of the movie see Schleier, *Skyscraper Cinema* 123–148).

47 In Orwell’s deeply dystopian novel *1984*, for instance, the seats of compensatory-panoptic state power seem to overtop London in the form of gigantic watchtowers. Buildings like the Ministry of Truth may appear as “an enormous pyramidal structure of glittering white concrete, soaring up, terrace after terrace, three hundred meters into the air” and thus as if coming straight from a Ferrissian sketch of an excessively skyward-soaring art deco pyramid (Orwell 5–6). In some cases, the modern

Indeed, the very dualism and dynamic of illusion and compensation seems to lie at the core of American culture at large: The Puritan founding fathers fled persecution and the religious intolerance of England for the heterotopia of illusion of America where they were free from constraints and danger and able to practice their faith freely. Yet they used this freedom to erect a compensatory heterotopia, stricter and more perfect than the religious and moral system they fled. It is this idea that lingered strongly throughout American history and has inspired so many religious or spiritual sectarians to retreat from the world (social space) for a frontier land in order to realize compensatory communities that – in their own understanding – radically differ from and compensate for all the failures and falseness of society at large. Confident that the eyes of God and all people rested firmly upon them and their ‘project’, not only the Puritan settlers and all their zealous descendants but in effect Americans generally strove to build that very ‘city upon the hill’ – in itself a panoptic site in both an active and a passive sense – as the ultimate heterotopia of compensation and thus as a place more perfect and more ordered than any other place on earth could ever be.

Yet no matter how tightly sewn the net of the modern spaces of compensation and coercion within both the skyscraper and its urban environment, blind spots will always emerge in the urban panopticon and allow for the realization, if only fleetingly, of subversive heterotopias of illusion in the very midst of all this compensatory space. In his influential 1980 work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, French scholar Michel de Certeau sought to both demonstrate and theoretically frame how “users make innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy [and thus compensational space] in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules” (Certeau xiii-xiv).

While Foucault has analyzed the miniscule ways of “how [...] silent technologies determine or short-circuit institutional stage directions” and thus – translated into ANT terminology – how discipline has been inscribed into spaces and docile bodies from the superior perspective of “the productive apparatus” aiming at compensation, Certeau rather strives to follow the subversive tactics and thus antiprograms of the consumers or “dominees” aiming at illusion from an inferior perspective:

overrationalization as expressed in the architecture and urban design of such future scenarios is even extended onto people’s most private lives, such as when their names are reduced to mere combinations of letters and numbers, as, for instance, in *Just Imagine* (1930) or *THX 1138* (1971).

If it is true that the grid of “discipline” is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also “miniscule” and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what “ways of operating” form the counterpart, on the consumer’s (or “dominee’s”?) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order [and thus also disciplinary/compensatory urban space]. (xiv)

In his much-quoted chapter entitled “Walking in the City”, Certeau champions the plain act of walking the city as a pedestrian as one of these quotidian “popular procedures” that may possibly subvert and escape the compensatory “grid of discipline” inscribed by architects and urban planners in their god-like top-down visions of the city as readable and knowable space. As opposed to the panoptic “voyeurist” ideal of these theoreticians of urban space, “the ordinary practitioners of the city live “down below,” [or in the midst of the vertical city] [and] walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it” (93).

While the theoretician-planners (but also the corporation or landlord owning a high-rise building) devise “places” (*lieux*) as static spaces in their programs for inscribing discipline in users (inhabitants, employees, tenants) of that space, the latter live in space (*espace*) and thus in an enacted, ‘practiced’ place. Passed through and used, space is realized by the urban pedestrian, the walker and climber in the vertical city just as much as by the present-day graffiti writer, skater, or parkour runner who all constantly claim new routes and ways, such as by way of ‘creatively misusing’ urban architecture, by disregarding fixed uses and laid-out ways of passage. The tricky “tactician of space” evades and escapes the compensatory spaces of rational urbanist schemes and enacts his or her own illusory, subversive spaces with every unforeseen, ‘unmapped’ movement within or usage of urban space. In doing so, he or she resists enrollment as a docile user of static places but rather inscribes his or her individual antiprogram into places (“writing an urban text”); the walker in the city hence emerges as an actor freely associating with static (fixed-use) places, thereby translating them into dynamic spaces of his own interest and use (see 117). Certeau may thus conclude:

These ‘ways of operating’ constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production. [...] the goal is to perceive and analyze the microbe-like operations proliferating within technocratic structures and deflecting their functioning by means of a multitude of “tactics” articulated in the details of everyday life; [...] the goal is not to make clearer how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology, but rather to

bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of “discipline.” Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidisdiscipline [...]. (xiv-xv)

Certainly, Certeau’s champion is the pedestrian ‘down below’ in the canyons of the rational urban-planner city. Yet if one models – as I have repeatedly done up to now – the skyscraper as a vertical city in itself, a compressed urban space of compensation in extremis, there is no reason why one should not also imagine the tricky walker in the city – supposedly operating only along the horizontal urban axis – as a creative walker and climber within the skyscraper and thus also along the vertical urban axis. After all, Zunz and others have shown how employees and tenants have carved out their space of illusion within the skyscraper’s coercive schemes by way of enrolling various actants, no matter if architectonic, technological, or human, in their antiprograms of subversion.

And is not this walker or climber operating right within the field of tension spanning between the two extreme poles of the urban heterotopia of illusion and that of compensation that has made his or her way into so many works of urban fiction, that has served the reader or viewer as a point of identification and orientation within sometimes monumental, sometimes confusing literary or filmic visions of urban space? There may even be genres, such as the action or crime thriller that could not possibly be imagined without that tricky-creative walker and climber figure championed by Certeau.

It is along Foucault’s distinction of compensation and illusion heterotopia and Certeau’s figure of the walker in the (vertical) city that I thus want to propose a categorization of 20th-century fictional works that focus on problems related to the city or feature urban space and architecture in a specifically prominent way. First, these fictional urban scenarios may be distinguished according to the way they depict the urban space (which also includes how its characters act in it) as either compensatory, i.e. as perfected and (over)rationalized or as illusory-subversive when compared to their larger fictional space or its past. Thus, the first question to answer would be: Is urban space depicted (or seen by its characters) as a compensation or illusion heterotopia? Second, a line may be drawn between such scenarios that present their compensatory or illusory urban spaces as either positive (utopian) or negative (dystopian) which also crucially includes how their characters perceive and value them (see Tab. 2). Of course there may be cases where urban space is significantly transformed from one state into another, from an illusory into a compensatory one or vice versa as part of the work’s narration, or different states exist simultaneously within one fictional world, or where its valuation by the characters changes. The second question would then be: Is that

Tab. 2: Categorization of Fictional Scenarios and Urbanistic Models Presenting Heterotopias of Compensation and Illusion as Either Positive or Negative

Heterotopia	Positive	Negative
Compensation	<i>Looking Backward</i> (1888)	<i>Safety Last!</i> (1923)
	<i>The Metropolis of Tomorrow</i> (1929)	<i>Metropolis</i> (1927)
		<i>Just Imagine</i> (1930)
	<i>The Radiant City</i> (1933)	<i>Modern Times</i> (1936)
	<i>Things to Come</i> (1936)	<i>1984</i> (1949/1984)
	GM Futurama (1939)	<i>Alphaville</i> (1965)
		<i>Playtime</i> (1967)
		<i>THX 1138</i> (1971)
		<i>Brazil</i> (1985)
		<i>High-Rise</i> (1975/2015)
Illusion	<i>The Warriors</i> (1979)	<i>Shaft</i> (1971)
	<i>1990: The Bronx Warriors</i> (1982)	<i>The Omega Man</i> (1973)
	<i>High-Rise</i> (1975/2015)	<i>Taxi Driver</i> (1976)
		Vigilante Films (1970/80s)
		<i>Escape from New York</i> (1981)
		<i>Blade Runner</i> (1982)
		<i>RoboCop</i> (1987)

illusion or compensation space depicted as or regarded (by its characters) as positive (utopian, shiny, beneficial) or negative (dystopian, gloomy, harmful)? Third, one may identify in almost any scenario a single character or a group of characters that function as walkers in the (vertical) city and thus subvert (or at least try to, or do so only temporarily) the dominant function (compensatory or illusory) of that urban space into its opposite, so they either bring subversion or chaos into a compensatory space regarded as oppressive, or they (and here they would differ from Certeau's classical walker figure) bring (law and) order or coercion into an illusory space regarded as "messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 8, see Tabs. 3 and 4). The third question then is: Who is the walker/escaper in the city and what does he or she want, i.e. what is his or her program of action – illusion (subversion, escape) or compensation (law and order, revenge)?

There are thus scenarios, especially of the late 19th and early 20th century, that imagine a perfectly realized utopian city as a well-ordered, just, and healthy place to live in, often by comparing it to a gloomy "messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" urban past that has been successfully overcome and thus compensated for in the present. It is generally regarded as positive both from the narrator's and the individual characters' perspective. There may certainly be doubts but they are eventually always resolved. This is the scenario to be found in the classical utopian text from

Tab. 3: Walkers of Subversion in the Compensatory City or High-Rise Space

Movie/Novel	Subversive Walker	Compensatory space and agents
<i>Safety Last!</i> (1927)	Harold, Bill	the city, the skyscraper, police
<i>Metropolis</i> (1927)	Freder	Metropolis
<i>Liberty</i> (1929)	Laurel and Hardy	the skyscraper, police
<i>Just Imagine</i> (1930)	Single 0	New York of 1980
<i>City Lights</i> (1931)	Chaplin as tramp	New York and its people
<i>M</i> (1931)	Hans Beckert	Berlin, police, watchmen, beggars
<i>Modern Times</i> (1936)	Chaplin as worker	factory, machinery, police
<i>The Big Clock</i> (1948)	George Stroud	modernist skyscraper, security guards
<i>1984</i> (1949/1984)	Winston Smith	London, Big Brother
<i>Alphaville</i> (1965)	Lemmy Caution	Alphaville, Alpha 60 computer
<i>Playtime</i> (1967)	Monsieur Hulot	modernist Paris
<i>THX 1138</i> (1971)	THX 1138	underground city, OMM 0910
<i>Tron</i> (1982)	Kevin Flynn	cyberspace, MCP
<i>Brazil</i> (1985)	Sam Lowry	high-rise city, bureaucratic regime
<i>Fight Club</i> (1996/1999)	Tyler Durden	capitalist system, western culture
<i>Cosmopolis</i> (2003/12)	B. Levin, E. Packer	cybercapitalist space, Manhattan

Tab. 4: Walker of Order in the Illusory Urban or High-Rise Space

Movie/Novel	Vigilante of Order	Illusory space and agents
<i>Shaft</i> (1971)	John Shaft	1970s New York, criminals
<i>The Omega Man</i> (1971)	Robert Neville	post-apocalyptic L.A., "The Family"
<i>Death Wish</i> (1974)	Paul Kersey	1970s New York, criminals
<i>Taxi Driver</i> (1976)	Travis Bickle	1970s New York, pimps, criminals
<i>Escape from NY</i> (1981)	Snake Plissken, police	Manhattan superprison, inmates
<i>Fort Apache, The Bronx</i> (1981)	policemen	1970s Bronx, criminals
<i>Class of 1984</i> (1982)	Andrew Norris	inner city school, criminal students
<i>RoboCop</i> (1987)	RoboCop, police	postindustrial Detroit, criminals
<i>Die Hard</i> (1988)	John McClane	smart skyscraper, terrorists
<i>American Psycho</i> (1991)	Patrick Bateman	homeless, racial minorities, women
<i>One Eight Seven</i> (1997)	Trevor Garfield	inner city school, criminal students

Plato's *Republic* (around 380 BC) via More's *Utopia* (1517) down to Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1623) and Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627),⁴⁸ which was also kept alive in a long list of late-19th century utopian texts – Edward Bellamy's 1888 novel *Looking Backward 2000–1887* probably being the most prominent and influential among them – marked by a boundless optimism in human and social progress. Some early science fiction films, such as the British epos *Things to Come* (1936) also belong here. The influence of an optimistic-progressivist H. G. Wells who delivered both the literary template and the screenplay is clearly felt in this work. But this scenario of a positive compensation utopia also underlines the modernist architectural and urbanistic imaginary of the 1920s and 30s. Especially Le Corbusier and the postwar urbanist mainstream informed by his ideals were convinced that their rational buildings and cities were 'radiant' blessings to humankind that could compensate for the gloomy, unhealthy, and unjust city of the past (see Tod/Wheeler 138–142).⁴⁹

Much longer, however, seems to be the list of fictional works that imagine the urban compensation space of a highly rationalized, ordered, and coercive city (or an entire society) as precisely that gloomy, inimical, and unjust milieu. From Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) to Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996), initially naïve denizens of these spaces usually come to question and then rebel against them, thereby turning into subversive walkers in the city desiring to escape or overthrow and reverse them (or those who control them: supercomputers, totalitarian bureaucracies, capitalists) back into (more) illusory states. A special case is certainly the long list of satiric comedy movies by and/or featuring the likes of Harold Lloyd, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, and Jacques Tati. Here, the more or less naïve but ever tricky and creative walker in the city becomes a subversive figure simply by passing through or climbing up and down the compensatory space and thus ridiculing its order and functionality, ultimately revealing it as a 'nonsensical' illusion (see Schleier, *Skyscraper Cinema* 1–58).

Then, there is a number of fictional scenarios that present illusion heterotopias, unordered spaces subverting the values and rules of its surrounding space in a

48 Strikingly, many of these utopian cities were not only highly rational in design but also modeled panoptically with a (watch)tower in their very centers (see Tod/Wheeler 29–55 and Manuel/Manuel 117–149, 205–412).

49 Wilson attests to the essentially urban character of both architectural and literary visions of such positive compensation utopia-heterotopias when she argues: "The classic utopian work is a description of an ideal city and society, an entity in which the town plan and the architecture – the totality of the organised, planned space – embody the political and social ideals of the society which has created this city. It is the embodiment in stone of a political order: the 'solid geometry' of a perfect way of life" (Wilson 19).

positive way, as a place cherished by the characters inhabiting it; these outcasts are willing and able to defend their illusory refuge against ordering invasions from the outside (state, police, capitalism, rivals). A typical example may be the wave of gang movies initiated by *The Warriors* (1979) that invited identification with a group of young (petty criminal) drifters – paradigmatic walkers in the city – that struggle to defend their heterotopic territory (or even just the ‘social space’ of their gang) within a vast gloomy urban wasteland, itself an illusion heterotopia, against both ordering attempts by police forces and attacks from rival gangs (see Sanders 385–386).

With another strand of scenarios, exactly that selfsame illusion heterotopia of a dark, crime-ridden postindustrial urban wasteland (the reality of many American decaying inner cities from the 1960/70s onwards) was depicted in a generally negative way. These narratives often center on a single heroic protagonist that is either simply appalled by or even becomes a victim of the crime, violence, and seeming amorality breeding in these illusory (and often high-rise) urban spaces. As a consequence, these lone walkers and climbers in the crime-ridden city struggle to reinstall order in these spaces (if they are cops, detectives, or teachers) or to take revenge on certain or random people of that illusory milieu (if they became victims before or simply imagine themselves to be victims), thus turning into classical vigilantes. From *Shaft* (1971) to *RoboCop* (1987) and *Die Hard* (1988), from *Death Wish* (1974) via *Taxi Driver* (1976) to the psychopath vigilante of *American Psycho* (1991/2000) – the 1970s and 80s produced a long list of these vigilante scenarios featuring single men in a sometimes manic struggle against the real or just imagined ills of gloomy and lawless urban milieus (see Sanders 366–372, Page 143–170, Corkin 74–82, 134–56).⁵⁰ In *Taxi Driver*, for example, isolated cabbie Travis Bickle perceives

50 Although reflecting actual urban decay and high crime rates during the period, a vast number of movies set in New York from the late 1960s to the early 1990s depicted the high-rise metropolis as a sometimes exaggeratedly gloomy, crime-ridden “Horror City,” thus firmly establishing it as the epitome of a negative illusion heterotopia (cut off from the rest of a safe America), into which John Carpenter’s *Escape from New York* (1981) would literally turn Manhattan by transforming it into a giant walled-off penitentiary (Kael 389, see also Sanders 369–372). The haunting portrait of an urban illusion space, a literal upside-down city that seems to have “ceded control to those [...] who are outside of the law, and [where] therefore anything might happen” as imagined in these movies not only resonated much with still-widespread fears about life in cities but also inspired city officials to new ‘zero tolerance’ urban policies from the 1990s onwards, largely based on Kelling and Wilson’s infamous Broken Windows Theory (Kelling 21).

51 A special subgenre of such vigilante scenarios may be found in the ‘teacher vigilante film’ that typically features an engaged teacher trying to reinstall order and discipline

Manhattan as a gigantic heterotopia of illusion (crime, prostitution, adultery, homosexuality) that literally intrudes into his taxi every night (“I have to clean the cum off the back seat. Some nights, I clean off the blood”). Gradually projecting his own dissatisfaction into “all this scum o[n] the streets” he longs for a “great rain” and someone to “clean up this whole mess” until he himself evolves into a heavily armed vigilante. Yet while in his taxi he only gets a glimpse of urban vice, the real ‘crime scene’, so the movie suggests, seems to have resorted to vertical seclusion: Not only does a cuckold direct Travis’ gaze to an apartment window high up where his wife is just about to commit adultery, also his final revenge mission against the pimp and suitor of a teenage prostitute leads the cabbie up a grimy tenement building.

in schools, those nominally compensatory spaces turned into dangerous illusory gangland abound with graffiti, gang violence, drug dealing and abuse, and prostitution (as extensions of the larger chaotic urban space). This basic motive has been reactualized in several movies over the course of many decades with the early *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) via *Class of 1984* (1982) down to *One Eight Seven* (1997).

2. The Networks and Frontiers of the Skyscraper in Science Fiction and Modernist Literature of the 1900s to 1920s

Abstract: The second chapter applies the theoretical findings of the first chapter. Firstly, it takes a close look at a range of early 20th-century science fiction short stories that prominently feature skyscrapers, such as Gardner Hunter's "A Common-Sense Heroine" (1915), Murray Leinster's "The Runaway Skyscraper" (1919), W. E. B. Du Bois' "The Comet" (1920) and an excerpt from George Allan England's epic *Darkness and Dawn* (1914). Afterwards, a much more detailed analysis of John Dos Passos' modernist city novel *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) is provided. This panoramic work of fiction allows one to closely retrace how Manhattan's urban actor-network is crucially reassembled by the emergence and skyward-growth of high-rise architecture both on a representational and relational level. A number of this novel's more important characters are singled out and examined according to their changing positions and personal fates between the poles of disciplinary and subversive spatio-relational regimes at work within the modern high-rise city, thus elucidating how they associate with spatial and technological but also other human actors in order to assume a position of agency on their own. Special attention will also be paid to the novel's formal characteristics, thus elucidating how a relational approach to prose works can help to provide new interpretative impulses regarding their specific language and narrative structure.

Keywords: Science Fiction, Short Story, Post-Apocalypse, Literary Modernism, Network Narrative, City Novel, *Manhattan Transfer*

Manifesting itself in the constant demolition of old and the erection of new and ever higher buildings, the rapid transformation of urban space in American downtown areas seems to have inspired as many utopian visions of a soaring high-rise metropolis as it gave rise to a whole range of apocalyptic tales that imagined a complete devastation of Manhattan by way of airstrikes or natural catastrophes during the early decades of the 20th century. And just as the trope of an endlessly urbanized high-rise dystopia or utopia, the (post-)apocalyptic scenario of urban disaster and survival became one of the most successful and longstanding motives not only but especially of 20th-century American fiction, both literary and filmic. Apart from recurring filmic destructions of New York (by, most prominently, tidal waves, nuclear wars, and giant monsters) from the 1930s onwards, hugely successful

movies like *Independence Day* (1996), *Deep Impact* (1998), *Godzilla* (1998), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *Cloverfield* (2008), and *2012* (2009) – to name but the most prominent among them – have even carried the symbolically highly charged trope of the toppling towers of Manhattan to new heights around the millennium and well into the 21st century (see Sanders 387–392, Page 103–142, 171–198). As Yablon argues, real estate speculation, constant demolitions, and rapid skyward growth were so much part of the reality of late 19th- and early 20th-century American downtown districts that it seemed as easy for contemporary writers and illustrators to conjure up a monumental high-rise megalopolis as it seemed to imagine its destruction by human, natural, or supernatural forces (see Yablon, “The Metropolitan Life” 313–19, Page 25–60). As icons and feats of modern technology, skyscrapers were thus able to inspire utopian dreams just as much as deeply dystopian and apocalyptic nightmares, the latter often directly referencing the biblical Babel trope of divine punishment for human hubris as manifested in the endeavor of erecting a sky-scraping tower. Whether positively or negatively, skyscrapers seemed to enthral America’s popular imagination during the early decades of the 20th century.

2.1 Clerks into Cowboys, New Girls into ‘True Women’ – the Skyscraper as a Frontier Space in the Early American Science Fiction Short Story 1898–1920

No wonder then that the earliest literary engagements with the rapidly skyward-growing city and its soaring towers are undertaken neither in the traditional realm of realist or naturalist fiction, nor in the more experimental works of modernist fiction but rather in the then-emerging field of science fiction and fantastic genre fiction. Adrienne Brown stresses:

[G]enre fiction served as the primary space for narrative experiments with the skyscraper. Paving the way for later avant-garde experiments in skyscraper form, weird fiction in the 1900s and 1910s marked the skyscraper as a peculiar structure lending itself to fantastic interpretation. (A. Brown, “Between the Mythic and the Monstrous” 167)

And it is in these genre fiction stories, often published in a great variety of contemporary pulp magazines and thus directed at a broad urban readership, that the skyscraper not only appeared as a frontier in the sky and therefore a heterotopic milieu of either compensation or illusion but that it literally merged with its mythical predecessor on the ground, namely the frontier wilderness of the American West, by way of fantastic time travels, large-scale disasters,

or post-apocalyptic set-ups.⁵² Brown highlights that very fusion of natural and urban frontier when she argues that

the skyscraper emerges [...] as a peculiar engine of urban exile, taking its users out of the social spaces of the city and into a liminal zone beyond its sanctioned borders. The weirdness of the skyscraper derives less from its newness and more from the manner in which it mimicked the older spatial characteristics of the frontier. [...] During this transitional moment when the idea of the feudal frontier was residual and the metropolitan city of capital was emerging, both the frontier and the cosmopolitan center could be rendered as fantastic spaces harboring unrestricted spatial and social behaviors. (174)

Within or through disaster, the skyscraper or rather the entire high-rise metropolis – already modern frontier spaces of sorts – transform (back) into a natural wilderness familiar from the just vanished American Western frontier in a great many of these early science fiction novels and short stories. Stranded in this very wilderness, the denizen of the (vertical) city has to face all the perils of the natural frontier – ‘savage’ people, wild animals as well as the relentless forces of nature – and manage to survive despite and among them. And it is on this very natural frontier miraculously or violently fusing with or transposed to the urban frontier in the sky that an already well-familiar space of heterotopic opportunity opens up, a space that seems to invite both illusory transgressions and compensatory over-performances in much the same way as the old West did for its early pioneer settlers. In this sense, certain coercive regimes as well as contemporary discourses concerning race, class, and gender made durable in the skyscraper as well as the modern city at large, may suddenly be subverted or even reversed, while others may simultaneously be intensified. Yet once more, it needs to be stressed that these heterotopic spaces do not emerge by themselves but are rather enacted by individual actors – walkers and climbers on the vertical frontier that constantly associate with,

52 During the late 19th and well into the 20th century, the U.S. boasted a rich magazine culture that typically featured such genre literature either in the form of short stories or serialized long-prose works, often before they were published as cased books. Yablon points out that apart from “the more established middlebrow magazines such as *Collier’s*, *Harper’s*, *Scribner’s*, and *Cosmopolitan*” especially Frank Munsey’s catalogue of monthly ten-cent pulp magazines – *Munsey Magazine*, *Argosy*, *Cavalier and Scrapbook*, and *All-Story Magazine* being the most popular among them – proved significant in popularizing a range of new literary genres with their “192-page format [...] enabl[ing] them to comprise a range of popular subgenres, from pseudoscientific narratives of disaster, invasion, and evolution to low-tech narratives of crime investigation and colonial adventure” (see Yablon, “The Metropolitan Life” 319–320).

reassemble, and translate a whole range of human and nonhuman actors into more or less stable networks.

Arguably the first scenario centering on the wrecking of Manhattan and its budding high-rise topography was explored in Park Benjamin's 1881 story "The End of New York" which imagined enemy balloons dropping bombs over the city. Already widely-read during the last two decades of the 19th century, such premonitory invasion literature earned even greater popularity with the publication of British science fiction pioneer H. G. Wells' apocalyptic epos *The War of the Worlds* in 1898. Soon after its release, several American newspapers plagiarized and then serialized Wells' novel while at the same time relocating its action from its original setting London to New York and Boston (see M. Davis 290–291). As if catering to the American public's hunger for such tales of urban apocalypse, Wells featured the destruction of Manhattan's high-rise panorama in his 1908 novel *The War in the Air*, this time as a result of airstrikes from an aggressive Imperial German zeppelin armada. And while Garrett P. Serviss had New York drowned by a giant tidal wave in *The Second Deluge* (1912), fellow American writer John Ulrich Giesy's apocalyptic-heroic war epic *All for His Country* (1915) has a Japanese air and naval force raze Manhattan to the ground with the iconic Metropolitan Tower – featured in so many of these early stories and novels – being "toppled like a great tree" (Giesy 197, see also M. Davis 291–96, Yablon, "The Metropolitan Life" 320–321, Page 23–59).

Whereas Wells and Giesy focused on the immediate destruction of Manhattan by and the fight against vicious foreign invaders, American science fiction writer George Allen England delivered one of the first and most detailed accounts of a completely ruined post-apocalyptic Manhattan in his *Darkness and Dawn* novel series (1911–14). In the aftermath of a massive cataclysm, a young consultant engineer and his stenographer awake from a century-long coma only to find the familiar high-rise scenery of Manhattan transformed into a dangerous wilderness of wrecked towers, thick forests, and wild animals. Confronted with this total devastation that, however sublime, yet utterly "messy, [de]constructed, and jumbled" heterotopia of illusion having reversed every familiar bit of civilization into its radical opposite, these two apparently lone survivors are nevertheless filled with a "fierce desire to rehabilitate all this wreckage, to set it right, to start the wheels of the world-machinery running once more" and thus to compensate for all the mess they presently find themselves thrown into (England 60).

Apart from the immensely popular genre of (post-)apocalyptic fiction typically featuring the destruction and later exploration of a wrecked, drowned, or overgrown Manhattan, a range of other early literary engagements with the skyscraper as well as the high-rise city at large from the field of genre

fiction should be of interest here. In two short stories published in the popular Boston magazine *The Youth's Companion*, it is not by way of war or any natural or supernatural force that the skyscraper, or to be precise here its top, may suddenly transform into a dangerous frontier space. While in the 1906 story "A Modern Cliff-Dweller's Experience" by an unknown author, one learns of a lawyer retreating to and then getting stuck on the rooftop of his workplace, a 19-storied Manhattan skyscraper, in Gardner Hunter's 1915 story "A Common-Sense Heroine", Janet, a teenage girl and her child brother Ted go through much the same experience on top of a Chicago skyscraper of 18 stories. In both cases, it appears to be the pure attraction, in fact the adventure of overlooking the entire city, that initially lures the protagonists to the skyscraper's lofty roof. Reveling in the beauty of the at once thrilling and sublime sight offered by these removed vertical frontier spaces and thus captured within that adventurous realm of marvel high above the city, however, they appear completely oblivious to time and space, therefore realizing too late that they have been locked out on the towers' roof. Starting "to feel awfully alone" on top of the skyscraper, the locked-out lawyer of the 1906 story quickly comes to realize the paradoxical situation he is in, namely that he "was as much isolated in the great city full of people as if [he] had been on the top of a mountain in Alaska" (Anonymous 1906, 3). Set out against the elements within this suddenly dangerous frontier space, he is forced to "howl like a starving wolf on a Montana desert" in order to make people on the streets below or in neighboring buildings to take notice of his present misery (3). And also in Hunter's story, Janet becomes aware of the danger she and her brother are in when she ponders the "the isolation and remoteness of the place" (Hunter 30). The very sublime experience and comfort offered by the compensatory modern heterotopia of the skyscraper has thus momentarily shifted into its opposite, has indeed been revealed as illusory. Instead, the outcasts appear eerily disconnected from their cozy skyscraper's larger networks and a dangerous, potentially even deadly frontier space has opened up around them. This very space, both stories continue to stress, is not at all unlike the untamed wilderness of Alaska or Montana, thereby confirming Brown's seemingly paradoxical conclusion that "[t]he center of the city proves to be just as remote from civilization as the outskirts of the frontier" (A. Brown, "Between" 173). And in both stories, the protagonists seem well aware of the frontier nature of their perilous situations. Whereas the lawyer compares his remote exile on the tower's top to the Alaskan and Montana wilderness, Janet may cheer up her brother by telling him that they are "going to be as snug as any campers in any woods or on any prairie ever were" (Hunter 30).

Yet they eventually accept their new role as frontier people which ultimately demands from them to become truly creative walkers and climbers on the vertical frontier: Just like the early settlers and pioneers on the natural frontier, they roam the rooftops in search of not only water and food but also of plywood and other materials, in order to build shelters and light fires. Ultimately unsuccessful in gathering these things necessary for surviving the cold night atop the vertical frontier, they resort to finding a way to escape the roof. Truly embracing their new frontier identity, both the lawyer and Janet prove as skilled creative misusers: While the lawyer cuts his coat, binds its strips together, and smashes in a window on the floor below with a piece of iron bound to its end, thus alerting the night watchman, Janet, the story's eponymous "common-sense heroine", ingeniously manages to break the elevator wires that appear to be accessible on the rooftop, thereby attracting the attention of people inside the building. In both cases, the protagonists can only escape the illusory frontier space of the skyscraper by first opening (the building's) technological or object black boxes; only thus are they able to creatively reassemble their swarm of actors into a new actant network that may eventually reconnect them to the building's larger actor-network and thus enable them to communicate with its other human actors.

In both of these stories of vertical isolation a dangerous frontier wilderness suddenly and shockingly opens up on top of the skyscraper and thus in the very midst of civilized metropolitan life. By literally merging the natural and the urban frontier, these narratives conjure up a heterotopic realm that confusingly subverts any clear-cut distinction between city and nature, civilization and wilderness. And it is here, within this strange metropolitan wilderness that seemingly stable urban identities are also bound to transform: Not only the lawyer as a typical member of the urban white-collar office universe, yet also the two typically urban youth siblings have to reinvent themselves as self-reliant, 'manly' frontier people willing and able to survive and escape perilous situations by way of both mechanical craft and creative ingenuity, thereby operating outside the common normative codes of profession (the lawyer), gender (Janet), and age (Ted). In light of these interpretations, it only seems straightforward that Hunter had his youngest character carry the name of Ted, thus alluding to U.S. President Theodore 'Teddy' Roosevelt. As a wealthy young urbanite, Roosevelt sought to acquire "the stern, manly qualities" that he deemed "invaluable to a nation" and thus to reinvent himself as a self-reliant cowboy during his time as a rancher and deputy sheriff in the Dakotas of the mid-1880s (Roosevelt, *Ranch Life* 56).

Yet while these two stories from *The Youth's Companion* still remained within a realistic framework, a range of other genre narratives more invested in scientific speculation and apocalyptic imaginaries were able to conceive the skyscraper as

a still more fantastically heterotopic frontier space capable of still more radical subversions with regard to contemporary dichotomies of race, class, and gender.

One prominent example from this sample of fantastic genre fiction may be Murray Leinster's short story "The Runaway Skyscraper", first published in Munsey's *Argosy* magazine in 1919. The basic disruptive event of Leinster's story is marked by miraculous time-travel: Caused by a geological shift below its foundation, Manhattan's Metropolitan Life Tower together with its entire white-collar workforce is catapulted thousands of years back in time to a pre-Columbian Manhattan Island covered with thick forests and populated by Native Americans.⁵³ After digesting his first shock to this most strange incident, the story's almost too perfect protagonist, young engineer Arthur Chamberlain turns into the exiled business community's competent scientific 'mansplainer'. Almost as rapidly as the tower passes the centuries, Arthur "develop[s] the stalwart and rugged qualities of the frontiersman", thus transforming from an initially inhibited office clerk into a skilled and truly 'manly' leader on the dangerous Manhattan frontier (Turner 15). In order to calm down the panicking crowd of clerks and stenographers, he constantly confirms his faith in the reversibility of their fate, indeed the total compensation for their illusory exile on the frontier, thus revealing his seemingly indomitable modernist optimism of being in charge of nature and its forces: "I'm an engineer," he finishes, "What nature can do, we can imitate. Nature let us into this hole. We'll climb out" (Leinster 4).

Arthur, however, is among the few people willing to become active in this situation. By contrast, the vast majority of the tower's workforce appears either too shocked or too apathetic in view of the hopelessness of their fate, stranded in "a barbarous world" so different from the comfortable urban frontier of the modern office skyscraper (8). Echoing Roosevelt's civilizational critique, Leinster's narrator passes a harsh judgment on them:

Soft in body as these people were, city-bred and unaccustomed to face other than the most conventionalized emergencies of life, they were terrified. Hardly one of them had even gone without a meal in all his life. To have the prospect of having to earn their food, not by the manipulation of figures in a book, or by expert juggling of profits and prices, but by literal wresting of that food from its source in the earth or stream was a really terrifying thing for them. (8)⁵⁴

53 Considering its truly heterochronic simulation of the Venetian Renaissance campaign, the Metropolitan Tower just like many other prominent skyscrapers of the period appear to be almost predestined for acting as vehicles of time travel.

54 In his 1897 review of Brooks Adams' essay *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1895), Theodore Roosevelt had already voiced his concern with regard to "a certain softness of fibre in civilized nations, which, if it were to prove progressive, might mean

In alliance with bank director Van Deventer, another frontiersmen in urban disguise “longing for a chance to see some real excitement for thirty years”, Arthur and “the others of the cooler heads” thus have a hard time inscribing their survival program of hunting and gathering into the “soft-bodied and city-bred” mass (7, 9, 10). While the tower’s population finally accepts their new roles as toiling frontier people, Arthur is the one who may come up with a scientific explanation for their mysterious time travel and may ultimately devise a plan to return back into their period. Thinking things through on long evening strolls around the tower, he is suddenly struck by a sublime view of the forlorn edifice:

Like a fairy tower of jewels the building rose. Alone among a wilderness of trees and streams it towered in a strange beauty: moonlit to silver, lighted from within to a mass of brilliant gems, it stood serenely still. Arthur, carrying his futile lantern about its base, felt his own insignificance as never before. He wondered what the Indians must think. He knew there must be hundreds of eyes fixed upon the strange sight—fixed in awe-stricken terror or superstitious reverence upon this unearthly visitor to their hunting grounds. A tiny figure, dwarfed by the building whose base he skirted, Arthur moved slowly about the vast pile. (10)

Even though he and the other stranded urbanites are beginning to cultivate and thus associate with the natural actor-network of the frontier, they still remain foreigners torn out of their modern metropolitan life and network in much the same way that the “runaway skyscraper” is. Yet it is here, within their exile on the frontier, that they – much like the tower – may appear much more sublime than in the great city and may thus in a certain sense also compensate for the illusory-messy life in the modern metropolis, be it their alienation, “soft-bodiedness”, or general decadence. This very compensation, however, is crucially fuelled by realizing their racial homogeneity and superiority as a white community distinct from their Native American neighbors on the Manhattan frontier. While it might momentarily seem as if Arthur (“He wondered what the Indians must think”) seems to identify with the Native American population, he henceforth makes sure to enroll his fellow frontier people in a strict program of racial homogeneity by foreclosing any speculative ‘becoming-Indian’, let alone any fraternization or even hybridization between the races.⁵⁵ Any heterotopic blurring of the

the development of a cultured and refined people quite unable to hold its own in those conflicts through which alone any great race can ultimately march to victory” (Roosevelt, “The Law of Civilization and Decay” 579).

55 Indeed, the only accepted contact between the white outcasts from modernity and the Native Americans is based on commerce. Convinced of their civilizational superiority, Arthur and his fellows, however, do not shy away from fleecing and exploiting the racial other. They are thus able to trade fairly worthless modern objects for valuable food

line between the races and thus also between civilization and 'savagery', such as Turner has suggested with regard to the early American frontier, has to be averted by all means in order to secure the compensatory effect of their heterotopic journey "to a pure frontier of white tribal unity and clear racial alliances" (A. Brown, "Between" 185, Turner 4).

Yet while racial differences are hence crucially intensified with regard to the Native American population, hierarchies of age, class, profession, or economic success seem to become subverted within the "white tribal unity" of the skyscraper population. Arthur, a financially struggling young engineer in modern day Manhattan ("I am afraid I shall never make a successful man" (Leinster 1)), may thus claim a leadership position within the exceptional situation of frontier exile due to his apparently innate optimism and manly resolution. After all, it appears that all distinctions fostered among the denizens of the modern city by the urban capitalist regime are momentarily suspended in the proto-socialist classless survival unit of frontier people.

In contrast, any shifts within gender politics on the frontier seem more difficult to determine in Leinster's story. At times, women appear empowered by their practical knowledge necessary for survival in wilderness, such as Arthur's stenographer and secret love interest Estelle, who – having grown up in the countryside – is able to provide valuable information on the frontier's flora and fauna and may thus claim some authority among the male-dominated leadership group, while other women even join the men fishing on rafts in Hudson River (12). At other times, however, Estelle and the other women of the group are depicted as helpless damsels in distress and hence along stereotypically lines (even though they are sometimes joined by "soft-bodied" effeminate men), such as when they scream out hysterically or "indulge[...] in tears of bewilderment, fright and relief in a peculiar combination defying analysis" in view of the frontier's many dangers (4). The frontier's potential of gender subversion thus clearly flares up but is quickly subdued for the sake of retaining compensatory discipline among men and women: While the men in command seem especially concerned with upholding the office skyscraper's rigid segregation of genders (as discussed above) by way of "commandeering offices for sleeping quarters for the women" and arranging an entire "single story for the women in the building to occupy" (7, 10), there generally appears to prevail an almost clear-cut labor distribution (except for

and goods, such as when Arthur receives "eight canoe-loads of corn and vegetables in exchange for a broken-down typewriter" (Leinster 12).

the fishing) of dangerous and physical tasks to men and stationary, domestic tasks to women.

The frontier adventure's generally normalizing effect of intensifying gendered codes of behavior is, however, nowhere more clearly manifested than in Arthur and Estelle and their mutual relationship. The story's beginning portrays them both as alienated urbanites unable to express or even experience 'true' emotions of romance within the 'artificial' realm of business and city life. Whereas Arthur "often longed to tell her how pretty she really was, but her abstracted air held him at arms' length", Estelle for her part "had suddenly decided that she was going to be an old maid" and that she "could not fall in love [although] she wanted to", thus "struggling to reconcile herself to a life without romance" (1). Arthur appears as a nervous and inhibited and thus unsatisfied young man, while Estelle, a country-native, appears as the stereotype of the unhappy (because?) working girl in the city. Only when transplanted to the pre-Columbian frontier do both characters seem able to leave their urban labor-bound identities behind and instead reconcile with their allegedly subdued gendered identities as resolute 'manly' leader and as 'true' woman able to love and care for others. As a consequence of their respective rediscovery of their gendered selves, Arthur and Estelle come to cherish and eventually love each other, a privilege they were refused in the alienated everyday of their urban existence. It comes as no surprise that Arthur and Estelle, reinvigorated and reassured in their heteronormative gender identities through their adventurous time in the wilderness, end up as a married couple once returned 'back in time' at the story's end.

An earlier, yet radicalized version of this frontier survival scenario may be found in the already mentioned post-apocalyptic *Darkness and Dawn* trilogy by George Allan England, serialized in Munsey's *Cavalier and Scrap Book* as well as the *New York Evening Mail* in 1911/12 and published as a book in 1914. Just as in Leinster's story, England's epic centers on a young engineer (Allan Stern) and his stenographer (Beatrice) working atop the Metropolitan Life Tower (then the world's highest building), who suddenly find themselves transposed to the dangerous wilderness of a post-apocalyptic Manhattan. Yet unlike Arthur and Estelle in "The Runaway Skyscraper" who are thrown back into a pre-Columbian past, Allan and Beatrice travel far into the future after awakening out of a century-long coma caused by a mysterious airborne disaster that has killed – so it seems at least – every human being on earth except for the two of them. In the meantime, Manhattan has transformed into an alien and perilous wasteland of ruined towers, thick forests, and wild animals. As they carefully begin to explore their new environment by walking and climbing through the ruined and foliage-covered vertical frontier, they quickly come to realize that they are

stranded within a vast “mausoleum of civilization”, a gigantic heterotopia of illusion in which every familiar order and comfort has crumbled to pieces (England 19, see also Page 54–59). Yet in spite or maybe even because of all the devastation surrounding them as well as the terrifying thought of being the lone human survivors on a de-civilized planet, these two walkers of compensation within the ultimate illusion heterotopia are all the more animated with a “fierce desire to rehabilitate all this wreckage, to set it right, to start the wheels of the world-machinery running once more” (England 60). It is thus that they – or rather Allan alone – set out to gather such “items, preserving an imperishable remainder of use value, [which] allow [them] to forge an economy of creative reuse” as well as to reassemble with these objects a modest network of civilization and thus a compensatory sanctuary within the wreck of the Metropolitan Tower (Yablon, “The Metropolitan Life” 325).

As already suggested and also seen in the case of Leinster’s story, this compensatory quest for survival and reconstitution goes hand in hand with an intensification of normative gendered identities and labor division: While Allan roams the dangerous ruins and forests of Manhattan in search of food and tools, Beatrice more and more often stays within the sheltering confines of the skyscraper, “devoting herself to the indoor chores that defined domestic womanhood: garment making, cooking, and cleaning” (325). As soon as she is thrown into the frontier wilderness, Beatrice – in much the same way as Estelle in “The Runaway Skyscraper” – seems to rediscover behind or rather beyond her former identity as a relatively independent working girl “the true woman she was” and thus a seemingly essential gender program encouraging her both to make “a real home out of the barren desolation of the fifth floor offices” as well as to desire Allan’s protection for, as England’s narrator stresses, “never since the world began had woman needed man” more than on this perilous post-apocalyptic frontier (England 66, 17).

And just as in Leinster’s 1919 story – only in a much more radical way – the compensatory intensification of gender difference on the frontier is coupled and conflated with a racial discourse as soon as Allan and Beatrice become aware of the fact that they are not the only human survivors roaming Manhattan. In fact, their refuge in the Metropolitan Tower is soon besieged by “the ‘Horde’ – that monstrous offspring of centuries of miscegenation and degeneration among the nonwhite and ape populations that had also survived the catastrophe” and now seem to rule the earth (Yablon, “The Metropolitan Life” 327). Whereas their lone exile on the frontier initially forced them to abandon their former urban lives along with their roles as employer and employee for the sake of both rebuilding civilization and securing the maintenance of humanity (thus forcing

them into the status of a couple), Allan and Beatrice's mission is now clearly racialized: Apparently being the only 'pure' representatives of the white race, they now carry the burden of preserving a 'pure' and 'civilized' white Anglo-Saxon race while at the same time "setting themselves up to do battle with the new brutal primitive now over running the Earth" (A. Brown, "Between" 183).⁵⁶ Only by way of embracing their new gendered selves and the according labor division together with their status as a white racial avant-garde different from and superior to the hybrid masses of the "Horde" is the heroic couple, so at least England's narrative suggests, able to secure both their lives and the survival and 'purity' of their race.

Saving them both from the fatal cataclysm and the hordes of savages roaming Manhattan, the Metropolitan Life Tower with its "cloistering height" emerges as "a protective fortress against harmful bodies, both viral and human" within the illusory-messy reality of the post-apocalyptic frontier (182). Stories like England's and Leinster's hence designate the vertical urban frontier of the skyscraper as a heterotopic site of intensified gender and race divisions and thus as a sanctuary safely removed from the dangerous wilderness below that may easily be read to stand in for the illusory space of the early 20th-century American metropolis as an arena of increased class divisions, gender emancipation, racial diversity, and cultural hybridization – much despised by many right- and left-wing intellectuals of the time. Given the fact that skyscrapers and their vast office spaces were "designed to be [white] middle-class zones: clean, light, healthful, and for the most part racially, ethnically, and ideologically homogeneous" (Kwolek-Folland 98), Brown may indeed conclude that

[i]n drawing upon the frontier to narrate the skyscraper, England and Leinster also import an imaginary solidified white cultural front, unfragmented by class unrest and struggles for gender equality. This homogenized white cultural front becomes gathered under the auspices of the skyscraper in these stories, updating frontier modes of legible racial difference for this modern symbol of white hegemony. (A. Brown, "Between" 184 and also *Black Skyscraper* 122–157)

Yet, the post-apocalyptic vertical frontier also allowed for a limited number of alternative heterotopic scenarios different from those of radical racial division

56 No matter whether in the works of Wells, England, Giesy, Leinster, or many other genre writers, these early science fiction stories strongly reflect then-widespread social Darwinist beliefs in an inequality and permanent struggle among human races, often combined with the socialist ideal of a self-supportive, autonomous, and in these examples also racially homogeneous community (see Bederman 217–240, M. Davis 290–296).

as outlined in Leinster's and England's stories. Obviously inspired by the latter two examples, it was none other than the eminent African-American writer and sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois who took up the popular strand of post-apocalyptic urban frontier fiction in order to tell a very different version of that scenario, one that did not culminate in the creation of a white cultural front and racial warfare but in a however temporary suspension of racial division and inequality.

In the short story "The Comet" appearing in his 1920 prose and essay collection *Darkwater*, the earth is passed by a comet whose toxic nebula kills Manhattan's and, so it seems, the earth's entire population, except for two people – a black man and a white woman – who miraculously survive the cataclysm within the shelter of hermetically sealed-off spaces. While their lives would normally be segregated both along the lines of race and class, the two lone survivors are now bound to each other out of pure necessity. Just as in Leinster's and England's tales, class distinctions are leveled and gendered identities are intensified among the two survivors under the conditions of the post-apocalyptic frontier in Du Bois' story. However and thus radically different from the former two tales, the strict racial division between whites and blacks in early 20th-century America is gradually called into question by the protagonists of Du Bois' story. Standing atop the Metropolitan Life Tower, it is especially Julia, the white woman, who comes to reconsider her conceptions of race and gender in the light of their apparent fate as lone human survivors on the urban frontier:

She watched him. He seemed very human, – very near now. [...] "and how foolish our human distinctions seem – now," [...] [...] A vision of the world had risen before her. Slowly the mighty prophecy of her destiny overwhelmed her. Above the dead past hovered the Angel of Annunciation. She was no mere woman. She was neither high nor low, white nor black, rich nor poor. She was primal woman; mighty mother of all men to come and Bride of Life. She looked upon the man beside her and forgot all else but his manhood – his sorrow and sacrifice. She saw him glorified. He was no longer a thing apart, a creature below, a strange outcast of another clime and blood, but her Brother Humanity incarnate, Son of God and great All-Father of the race to be. (Du Bois 268–269)

The top of the Metropolitan Tower thus emerges as the ultimate heterotopia of illusion, the almost-realized utopia of a suspension of race distinctions, far removed from the racist everyday below or in this case of the immediate past; yet as racial, social, and economic distinctions are blurred and overcome, one distinction is once more firmly reinvigorated, namely that between the sexes and their normative gender codes: Julia is now willing to leave her wealthy and idle, yet independent life that is manifested by her supposedly male familiarity with modern machines (she is a (hobby) photographer and drives cars) behind in

order to rediscover woman- and motherhood as her true destiny and to embrace her role as “primal woman; mighty mother of all men to come” and thus to forget all else but Jim’s glorified manhood as “great All-Father of the race to be” (269) Jim for his part is pushed more and more into a normative male role of leader and protector by the post-apocalyptic set-up. Seizing the wheel of Julia’s car⁵⁷, providing her with food and shelter, Jim too comes to rediscover his original physical manhood as “tall, straight, and stern” as well as – and here again in racialized terms – a “mighty Pharaoh” or “curled Assyrian lord” (270) as part of a similar epiphany as Julia experiences.⁵⁸

Out on the desolate frontier of a seemingly dead Manhattan and world, atop a skyscraper, the ultimate heterotopia of racial equality, even the suspension of all racial division becomes realizable, yet only at the prize of a simultaneous re-activation of already-then reactionary and supposedly ‘natural’ gender ideals, fostered by the arduous life on the post-apocalyptic frontier as well as the prospect of having to maintain the human race. Much to the bewilderment of both the characters and the reader, the seemingly imminent utopia of racial equality is never realized, as the nebula struck only Manhattan and Jim and Julia are quickly reunited with their racially homogenous black and white families who firmly restore the two transgressors into the old social context of clearly drawn race and class boundaries that were momentarily suspended on the frontier (see Yablon, “The Metropolitan Life” 329–330, Page 62–64, A. Brown, *Black Skyscraper* 135–142).

The motive of the frontier breaking back into metropolitan life first tested out in these early science fiction stories has had a rich afterlife throughout 20th-century disaster and post-apocalyptic fictions. Permanently or merely temporarily transformed into dangerous spaces in which to struggle for bare survival, wrecked cities and skyscrapers have provided, above all, the arena for strengthening gender boundaries and especially for modern men to reinvent

57 Initially unfamiliar with driving cars, Jim however quickly comes to stand his man and “seized the wheel” while a formerly independent and ‘automobile’ Julia “forgot to wonder at the quickness with which he had learned to drive her car. It seemed natural” (Du Bois 267).

58 Jim’s shooting of rockets atop the skyscraper in order to attract the attention of other possible survivors has been read metaphorically as circumscription or anticipation of interracial sexual contact between Jim and Julia (see Yablon, “The Metropolitan Life” 329). The roof of the Metropolitan Tower is once more identified as the site of ultimate heterotopic subversion where even the breach of one of 20th-century America’s most-feared taboos – interracial contact – becomes possible (see Zunz 120–121).

themselves as cowboys on the frontier of urban disaster or post-apocalypse. In fact, a wealth of (post-)apocalyptic novels and movies centering on the destruction of Manhattan but also such classical disaster action movies as *The Towering Inferno* (1974) or *Die Hard* (1988) have championed the ideal of cowboy masculinity embodied by brave men in the face of danger, while at the same time formerly self-reliant and strong women are reduced to the roles of damsels in distress to be saved by their fearless cowboy men.

2.2 Following the Actors through the Modern High-Rise City in John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* (1925)

Whereas the skyscraper featured prominently in the works of the science and fantastic fiction genre during the first two decades of the 20th century, established 'high' prose literature of the period, no matter whether committed to a Realist, Naturalist, or to a rather experimental Modernist agenda, seems to have resisted dealing with that new architectural skyward transformation of America's large cities, only mentioning these newly built giants in passing, if at all. Too new and crude and too transient did they seem not only to Henry James but also to many other respectable writers of the day who seem to have deemed these latest architectural innovations not worthy any artistic, let alone literary engagement. It may thus come as no surprise that it was a comparably young and still non-established art of the early 20th century, namely photography, which first sought to turn to these impressive built structures of the great metropolises. From the early years of the new century onwards, eminent pioneers and figures of photography, such as Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Paul Strand, Margaret Bourke-White and later also Berenice Abbott and Andreas Feininger seemed fascinated with the Manhattan skyscraper, its stunning new perspectives, and radical distortion of urban dimensions. With their impressive series of urban photography, these important figures not only helped to establish photography itself as a respectable artistic medium but also turned the skyscraper into a modern and sublime object par excellence as well as the skyline at large into a respected motive of art (see Lindner, *Imagining New York City* 64–74, Schleier, *The Skyscraper in American Art*, 41–85, Scott/Rutkoff 48–55). The photographers were thus quickly joined by representatives of a much older and established visual art in their enthusiasm for the high-rise city. Painters like John Marin, Max Weber, Joseph Stella, Charles Sheeler, and Georgia O'Keefe not only chose the skyscraper and the cityscape transformed by it as their motives but also sought to represent these modern icons (also in order to set themselves apart from the accurate Realism of photography) in ever-innovative and expressive

ways by experimenting with a whole range of new styles adopted from European modernism, from Expressionism via Futurism to Cubism in their works (see Schleier, *The Skyscraper in American Art* 55–110, Scott/Rutkoff 56–90, Bender, *The Unfinished City* 91–148). In her detailed study on the skyscraper in American art, Merrill Schleier explains the motivation behind this “skyscraper mania” among contemporary photographers and painters: “The numerous paintings and photographs of boundless towers rendered from disorienting perspectives were manifestations of the simultaneous amazement and inability to grasp the skyscraper’s monumental proportions and symbolic implications” (Schleier, *The Skyscraper in American Art* 77).

And it was two representatives of both these arts “creatively maneuver[ing] to develop new representational strategies and techniques capable of visualizing urban change in response to the highrise city”, painter Charles Sheeler and photographer Paul Strand, who devoted an early experimental-documentary film to the spectacular spaces and views of Manhattan, the quintessentially modern American high-rise space (Schleier, *The Skyscraper in American Art* 100–102, Dähne 198–209, Lindner, “After-Images” 86). Their 1921 ten-minute movie *Manhatta* juxtaposes its documentary film material with intertitles bearing the powerful free verse poetry of Walt Whitman and become seminal for a whole range of experimental documentary films realized during the 1920s and commonly known as ‘city symphonies.’⁵⁹

Only then, during the 1920s, did texts of high prose literature, too, fully embrace the modern metropolis and its countless technical and architectural marvels. In many ways similar to the contemporaneous city symphony movies, their panoramic view of the urban landscape and their attempt to capture the modern city’s dynamic pulse, especially one 1920s trio of novels nowadays stands out in world literature as prime examples of the modern metropolitan novel, namely James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), John Dos Passos’ *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), and Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929).⁶⁰ Among these, it was of course *Manhattan Transfer* that specifically focused on the skyscraper, given

59 Notable European examples of this 1920s genre are Alberto Cavalcanti’s *Nothing But Time* (1926, Paris) Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927, Berlin) as well as Dziga Vertov’s *Sagaj, Sowjet!* (1926, Moscow) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929, various Soviet cities) (see Dähne 164–278).

60 In his lauding review of *Manhattan Transfer*, writer Sinclair Lewis even argued that Dos Passos’ work constituted “the moving symphony itself” (Lewis, *John Dos Passos*’ 10). For more on Dos Passos’ use of film techniques similar to those of the city symphony movies see Foster 187–190, Dähne 117.

the fact that it was among the defining structural elements of Manhattan's urban space as opposed to the comparably low-rise cityscapes of Joyce's Dublin and Döblin's Berlin.

Not only did high prose literature thus discover the skyscraper late but also literary Modernism's interest in general lagged behind several years when compared to other artistic genres of the day (photography, painting, film), which had much earlier and willingly adopted it as a motive and inspiration for all kinds of modernist formal and stylistic experiments. Yet beginning with Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*, the modern American metropolis and its most prominent icon, the skyscraper, also came to act as inspiration and catalyst for a wealth of literary experiments in terms of language, style, narrative structure, plot, and character development within the modern American (city) novel. In this respect, Brown has aptly observed:

Providing one of the first spaces for casual viewing of the urban masses from its towering apex, the skyscraper eventually became a key narrative model for handling the kind of massive hundred-character narration a writer like John Dos Passos would test in *Manhattan Transfer* and perfect in the *USA* trilogy, or enable the experiments of writers Sinclair Lewis, Wallace Thurman, Janet Flanner and W.E.B. Du Bois in creating de-particularized types rather than characters, [...]. The skyscraper challenged these authors to overhaul novelistic mechanisms of plot, linearity and characterization, transforming the intimate house of fiction into a tower with a broad, multi-perspectival narrative scope, which better reflected the shifting spatial, social and formal dimensions of the nation's newly-steeled cities. (A. Brown, "Between" 167)

A next straightforward step would thus be to take a closer look at Dos Passos' eminent 1925 modern city novel in the following, as it was not only among the first texts of American prose literature to explicitly address the skyscraper as a reality of metropolitan life but also experimented with its symbolism and structure on a formal level. Given the enormous will to innovation and experiment with regard to both its narrative and its formal aspects together with its status as the first and probably best-known modernist American city novel, it should equally come as no revelation that *Manhattan Transfer* has stimulated a large amount of critical commentary ever since its initial publication.

The vast majority of this commentary has understandably come from the field of literary studies proper – often in the context of larger studies on the urban or metropolitan condition in American prose (Gelfant, R.A. Gates, Lehan, Harding); however, these studies mostly lack any analysis of their literary source material through the lens of more or less prominent spatial theories. Due to their prominence in the novel, the skyscraper in particular and the architectural context in general have attracted academic scrutiny in individual articles, such as on

the novel's recurring Tower of Babel motive (Vanderwerken) or in the context of engagements with the novel's explicit or implicit urban and architectural discourse (T. Gibson, Koritz). There has also been a good amount of recent work on *Manhattan Transfer's* network character, either with regard to the novel's narrative network structure (Brevda, Butts, Beal), its inherent textual heterogeneity (Keunen), and the frequent human-technological hybridizations in the case of both its characters and its urban settings (Brevda, Goodson, Geyh, Scanlan). Among these accounts, Marshall may have come closest to an explicit actor-network approach in her study of infrastructures in *Manhattan Transfer*, yet most of these studies, as broad and diverse they may be in themselves, have generally failed to extend their rudimentary network approaches to the novel's entirety, i.e. to its textually diverse, multi-perspectival, and constantly intersecting plot lines just as much as to its formal aspects, such as its specific metaphorical language and 'hybrid' descriptions of people, objects, and urban settings as and by way of each other; rather, they have generally focused on just one of these aspects and not considered their mutual interconnectedness. Apart from that, any in-depth analysis of the novel's complex and diverse spatialities seems to be surprisingly amiss in the wealth of critical commentary devoted to Dos Passos' novel.

This section of my study thus aims at both a fully-fledged (actor-)network analysis of the novel's content and formal aspects and a critical engagement with its spatial power structure with a specific focus on its built high-rise environment, in order to offer a fresh and insightful analysis of its highly complex and multiply-entangled form and content.

Manhattan Transfer delivers a powerful panoramic portrait of New York as a modern metropolis that one may even deem the novel's actual protagonist, by relating more or less short episodes from the lives of a vast number of characters with some of them reappearing again and again and others appearing once or twice only.⁶¹ Because of this mass of characters, their various ethnic, class, and gender identities, professions and ambitions, the novel's metropolitan panorama appears even richer and certainly broader than those of Joyce's *Ulysses* and Döblin's *Alexanderplatz* which focus on more or less one or two main characters.

61 In fact, many critics have followed Blanche F. Gelfant's classification of *Manhattan Transfer* as a synoptic novel which typically presents the "total city immediately as a personality in itself" (Gelfant 11, see also 133–134). William Brevda has thus argued that "although there are human figures in *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos mak[es] the city the central character," while A. C. Goodson even goes as far as stating that "Manhattan is the only character that matters in this virtuoso essay in modern seeing" (Brevda 94, Goodson 92).

Moreover, the fates of most of *Manhattan Transfer's* characters intersect more than once or may even get entangled in complex ways, thus implying an intricate network of actors that does of course also include a vast number of architectures, infrastructures, technologies, objects, and gadgets that only seem to make life in modern Manhattan possible in the first place. One may thus well describe *Manhattan Transfer* as a network narrative, a concept introduced by film scholar David Bordwell in order to denote plot structures featuring a large number of characters whose lives and fates intersect in the course of the narration, thereby associating them into a network of various relations (see Bordwell 189–245, Beal, *Networks of Modernism* 3, 25–32). Narratives like this have also come to be known under the label of ‘six degrees of separation’ according to the idea that each human being is related to everyone else on earth or within any given network via no more than six other people. Applying the six degrees of separation theory to a Manhattan context allows one to imagine that Dos Passos’ characters cross each other’s paths not only because they live in one and the same urban milieu but because they may even inhabit or work in one and the same “swarming city in itself” that a high-rise building certainly constitutes, some of them actually meeting, others living door to door without taking notice of each other. It is thus that an (actor-)network approach as well as a close scrutiny of its spatial and architectural (high-rise) milieus seem to lend itself not only to a critical reassessment of *Manhattan Transfer's* overall narrative network structure but also to its specific modernist network poetics.

In this respect, it should be of interest that the novel’s time frame spans a thirty-year period from roughly 1890 to round about 1920 and thus the very time during which urban space and life in Manhattan were radically transformed by the spread of the skyscraper that may, as I would argue, be read as one of the novel’s leitmotifs both in terms of its recurring presence in the narration and as a spatial actor in its own right.

In fact, the novel abounds in instances of urban change and new high-rise buildings under construction. Not only does the reader come across several single vignettes of real-estate agents trying to sell lots for construction (Dos Passos 25–26) or rent out modest living space to possible tenants (47–48) but countless characters also repeatedly run into or spot new buildings in several phases of their construction (171–172, 177–178, 282). One particularly detailed scene may be exemplary of these instances:

She went to the window and leaned out into the sunlight. Across Park Avenue the flameblue sky was barred with the red girder cage of a new building. Steam riveters rattled incessantly; now and then a donkey-engine whistled and there was a jingle of

chains and a fresh girder soared crosswise in the air. Men in blue overalls moved about the scaffolding. (171–172)

But the skyscraper not only makes an increasing appearance as a physical reality of the urban every day, it also crucially informs and inspires discourses on architecture, religion, morality as well as economic and personal success, as they emanate from the characters' conversations, reflections, visions, and dreams. Most explicit may be the professional architectural discourse voiced by Dos Passos through the character of delineator and architect Phil Sandbourne. Each time he appears in the novel he seems to be taken by a new then-visionary plan for a truly modern high-rise architecture: From an older colleagues' "plans for allsteel buildins", the "idea the skyscraper of the future'll be built of steel and glass" (76) as well as to the latter's vision of a proto-Corbusian vertical city described as a "communal building... Seventyfive stories high stepped back in terraces with a sort of hanging garden on every floor, hotels, theaters, Turkish baths, swimming pools, department stores, heating plant, refrigerating and market space all in the same buildin" (158–159) down to Sandbourne's own passionate idea of colored tile to be used in skyscraper construction which according to him "would revolutionize the whole life of the city" (234) – these architectural visions here introduced by Dos Passos through Phil Sandbourne were rooted in plans of Europe's modernist architectural avant-garde and were far from being realized both at the time of the novel's publication in 1925 and even more so at the novel's narrated time between 1900 and 1920 (see T. Gibson 66–67).⁶²

Yet also on a less explicit level, skyscrapers or architectural height in general turn into a super sign that comes to represent a huge variety of concepts, states, and moods for the novel's characters and by way of whom Dos Passos seems be keen on exploring the full range of the skyscraper's 'significant surplus'. For once, it is material success that constantly seems to be identified with or becomes inspired by architectural heights. Thus, one encounters a man who

62 Todd Gibson has rightfully argued that the architectural plans for skyscraper design found in *Manhattan Transfer* in no way "reflect the New York skyline Dos Passos knew but rather express ideas which were finding voice in European architectural circles forming around the German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and the French architect Le Corbusier" (T. Gibson 66). While effectively "the International Style of architecture was introduced to the American reading public in Dos Passos's 1925 novel," it would take another quarter century till the first of these functionalist glass and steel skyscrapers were actually erected in the U.S. (T. Gibson 68, see also page 118 of this study).

is inspired to high-flying dreams of the big money just by gazing out of his office skyscraper (106–107), an actress dreaming of landing a hit whose “words were an elevator carrying her up dizzily, up into some stately height where electric light signs crackled scarlet and gold and green” (144), an admirer of hers wanting to stress her supremacy by exclaiming that she really “ought to live on the top of Woolworth Building in an apartment made of cutglass and cherry blossoms” (142) while a man desperately trying to become an architect simply voices the desire to be identical with the high building itself: “Kerist I wish I was a skyscraper” (230) – be it only because it represents the two things he seems to lack the most: material success and stability. And as much as climbing up staircases, going up in elevators or inhabiting great heights may stand in for an ascent to power or economic success in the case of some characters, so do others see their ruin or failure reflected in their fall from or standing at the foot of skyscrapers and bridges: One once successful Wall Street broker, but by now homeless character feels his misery completed when he runs into the construction site of a future skyscraper and thus the ultimate sign of speculation and economic success (177–178) while another feels like having been “dropped sickeningly fortyfour stories, crashed” from a skyscraper and shirking to “the smallness of dust” after just having lost his job in Pulitzer’s World Building (315). On another occasion, the same character is plagued by a nightmare of not finding the entrance to a skyscraper (327) and another commits suicide by jumping from Brooklyn Bridge (119).

At other times, the built heights of New York come to denote all sorts of legal and moral trespassing when being cast as the site of and refuge for corruption (188–190, 282, 294–295), adultery (59–61, 142–144, 180–181), and all sorts of other crimes (burglary: 140–142, break of Prohibition law: 253–254, imposture: 312–313, abortions: 238, 242–243, 338). Not unsurprisingly, *Manhattan Transfer* and its characters are recurrently haunted by the Tower of Babel trope and its deeply moral message of just punishment for illicit trespassing and other acts of human hubris – a discourse sometimes even veiling or accompanying a harsh anti-urbanism or an embitterment over urban life in some characters (see Vanderwerken 254–256, Gelfant 157). From the second chapter’s opening prose poem that already links New York to the tradition of ancient cities like Babylon and Nineveh facing destruction or divine punishment for their amorality and hubris (23) onwards, the Babel discourse seems to reverberate implicitly through much of the novel’s emphasis on describing bad weather conditions (especially thunderstorms, 23, 171–172, 190–191) and disasters, such as the many fires (25, 230–231, 355–356) and crashes (53, 159–160), only to culminate in a once more

explicit episode, namely a mentally deranged tramp's apocalyptic prophecy of a Babylonian New York's destruction towards the end of the novel:

Juss set here a minute an look at her [the city] Gabriel...Look at the old bitch if you'll pardon me the expression. [...] Do you know how long God took to destroy the tower of Babel, folks? Seven minutes. Do you know how long the Lord God took to destroy Babylon and Nineveh? Seven minutes. There's more wickedness in one block in New York City than there was in a square mile in Nineveh, and how long do you think the Lord God of Sabboath will take to destroy New York City an Brooklyn an the Bronx? Seven seconds. Seven seconds [...]. [...]. But it's terrible to think of, folks, the fire an brimstone an the earthquake an the tidal wave an the tall buildins crashing together. (340–341)

But while these moral discourses and instances all seem to suggest an impending apocalypse – no matter whether divinely, naturally, or technologically induced –, Dos Passos' vividly naturalistic rendition of Manhattan's dizzying diversity of all kinds of languages, dialects, and accents rather suggests that the city has already fallen into "a post-Babel confusion of tongues" (Vanderwerken 254).⁶³

Surely, the skyscraper may thus be said to act as a super-signifier in *Manhattan Transfer* as it comes to represent or reflect all kinds of social, emotional, and moral states and developments within the novel's characters. At the same time, one may, as Vanderwerken has rightfully done, read the Tower of Babel trope and its logic of destruction and chaos as punishment for or merely an effect of rapid urban development as the novel's "controlling myth" or even its "organizing principle" in the same way as one could do in the case of so many of the above mentioned apocalyptic scenarios in film and fiction featuring the destruction of New York (Vanderwerken 254). This section, however, is not so much interested in a representational reading of Manhattan's metropolitan urban space and its skyward growth, as one encounters it in the overwhelming majority of literary criticism engaged with Dos Passos' novel; rather, it wants to look at what this space is composed of, which settings and subjects it produces and what it does, how it acts with and upon or even merges with the text's many characters. This

63 Indeed, Dos Passos confronts the reader with a sometimes confusing variety of ethnic accents and idiosyncrasies from the French accents of Emile, Congo, Madame Rigaud, and Madame Soubrine, the German of Mr Zucher (19–21), the Italian of the anarchist waiter Marco (43–46) and newly arrived immigrants (78), the Finnish of Laplander Matty (92–93) over the Irish accents of Gus and Nellie McNeil as well as of Joe and Mike O'Keefe to the Yiddish accents of a "little bearded man" and his family (22), Rosie and her mother (31), a pair of burglars (141–142), Mrs Budkowitz (147–148), Mrs Cohen (319–320), and Mr Goldstein (328–329).

relational reading of *MT*'s (high-rise) space and its characters' movement up and through that space will draw on many of the concepts and models developed in the first chapter of this study. In this sense, the skyscraper constitutes much more a structural or relational principle of the literary text while at the same time being part of it, being an actor in its own right in the complex urban assemblage unfolded by Dos Passos in *MT*. As already mentioned above, the skyscraper as one highly compressed "swarming city in itself" and thus as an intricate network of countless human and nonhuman actors already prefigures the novel's structure as a network narration following and entangling a great many fates and trajectories at the same time; and precisely because it constitutes the metropolitan network in compression, it also contains the metropolitan experience, its juxtaposition of most diverse spaces as well as its oscillation between illusory and compensatory forces in nuce.

And it is also in this sense that one has to contradict the skyscraper's role in *MT* as prescribing a certain abstract top-down vision of the city and its myriad of actors, as has been done by Madsen when he argues that "Dos Passos, in a sense, stands on top of a skyscraper, along with the reader, and surveys the masses on the streets of Manhattan" (Madsen 39). The author's and thus also the reader's perspective in *MT* does, as I would contend here, neither constitute that panoramic "god-like" view of Certeau's urban planner from atop a high-rise, nor does it come close to the oft-quoted, yet seldom explained abstracted "camera eye" perspective – excerpt for maybe in the short prose poems that open each chapter.⁶⁴ In fact, the reader seldom shares that god-like view over the city with certain characters (exceptions: 93–94, 106–107, 237) but in the vast majority of cases follows the novel's characters as walkers and climbers right through the busy bustle of the streets, apartments, tenements, office high-rises, trains, and subways. Far removed from the abstracted vision of either an omniscient god-like narrator, an urban planner/scanner gazing down from high above, or that of a 'neutral' camera eye, Dos Passos' personal narration in *MT* is a deeply subjective one that always seems to be on the verge of and often enough delves into its character's minds and their streams of consciousness.

64 These opening prose poems indeed offer an unusually abstract, yet at the same time highly aestheticized vision of the city whose strong emphasis on dynamics, movement, metaphor, distorted dimensions, and vibrant colors lend these passages the quality of Futurist or Expressionist paintings. For more on the complex connections and influences among the oeuvre of Dos Passos and various European modernist writers, filmmakers, and painters see Spindler 395–406, Goodson 91–92, 94–95, Keunen 432, and Harding 96–99.

It is right from within this perspective, when following the characters (i.e. the actors) right into the middle of things, down the streets, walking into and climbing up and down or simply residing and working in buildings, that these spaces become tangible as milieus of compensation, of harsh discipline and social pressure. And it is right here, in the middle of things, that Dos Passos not only makes his actors provide their very own interpretations and commentaries on these spaces and their effects, i.e. providing their own micro ‘sociologies’ of space but that he also makes them either adapt to these conditions or carve out their own illusory spaces by constantly finding new lines of flight or by creatively re- or misusing other actors.

Yet, above all, Dos Passos – through his characters – presents Manhattan’s metropolitan space – whether out in the streets, in parks, on buses or subways, or inside buildings – as a site of shameless spectacle and utter transparency. Living within and moving through this urban panopticon, the novel’s characters appear to be feeling the constant presence of others as well as their curious gazes, regardless of whether they are actually present or just assumed. Due to their excessive multiplication of floors and windows and thus of possible eyes and ears directed in- and outside, skyscrapers, which became the dominant architectural form in Manhattan during the thirty years covered by *MT*, seem to constitute a multiplying array of watchtowers within that giant panopticon of the skyward growing metropolis. To be sure, the evolution of Manhattan into a high-rise space did not follow an outspoken panoptic program, as it may be found in the urban schemes devised by Le Corbusier, Ferriss, Hood, or Corbett during the 1920s, but rather proved an all but imperfect panopticon that still offered many blind spots as a consequence of its uneven and non-planned growth. And yet, the increasing number of skyscrapers and the panoptic settings they however imperfectly and unintentionally created are clearly perceived and commented on by a vast number of characters in the novel.⁶⁵

65 Scanlan’s assessment that “[t]heorizing that the skyscraper is a sort of vertical panopticon” would not work in order to adequately capture the relation among the novel’s built space and its characters as well as his contention that “[t]he skyscraper in *Manhattan Transfer* [neither] work[s] as an “inspector-keeper” [nor] constrict[s] movement along Foucauldian lines” (Scanlan 268, 256) seem falsely based on the assumption that panoptic set-ups have to adhere strictly to Betham’s idealized prison model. Apart from that, these judgements seem oblivious of the fact that the skyscraper’s panoptic force is not alone grounded on vision but likewise on acoustics and smell (panoacousticon, panolfactorium). It is thus that the skyscraper may well appear not as the only but certainly as the most powerful actor within a panoptically “reconfigured urban ecology” (Scanlan 268).

When Ellen, a young actress and one of the novel's main characters, walks the city on one sunny day, she has to confront the full power of the urban panopticon and its various human (greedy men, policemen) and nonhuman agents (buildings, the sun):

Two sailors were sprawling on a bench in the sun; one of them popped his lips as she passed, she could feel their seagreedy eyes cling stickily to her neck, her thighs, her ankles. She tried to keep her hips from swaying so much as she walked. The leaves were shriveled on the saplings along the path. South and east sunnyfaced buildings hemmed in the Park, to the west they were violet with shadow. Everything was itching sweaty dusty constrained by policemen and Sunday clothes. (129)

The disciplining effect of the urban gaze on her (she adapts her walk) may thus not only have its source in fellow human actors, such as when on other occasions she feels that "men and women [...] turned and looked after her, like sticky tendrils of vines glances caught at her as she passed" (222) or when "[I]like the sense of a mirror behind her she felt the smart probing glances of men and women at the tables round about" (330) but also in their nonhuman, namely built 'surrogate' watchtowers when, for example, she perceives of "the tall houses sharp gray as dead teeth round the southern end of the park" and thus experiencing built space as a literal and possibly violent danger (186).

But Manhattan's urban panopticon seems to be most relentless when it comes to (young) couples in search of a sheltered site for the exchange of intimacies. In the case of Ellen's flatmate Cassie and her boyfriend Morris, not only Central Park but also Cassie's private room suddenly emerges as a giant panopticon stage surveyed by a myriad of human, electrical and high-rise window eyes all possibly directed at them and curiously following their actions:

They stood looking back at the glow of electric signs that came from Columbus Circle. To the left they could see curtained lights in the windows of a whitefaced apartmenthouse. He looked stealthily to the right and left and then kissed her. She twisted her mouth out from under his.

"Don't...Somebody might see us," she whispered breathless. [...] The lights from the buildings that hemmed in the end of the Park shone in their faces. [...] "Look out," he whispered pulling himself away from her. They walked on unsteadily down the path through the shrubbery.

"I guess it aint."

"What Morris?"

"A cop. God it's hell not havin anywhere to go. Cant we go to your room?"

"But Morris they'll all see us."

"Who cares? They all do it in that house." [...]

They sat down on a bench in the light. (151–152)

A similar scene featuring Dutch and his girlfriend Francie (who later turn into a gangster couple (see 318–319, 328–329, 348–350)) in search of some privacy on a night out is marked by a likewise panoptic paranoia of being watched or caught by the million eyes of the urban panopticon. Desperately, Dutch in a later episode may even exclaim: “This goddam park’s full of plainclothes men...There’s nowhere you can go in the whole crummy city without people watchin you” (318). Yet even after having escaped the “prying open [...] eyes of skyscrapers” (332), streetlights, policemen, watchmen, and passersby, the urban panopticon or rather panacousticon extends not only into built space but even into private rooms, such as indicated by Cassie and as demonstrated by Dutch and Francie’s subsequent retreat to the latter’s tenement room which is a delicate undertaking in itself as the couple needs to be very quiet in order not to disclose the forbidden male visitor (269–270).

In much the same way, George Baldwin and Nellie McNeil are worried about discretion in order to keep their adulterous meetings in the McNeil’s apartment secret. While already “[s]nakes of light from the streetlamp wound greenly about them” through the window, Nellie warns Baldwin: “Keep quiet cant you ... here take yer shoes off ... There’s enough trampin o men’s shoes up here...” (60–61). And also Jimmy and Ruth, another flatmate of Ellen’s and Cassie’s, feel the urge to discipline themselves with regard to noise and vision, given the constantly assumed presence or attention of others living next door or in the opposite building:

“Shush you can hear everything through the partition...that’s Cassie,” she whispered giggling. [...]

“Look at that funny woman opposite. She’s got a face exactly like a llama.”

“It’s on account of her I have to keep my shades drawn all the time...”

“Why?”

“Oh you’re much too young to know. You’d be shocked Jimmy.” (125)

In a yet more explicit scene towards the end of the novel, a young couple displays varying degrees of adjustment to or rather acceptance of their state as constantly overlooked ‘panoptic subjects’:

“Pull down the shade,” comes the man’s voice from the bed.

“I cant, it’s busted...Oh hell, here’s the whole business down.”

Anna almost burst out crying when the roll hits her face, “You fix it,” she says going towards the bed.

“What do I care, they cant see in,” says the man catching hold of her laughing.

“It’s just those lights,” she moans, wearily letting herself go limp in his arms.

It is a small room the shape of a shoebox with an iron bed in the corner of the wall opposite the window. A roar of streets rises to it rattling up a V shaped recess in the building.

On the ceiling she can see the changing glow of electric signs along Broadway, white, red, green, then a jumble like a bubble bursting, and again white, red, green.

“Oh Dick I wish you'd fix that shade, those lights give me the willies.”

“The lights are all right Anna, it's like bein in a theater...It's the Gay White Way, like they used to say.”

“That stuff's all right for you out of town fellers, but it gives me the willies.” (346–347)

This scene seems to anticipate Foucault's famous description of Bentham's panopticon prison plan and its cells circularly located around one central watchtower as “so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible” leading him to the conclusion that “[v]isibility [and one may add: audibility] is a trap” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 198). The above-quoted scene may thus be the most perfect instance of the urban panopticon in *MT* that ultimately casts Manhattan as a prison-like built ensemble of an endless number of small apartment-cells under constant (real or supposed) supervision from the outside (if no shades are drawn) or overhearing from within buildings, all “induc[ing] in the inmate [tenants] a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (198).

As already seen with these examples, the disciplining or compensatory force of the metropolitan milieu not only works on account of vision and transparency, as in the classic model of the panopticon. When it comes to interiors, apartments or single rooms within densely populated tenements and skyscrapers, also acoustics and thus the reverberation of sounds through walls and floors and their actual or assumed overhearing by others has a powerful disciplining effect on the urban resident, thereby revealing these often packed and thinly-walled urban housings into veritable panacousticons – a condition that, in comparison to the panopticon, even works reciprocally by way of forcing one to actively avoid one's own noises and to passively endure others' noises. In an early scene from *MT*, the relentless terror of the (passive) panacoustic condition is painfully experienced by Ellen's mother Susie desperately trying to find some rest:

Susie Thatcher lay uneasily in bed, her hands spread blue and bony on the coverlet before her. Voices came through the thin partition. A young girl was crying through her nose: [...] Susie Thatcher stirred in bed moaning fretfully. Those awful people never give me a moment's peace. From below came the jingle of a pianola playing the Merry Widow Waltz. O Lord! [...] She twisted up her mouth and began to cry. [...] A wagon clattered by down the street. She could hear children's voices screeching. A boy passed yelling an extra. [...] Oh I'll go mad! (Dos Passos 31–32)

The same annoying experience of the street or other residents' obtrusive invasion of one's private space by way of their noise, of the supposed outside

penetrating the supposed inside of one's refuge, is made by countless other characters in *MT*. After moving into a hotel, also Susie's by then adult daughter Ellen experiences her private room as an urban echo chamber: "From the street she could hear the occasional rumble of a truck. In the kitchens below her room a sound of clattering had begun. From all around came a growing rumble of traffic beginning" (156–157). Her uneasiness with the urban noise in this particular scene again seems to be rooted in an early traumatizing childhood episode during which Ellen is badly scared by "the roaring and the rattat outside" while home alone (50). Also Emile, the young French immigrant waiter, is irritated by the insolent visual, acoustic, and vibrating intrusion of the city into his shabby room while trying to find some sleep: "Those dirty shades let in all the light," muttered Emile as he stretched himself on the outer edge of the bed. [...] And he lay on his back looking up at the rusty stains on the ceiling, shuddering every time an elevated train shook the room" (46–47).

Another aspect of dense urban dwelling that rather passively annoys than actively enforces coercion is that of the omnipresent smells intruding one's private space from street level or from other residents' spaces. This very panolfactory condition also constitutes a constant source of irritation that is felt by many of *MT*'s characters: While trying to go to sleep, for example, Jimmy is suddenly overwhelmed by "a sourness of garbage, a smell of burnt gasoline and traffic and dusty pavements, a huddled stuffiness of pigeonhole rooms where men and women's bodies writhes alone tortured by the night and the young summer" comes "on the air through the window" (179, see also 21, 352).

Thus beleaguered by real and assumed looks, eavesdropping, noises, and smells, moving through or inhabiting the metropolitan space of Manhattan often enough stirs powerful feelings of claustrophobia and entrapment in the novel's characters. Not only do they experience the city's built space at times as dangerously "hemming" in the few untilled public areas of Manhattan and thus also entrapping them therein (129, 152, 186) but also their private refuges are often enough perceived as prison cells right from Bentham's panopticon. Complaining about the size of his family's residence, Jimmy complains "If we only had more space, [...]; we live cramped in our squirrelcage..." (296), while he seems to suffer from even greater claustrophobia in his single apartment after splitting up with Ellen:

His room was a small square bleak room on the south side of Washington Square. Its only furnishings were a bed, a chair, a table piled with books, and the gasstove. [...] Inside him all sorts of unnamed agonies were breaking loose. [...] Occasionally the room would start going round him solemnly and methodically. (309, see also 346)

However, the urban panopticon's workings and indeed its most destructive effects are explored in the case of *MT*'s character Bud Korpenning, a young man from a farm in upstate New York coming to Manhattan upon the novel's opening (15–17). In his desperate search for the “center of things”, Bud drifts through the city without ever finding a steady job or gaining a foothold anywhere (16, 34). His move to Manhattan is necessitated in the first place by his will to evade prosecution after murdering his violent stepfather, a moral burden that seems to trouble his quest to ‘make it’ in the city. After all, the urban panopticon's “automatic functioning of power” further nourishes a strong paranoia in him that makes him see detectives and plainclothesmen in every person he runs into. Eventually ending up as a beggar in a homeless shelter, Bud manically wanders the city. Driven by an ever-increasing panic of getting caught for his crime, he comes to suspect undercover cops in every random acquaintance and passerby, the probing eyes of coercion possibly luring behind every corner and window of the city. On his final run through the city that has long since turned into a giant trap to him, Bud's urban paranoia is linked as a motive to the city lights and the break of dawn and thus to the inspecting lights and eyes (of the city and the sun but ultimately also those of God) that threaten to expose Bud's guilt just as much as his desperate situation and subsequently trigger his suicide:

Don't matter where I go, cant go nowhere now. An edge of the blue night had started to glow behind him the way iron starts to glow in a forge. Beyond black chimneys and lines of roofs faint rosy contours of the downtown buildings were brightening. All the darkness was going pearly, warming. They're all detectives chasin me, all of em, men in derbies, bums on the Bowery, old women in kitchens, barkeeps, streetcar conductors, bulls, hookers, sailors, longshoremen, stiffs in employment agencies...He thought I'd go tell him where the ole man's roll was, lousy bum...One on him. One on all them goddam detectives. The river was smooth, sleek as a bluesteel gunbarrel. Dont matter where I go; cant go nowhere now. The shadows between the wharves and the buildings were powdery like washingblue. Masts fringed the river; smoke, purple chocolatecolor fleshpink climbed into light. Cant go nowhere now. [...]

Bud is sitting on the rail of the bridge. The sun has risen behind Brooklyn. The windows of Manhattan have caught fire. He jerks himself forward, slips, dangles by a hand with the sun in his eyes. The yell strangles in his throat as he drops. (119)

As a manic prisoner of the urban panopticon, in which everyone appears as a warden and every high-rise a watchtower, Bud painfully experiences that “[v]isibility is a trap”, a trap to which the only exit seems to be death. And even as he finally faces the latter, he feels the probing glaze of “the sun in his eyes.”

As much as living in the high-rise city turns into the experience of an almost paranoiac omni-visibility and -audibility, it may also grant one safety and

secrecy within the anonymity and secluded heights of its built space, thereby turning into a site of illicit possibility and illusory-heterotopic subversion. After all, not every character of *MT* always appears as a passive and paranoia-driven victim of the urban panopticon but also and sometimes at the same time also as an active walker and climber in the city, willfully associating with other actors and enrolling them in their very own private antiprograms. In fact, there is a great number of rather lengthy episodes that feature single characters walking through as well as up and down an increasingly vertical city space. From Ed Thatcher's initial tour to the hospital, then to a bar, home, then out on the streets to watch a fire in a building close by, and back home again spanning the novel's two initial chapters (17–25) over Bud's recurring odysseys in search of a job down to his final walk culminating in suicide (33–35, 67–68, 118–119) up to Ellen's long and detailed walks through the city either by foot, train, bus, or taxi (129–131, 155–157, 352–357) – these urban walkers and climbers are as much produced and enrolled by the space they move through as they themselves produce that space by using it, relating to it, associating with its myriad of human and nonhuman actors and (more or less successfully) enrolling them for their own purposes.⁶⁶ In many cases this even involves subverting and escaping the coercive programs of the urban panopticon, such as when these characters temporarily seclude themselves in urban heights from the public space of street level and its rules and pressures or when momentarily translating spaces originally inscribed with coercive programs into illusory spaces of subversion and possibility. Baldwin, McNiel, and their affiliates turn high-rise offices into spaces of subversion by discussing their corrupt political machine politics – often accompanied by always already 'illusory' demimonde characters, such as Nevada Jones and Tony Hunter (188–190, 281–283). And it is thus that usually panoptic and panacoustic private rooms, such as in the dancer girls' shared

66 This very reciprocity of characters producing and being produced by the city may seem evident from the perspective of a network approach but stands in harsh contrast to a common current in scholarship on *MT* that tends to read the novel as a purely naturalist text whose “characters [...] are thus always predefined [and determined] by the world in which they function” (Lehan 239, see also Koritz 102). Although not indebted to a relational network approach either, Keunen clearly acknowledges the agency and complexity of Dos Passos' characters who “are not reduced to social or pathological conditions” while Scanlan even attests to the reciprocal production of the city and its inhabitants when he argues that “[c]haracters transfer city discourse [as well as buildings and objects] into their own identities. And characters in turn, help shape the city they perceive and experience [...]. [...] it is necessary to acknowledge the city's central motion as a process of transfer [...]” (Keunen 427, Scanlan 251).

apartment or in Jimmy's flat are translated into spaces for intimacies when used by Ellen and Stan for their extramarital affair (142–143, 179–181). In the same vein, Stan once disguises as a woman in order to avert the curious gazes, such as of society journalists, when leaving the theater with Ellen one night (196–198). At the same time, Ellen's husband may 'creatively' misuse a fire escape for his own jealousy-driven purposes when climbing it up in order to catch his wife and her lover in the act (180–181). On another occasion, the reader may follow a burglar on his quest to break into Ellen's shared apartment, first by pretending to be a messenger boy, then by creatively misusing the tenement's roof, fire escapes, and architecture in order to climb into the apartment through a window from above (141–142).⁶⁷ After driving away the burglar and considering its own adulterous involvements, Stan exclaims what one may well read as the credo of the metropolitan experience's promise of heterotopic-subversive opportunity: "Burglary, adultery, sneaking down fireescapes, cattreading along gutters. Judas it's a great life" (143).

In all these cases, illicit lovers, burglars, or corrupt businessmen and politicians refuse their enrollment in coercive-disciplinary programs of the city space by creatively re- and misusing objects, infrastructures, and (high) architectures for their purposes, thereby enrolling them in their own subversive antiprograms. Amy Koritz has thus rightfully argued that novels like *MT* "remind us that the real-world application of any professional discourse, including that of architects and urban planners, is constantly challenged by the complex aspirations and desires of individuals in search of passion, power, respect, or simply survival" (Koritz 102). The very inability of (coercive/compensatory) urban and architectonic schemes to influence people's behavior within and their use of urban space is rendered most striking in a scene where *MT*'s architect character Phil Sandbourne, enthusiastically pitching a colleague's plan for a 75-story vertical city to George Baldwin, is suddenly distracted by the sight of a girl in a passing taxi (probably Ellen) only to get run over and heavily injured by another car on Fifth Avenue (159–160). While well versed in the theoretical realm of abstract place, the prototypical architect and urban planner as embodied by Sandbourne in *MT*, seems unfamiliar with the dynamics and subversive potential of urban space, ultimately proving inept to walk in it and use it safely for his own purposes.

67 The roof-climbing thief in *MT* who carefully notes "doors, fire escapes, windows, cornices" on every building he passes, recalls young Vito Corleone's walk over the Manhattan rooftops on the way to his murder of Don Fanucci in *The Godfather Part II* (1974).

Considering the above evidence, one can neither uphold critics' widespread view that "*Manhattan Transfer* depicts an environment where the capacity for self-realization and community has been sapped", nor the similarly common idea that *MT*'s characters have to confront an entirely static and inhuman urban environment, an "unyielding physicality of buildings and streets", and thus a literal urban black box resistant to any closer access and associations (Butts 28, Koritz 110, 115). Interestingly, most critics always use the present perfect tense in order to describe Dos Passos' Manhattan and its relentlessly static relation to his characters, thus evoking the image of a city as an always already completed monolithic monument, an always already stabilized and safely black-boxed network of so many different actors. In doing so, however, they tend to ignore the fact that not only is the city and its built environment always 'in motion' (something that the city symphony movies impressively demonstrated) but also that it still constitutes a fundamentally malleable space, an environment that is (not yet) black-boxed and may thus be continually reshaped and creatively (mis)used according to one's own subjective interests and desires. As pessimistic as the tone of Dos Passos' novel may generally be and as overwhelming as the city's panoptic forces sometimes seem, there still exist a good many blind spots in which to hide, escape and enact, if only fleetingly, spaces of subversion, as well as to encounter actors that may be inscribed by and enrolled, if only temporarily, into individual antiprograms.

It is thus possible to read *MT*'s characters' lives, their various stories of success and failure along the lines of (actor-)network theory and retrace the processes by which they build up more or less stable and diverse networks with and within the city by way of associating with and getting translated by a vast number of human and nonhuman actors. *MT* therefore appears as a chronicle not only about Manhattan's 'transfer' into a modern high-rise cityscape but also about its characters' transfer, i.e. their association with a great many of actors and their simultaneous translation into 'modern' metropolitan subjects as well as their resistance to or inability to undergo this very process. In *MT*'s countless short episodes, the reader is able to closely follow how individual characters build and stabilize networks of their own by associating with and enrolling as many other actors as possible in very own programs of success and ambition in order to get translated or rather 'transferred' into better and more powerful positions. As already elucidated above, these processes of network building may involve characters variously enrolling into or resisting inscription by the modern city's powerfully heterotopic programs of compensation and illusion. It is also striking to see how the skyscraper recurs in these processes in various shapes from its manifest reality as an urban actor(-network) in its own right over its

simultaneously coercive and subversive potentials down to its symbolic embodiment of the city at large or the metropolitan condition in general. A number of exemplary characters and their networks will serve to illustrate these points.

As one of *MT*'s central characters (beside Jimmy Herf and George Baldwin), Ellen Thatcher's personal success story may be retraced in greatest possible detail by way of countless episodes documenting her association with a vast number of human and technological or architectonic actors. The many translations she consequently undergoes during the novel may already be anticipated from the variety of forenames (Ellen, Elaine, Ellie, Helena) and surnames (Thatcher, Oglethorpe, Herf, Baldwin) under which her character appears. Seen from an ANT-perspective, Ellen appears as a quasi-object whose flight through the urban matrix one may follow in detail with every episode in which she makes an appearance constituting another freeze-frame, another translation on her transformation into a truly hybrid metropolitan subject.

Born into a middle-class family at the novel's opening, Ellen's ambition is emphasized from early on. After having visited the theater with her father at young age, she desires to be a boy, probably because she already understands that there are far more personal and professional restrictions for women at the time than there are for men (32). In many ways similar to her literary double Carrie Meeber, the protagonist of Theodore Dreiser's 1900 novel *Sister Carrie*, she is drawn to show business.⁶⁸ At an early age, she is able to associate with influential Broadway people, such as successful director Harry Goldweiser and her first husband, the acclaimed actor John Oglethorpe, both of whom she successfully enrolls into her program of early stage fame under the name of Elaine Oglethorpe, even though palpably repulsed by these two men on a physical-emotional level. Translated in this way into an admired stage actress, she can further extend her network by associating with, above all, influential men and admirers from politics, law, and the urban elites. These associations in turn allow her to gain further financial and spatial independence from her husband, which is manifested by her relocating first to a hotel and then to a private rented room, and culminating in her eventual divorce from Oglethorpe. Especially by way of her friendship to successful lawyer and power broker George Baldwin, one among her many admirers, she is not only able to get in touch with Manhattan's social and political elite, such as by way of attending lavish parties but also to keep herself and her

68 Regarding the two characters' similarity, William Brevda has even contented that "Ellen Thatcher is the cynical younger sister of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, hardened by her additional years in the modern city" (85).

friends out of trouble from the police (131–134, 199–203, 307–308). Eventually leaving show business, she marries journalist Jimmy Herf, has a child and stays in Europe during World War I with them. Upon her return to Manhattan, Ellen “Ellie” Herf is once more able to successfully reinvent herself as a fashion editor while her second husband turns more unsuccessful and fatalistic with every episode. After having established herself as editor, she disassociates from Herf by seeking divorce only to reconnect with Baldwin, by now being ‘groomed’ for mayor (342–343). A marriage to him would then entail another translation into the mayoral ‘trophy wife’ Ellen Baldwin, a status she seems to despise but ultimately accepts at the novel’s end (335–336, 356–357).

It is noteworthy that Ellen is again and again able to stabilize both her far-flung associations to various human actors as well as her various professional or gender identities by entering into agential partnerships (thus forming actants) with architectural structures, technological devices, or even songs and jingles turning into mantras of her success. In fact, she understands perfectly well how to enroll urban heights into her subversive antiprograms by way of translating them into refuges for illicit acts, such as the then-forbidden consumption of alcohol (253–254), her extramarital affair with Stan (142–143, 179–181) or a risky abortion in a private clinic (238, 242–243), these partnerships with architectures and secluded spaces ultimately stabilizing her personal freedom and independence from normative moral (gender) programs. On other occasions, songs, titles, and advertisement jingles seem to inspire her career, such as when the newspaper line “Greatest hit on Broadway” work like “an elevator carrying her up dizzily, up into some stately height where electric lights crackled scarlet and gold and green [...]” (144–145) or the advertisement campaign and song of the Danderine Lady on a White Horse that ultimately connects her to Stan (129–130, 135, see Geyh 428–430). William Brevda has thus rightfully commented that “[t]hroughout the novel, Dos Passos connects Ellen to advertising and the artifacts of material culture such as enameled tile, skyscrapers, revolving doors, rollercoasters, taxis, and electrical signs” thus making her appear “so urbanized that she increasingly takes on the city’s attributes” (Brevda 84, 81).

And indeed, the more successfully Ellen appears to associate with and stabilize her actant-partnerships with the modern city and its various components, the more not only she herself but also others perceive her as an artificial piece of machinery and handicraft. Thus, Ellen is not the only character in *MT* but certainly the one most frequently (self-)characterized by reference to architecture and technology. Standing on the roof garden of a skyscraper overlooking Central Park, Ellen suddenly seems to be turning into a steel-framed high-rise herself

when feeling “a stiff castiron figure in her metalgreen evening dress” (237, see also Scanlan 280–281). After a strained day at the editorial office she feels as if “[a]ll her nerves were sharp steel jangled wires cutting into her” (333–334) and on another day, it seems to her that it is “like a busted mechanical toy the way [her] mind goes brrr all the time” (356). In Jimmy’s nightmares, his successful editor wife once appears as linotype with “a gulping mouth with nicklebright rows of teeth, gulped, crunched” (296) while another time he encounters “Ellie made of thin gold foil absolutely lifelike beckoning from every window” of a skyscraper that he fails to find an entrance to (327). And given her strongly felt ‘artificial’ humanity, it is not only Jimmy who perceives of his wife as “a porcelaine figure under a bellglass” and thus as an uncanny “Elliedoll” (272–273) but Ellen herself who feels “rigid as a porcelaine figure under her clothes, everything about her seemed to be growing hard and enameled” (335); she even likens herself to “an Effenbee walking talking doll” (356) every time she confronts her future fate as George Baldwin’s decorative ‘trophy wife’.

While Ellen often seems to turn just as solid and artificial as the objects and architecture she associates with, her extreme entanglement with the city and its components also appears to have an opposite effect by repeatedly plunging Ellen as well as a good many other characters into dizzy deliria, thereby threatening to dissolve their subjectivities within the great metropolitan vortex of a thousand disparate movements, views, gazes, sounds, and smells.⁶⁹ One scene in particular captures these seemingly so contradictory effects of the urban experience on Ellen most perfectly, while at the same time featuring another powerful agential partnership between her and a quintessential modern device:

Under the skin of her temples iron clamps tighten till her head will mash like an egg; she begins to walk long strides up and down the room that bristles with itching stuffiness; [...] The telephone reached out shivering beady tentacles of sound. She slams the window down. O hell cant they give you any peace? [...] She no sooner puts the receiver down than the bell clutches at her again. [...] “It’s such a hellish nuisance, I’d like to cut it all off...spreads apace. [...] I am borne darkly fearfully afar... The phone rings. [...] The telephone is shiveringly beadily ringing, ringing. The buzzer burrs at the same time. Ellen presses the button to click the latch. [...] Then the tension in her snaps, she feels something draining out of her like water out of a washbasin. (235–237)

69 Also Brevda seems to have attested to this dual effect of the urban condition when he argues that the city’s “motion is both centrifugal and centripetal. The novel has two centers, one shattered, generating an outward spin [tending towards complete dissolution], another fused, pulling things inward” and forging associations everywhere (Brevda 96–97, see also Lehan 239–240).

The almost monster-like telephone is rendered here as an annoying, peace-robbing force, an insolent intruder into Ellen's private space and psyche with an alarming agency of its own. Strikingly, Ellen appears as much alienated in this scene by her gradual transformation into a telephone herself – complete “with iron clamps” under her temples – as by the gradual dissolution of her interiority, the more she associates with the annoying machine. At the same time, the telephone and thus one of the technical innovations of the time that made living and working in the high-rise city possible in the first place, proves to be a powerful co-actor in Ellen's ambitious effort to build and stabilize her urban networks. It is only by entering into an actant partnership with the phone that Ellen may immediately and quickly get in touch with her colleagues, friends, and admirers and is thus enabled to administer her many private and professional affairs handily, economically, and in privacy. As much as Dos Passos stresses that Ellen is conditioned and literally enslaved by the device, struggling to adapt her behavior to it, the phone also significantly extends her agency both in terms of space and intensity, facilitating and catalyzing a quick arrangement, maintenance but above all solidification of associations with other actors. As a consequence, the human-technological actant Ellen-telephone may have to get used to itself but it is certainly more successful in stabilizing a vast network of associations and in enrolling a great number of different actors in her action programs than Ellen alone could ever manage to do.

Another success story of *MT* is that of George Baldwin, whose rise to power and fortune is similarly based on his forging of associations to important actors of the city's political, social, and business elite, thus slowly but determinately being ‘transferred’ (in)to more powerful positions. Starting off as a young and ambitious lawyer at the novel's outset, he quickly comes to prominence by pleading and winning the case of Gus McNiel, a milkman run over by a train. Baldwin is only too right when he admits to the McNiels later on: “D'you know, you people have brought me luck? I've got several good cases on hand now and I've made some very valuable connections” (90). And it is by way of Gus McNiel, come into money through the case and risen to the position of a powerful and ruthless union leader, that Baldwin builds a corrupt, yet highly effective political machine network into which both men are able to enroll various key political, business, and union leaders over the years. Similarly to Ellen, Baldwin regards marriage as a tool of social ascent as well as a moral facade, while he also likes to engage in various relations and extramarital affairs with other women (Nellie McNiel, Ellen, Nevada Jones). Early on realizing the change of political climate after WWI, he performs a change of horses by disengaging with his corrupt machine associates and rather accepting a “Reform ticket” for the elections to district

attorney and later on even to mayor in order to swim with the current of the 1920s progressivist political trend (282, 294–295, 342–343).⁷⁰ Finally, Baldwin is not only heading towards becoming elected into the city's highest political office but also manages to enroll Ellen as his 'trophy wife' into his program of power and success (335–336, 356–357).

Ellen and George Baldwin's are the big success stories among the more prominent characters of *MT*, even though Dos Passos never tires from stressing the high personal and moral price they have to pay for their respective successes in law, politics, show business, and journalism, thus adding a decidedly negative connotation to their success story. Especially for Ellen, "striv[ing] toward 'success' [...] means becoming an automaton", a process she herself is well aware of and that nourishes a growing self-hatred in her (Scanlan 278). Although Ellen's 'automatization' is clearly depicted as a negative development by Dos Passos and also interpreted as such by most critics, it may be read – from a purely relational viewpoint – as a logical consequence of her successful association with non-human actors (e.g. buildings, telephones), thus forming more powerful actants that stabilize her networks and safeguard her success in the long run.⁷¹

Indeed, when compared to these stories of success, it becomes obvious that most of the other fates explored in the novel may rather be labeled stories of decline or even downright failure, thus once more attesting to the novel's generally pessimistic tone. If *MT*'s success stories may be analyzed and at least partly explained through following its characters' various associations and translations throughout the course of the novel, then the same should be possible with regard to its failing characters. Bud Korpenning's futile search for the "center of things" certainly marks the novel's first and most destructive story of failure, ending in the character's death by suicide. Obsessed by the idea of somehow getting

70 This political change is reflected in the novel's third part not only by the introduction of Prohibition (253–254, 287–290) but also by a tough-on-crime policy, as may be grasped from the police raid of a party attended by Ellen and her friends (307–308) or a judge's moral speech and his draconian punishment subsequently handed out on Dutch who had formed a notorious robber duo with his girlfriend Francie (348–350).

71 Another and probably *MT*'s most unlikely success story is that of Congo Jack, an initially rather unambitious young French immigrant who rises from a poor waiter to a Park Avenue-based millionaire named Armand Duval by way of his illegal bootlegging activities, thus literally going from 'rags to riches' during the course of the novel. Congo's rise to wealth seems all the more surprising when compared to his fellow immigrant companion Emile who proves extremely ambitious in his activities to forge new networks in Manhattan and climb the social ladder, only to 'merely' end up as Congo/Armand's private cook as the novel closes.

to a hypothetical “center of things”, Bud believes in locating and then finding some sort of essential core, a literal el dorado within the cast metropolitan cityscape where he may be able to find a decent job, meet the right people, and start climbing the social ladder. As there clearly does not exist any such mythical center in Manhattan, Bud wanders around the city in circles as if involved in an endless Sisyphus quest to arrive at just this presumed center by following the contradictory advice and directions of random people consulted by him. Trapped in a relentless Derridian *différance* that keeps on deferring that alleged center or meaningful core to other places without any chance of ever getting there (because it really does not exist), Bud, unlike *MT*’s more successful characters, is unable to understand that within the great holistic and thus non-essentialist, ‘decentered’ network of human-material relations there is no fixed center. Rather, it is up to any actor within the great macro-network of the city to define him- or herself as a center or node and to start building up associations while undergoing translations at anytime and from wherever they are. The center, in this sense, is everywhere and moves along with the respective actor. Bud thus serves Dos Passos as a vehicle to negotiate the quintessentially modernist motive of the lost center in his novel; it is precisely from the ideas of centerlessness or relativism, as addressed recurrently in modernist art, that both postmodern and relational-network thought have departed, in part already developed by philosophers and social scientists of the early 20th century, yet risen to prominence only during the century’s second half (see Beal/Lavin 6–13).

This motive is explored from a different angle in the case of Jimmy Herf’s failure to make it or become rooted in the city. Born in Europe and having come to Manhattan as the child of a wealthy family, one may argue that he is never really as deeply ingrained in the big metropolis as are natives like Ellen or Baldwin. Although related and associated to a great many actors, human and nonhuman, from the affluent and powerful Merivale family (that he grew up in after the early death of his mother) to his contacts in Manhattan’s press circles, to his acquaintance with Congo/Armand, Jimmy never really tries to make use of these connections or even actively seems to resist any translations or ‘transfers’ that these may entail. An individualist at heart, he thus not only resists pursuing a business career as suggested by his uncle (114–115, “Uncle Jeff and his office can go plumb to hell” (115)) but also refuses to take financial help from Congo (343), uneasy with the roles these decisions would have translated him into. Unlike George Baldwin, for instance, does not desire to stay associated (married) to Ellen, can no longer stand the role of a married family man as soon as he feels that there is no love between them anymore (310). Similar to Ellen, Jimmy perceives that residing in the city and associating with its material actors into

hybrid actants will gradually make him feel as if he was turning into these devices himself: Trapped in an actantial relation with a typewriter during most of the day as a journalist, he senses he is no more than “an automatic writing machine” (309). Yet unlike Ellen, Jimmy does not give in to these gradual hybridizations with the city and thus eventually refuses to be turned into a truly modern subject intricately entangled and coalesced with the big metropolis. His refusal, yet also his personal inability to come to terms with the city and his possible translation into a metropolitan man culminates in a most striking, almost Kafkaesque dream featuring not only his wife but also the ultimate epitome of urban modernity, the skyscraper:

All these April nights combing the streets alone a skyscraper has obsessed him, a grooved building jutting up with uncountable bright windows falling onto him out of a scudding sky. Typewriters rain continual nickelplated confetti in his ears. Faces of Follies girls, glorified by Ziegfeld, smile and beckon to him from the windows. Ellie in a gold dress, Ellie made of thin gold foil absolutely lifelike beckoning from every window. And he walks round blocks and blocks looking for the door of the humming tinselwindowed skyscraper, round blocks and blocks and still no door. Every time he closes his eyes the dream has hold of him, every time he stops arguing audibly with himself in pompous reasonable phrases the dream has hold of him. Young man to save your sanity you've got to do one of two things...Please mister where's the door to this building? Round the block? Just round the block [...]. (327)

Surely this dream episode, having with some justification been described “as the crux of the novel” (Vanderwerken 264), is reflective of Jimmy’s estrangement from both his successful and unfaithful editor wife Ellen and the modern high-rise space of Manhattan that for all its golden allure appears to him as a sickening “City of Destruction” (327) after all: “I’m losing all the best part of my life rotting in New York” (165). Getting ‘urbanized’ in the same way as Ellen and thus gaining access to the skyscraper city can therefore ultimately only amount to his own destruction as an individual subject.⁷² Truly “modern” in his thinking – at least in the Latourian sense – Jimmy shies away from thinking society or human actors as always already entangled with technology and built space and can thus only interpret any closer association with the city and its nonhuman actors as

72 His nightmare of the inaccessible skyscraper, however, is not the only instance of skyscrapers haunting Jimmy towards the novel’s end. Not alone does he perceive of his lay-off at a newspaper as a plunge “fortyfour stories” down the Pulitzer Building but he is also depicted as being dwarfed and in a way also ‘crushed’ at the foot of Pulitzer and Woolworth Building, the latter “pull[ing] out like a telescope” as he looks up its shaft (315).

an act of dehumanization – an interpretation ultimately invited by the literary text and probably also reflecting the view of the modernist John Dos Passos (see Vanderwerken 256, Koritz 116). As a consequence and unlike the successful, yet negatively portrayed characters of *MT*, these towers, just like the rest of the city, remain black boxes to Jimmy, non-transparent and impenetrable monoliths devoid of humanity.

Jimmy, not unlike Bud's quest for a center in real life, seems to be searching in vain for an entrance to the tower as some sort of bearer of meaning and transcendence. And, in fact it appears that Jimmy, as a man of letters, desperately tries to read and decipher the city's text throughout the novel in order to extract meaning from it (see Vanderwerken 261–262, Geyh 432–434, Scanlan 263). In doing so he, however, seems unaware of the fact that early 20th-century Manhattan is no longer the 19th-century city of ordered space and clearly decipherable representations but rather the modern “city of scrambled alphabets” and “gilt letter signs” (315). Indeed, Manhattan's signifiers from advertisement slogans, popular songs, religious discourse to newspaper headlines (all of them constantly collaged into *MT*'s prose text) have already lost their relation to, let alone identity with stable meanings and referents. So, while Jimmy still mourns the loss of stable representation in the city (“If only I still had faith in words” (327)), Ellen, by contrast, is already fully aware of and accepts the modern city's non-representational reality: “You know, marriage, success, love, they're just words” (154, see also Brevda 83, Geyh 433–435).⁷³ Resistant to any translation into a hybrid ‘metropolitan subject’ as well as disengaged with metropolitan life and its hybrid actant population (his estranged family and friends included) a disillusioned and fatalist Jimmy sees no other way out but to leave the city for good at the novel's very end (358–360).

Another instance of dramatic failure in the city may be the case of Stanwood “Stan” Emery, Jimmy's friend descended from a wealthy family of lawyers. In many ways, Stan seems to share Jimmy's disregard for success (163) and similarly resists becoming translated into an earnest and ambitious young lawyer according to his family's wishes (164). Yet unlike Jimmy, Stan appears so ‘connective’, so ‘sociable’ that he, aided by his obvious alcoholism, keeps on associating himself with almost any human and nonhuman actor he runs into – from

73 Paula E. Geyh has convincingly argued that Dos Passos' Manhattan is no longer only a “city of things,” as Dreiser's Chicago and Manhattan in *Sister Carrie* may still have been, but also and increasingly so a “city of signs” in which signifiers float freely and take on an agency of their own, thus creating situations that one can only describe as postmodern avant la lettre (see Geyh 419–420 but also Brevda 89).

his affair with Ellen to his frequent booze-cruises to his spontaneous marriage to Pearline (223). His dilemma, however, lies in the fact that he cannot stabilize these associations into viable and strong networks. He is thus constantly floating through the great urban stream, thrown from person to person, from place to place, from party to party by the modern city's powerful dynamics, without ever being able to establish stable bonds with anything or anybody – although his desire to become an architect and his eventual wish to even become a skyscraper (“Kerist I wish I was a skyscraper”) are clearly expressive of his secret yearning to able to do so (230). The skyscraper as that great stabilized network of a myriad of human and nonhuman actors, that “swarming city in itself”, as well as the architectural act of planning and building may thus well serve as ego ideals to the novel's most unstable, most unsteady character. Jimmy, by contrast, ultimately abhors the skyscraper, as well as any attempt to get enrolled and black-boxed within its vast network, so much so that he even wishes to blow it up: “I imagine what I want most is get out of this town, preferable first setting off a bomb under the Times Building” (164). Stan's desire for skyscraper-like stability in his unstable life, however, only really surfaces immediately before his dramatic death which is narrated in the short chapter “Rollercoaster”, whose title one may well read as another metaphor for Stan's shifting up-and-down existence.⁷⁴ After pulling another all-nighter of unsteady booze-cruising through various bars and dancehalls, a delirious Stan seems to be inspired toward his wish to become a skyscraper by the sublime vision of Manhattan's “buildings densened to a granite mountain split with knifecut canyons” in the early morning sun (229). Having arrived in his apartment inhabited by him and his wife of only a few weeks, Pearline, he nevertheless appears incapable of realizing his idealized action program of skyscraper-connectivity/stability. In drunken dizziness, he is unable to handle the swarming mass of song lines, discourses, and objects around and inside of him by either associating with, using, or ordering them. Rather, he is

74 *MT*'s chapter titles either refer to technological innovations of the modern city, such as steamroller, fire engine, nickelodeon, revolving doors, and skyscraper, or pieces of urban discourse, such as popular songs, advertisement slogans or biblical verses, that either explicitly appear in the chapter or metaphorically frame its episodes (see Gelfant 153–155). It is also tempting to read them as the various ego ideals aspired to or action programs followed by Manhattan's ‘metropolitan subjects’ in the making when associating with the city and its buildings, objects, and discourses, such as appears to be the case with the titles “Great Lady on a White Horse” and “Nine Days’ Wonder”, “Nickelodeon” or “Revolving Doors” in the case of Ellen or “Tracks” in the case of Baldwin and Emile.

overwhelmed by the furniture and “the interior objects of the middle-class flat” that have strangely come to life and which seemingly guide him into setting the whole building on fire (Scanlan 275):

He picked up a chair, the chair wanted to fly, it swung round his head and crashed into the window, the glass shattered and tinkled. He looked out through the window. The street stood up on end. A hookandladder and a fire engine were climbing it licketysplit trailing a droning sirenscriek. *Fire fire, pour on water, Scotland's burning.* A thousand dollar fire, a hundredthousand dollar fire, a million dollar fire. Skyscrapers go up like flames, in flames, flames. He spun back into the room. The table turned a somersault. The chinacloset jumped on the table. Oak chairs climbed on top to the gas jet. [...] He lay on his back on the floor of the revolving kitchen and laughed and laughed. [...] Up in flames, up, up. Kerosene whispered a greasyfaced can in the corner of the kitchen. [...]. He stood swaying on the crackling upside down chairs on the upside down table. The kerosene licked him with a white cold tongue. He pitched, grabbed the gasjet, the gasjet gave way, he lay in a puddle on his back striking matches, wet wouldn't light. A match sputtered, lit; he held the flame carefully between his hands. (230)

Unable to enroll these modern kitchen objects (just as any actor in the city) into a stable network, he is drawn into a destructive program of chaos, leaving him no option but to perish within in this deadly high-rise firetrap. Like Stan, his aimed-at ideal of stability, the skyscraper-network, disintegrates irreversibly into chaos in this self-fabricated inferno: “Skyscrapers go up like flames, in flames, flames” (230).

An even more dramatic, yet slower decline may be followed with the character of Joe Harland, Jimmy's uncle, who has fallen from the pinnacle of a highly successful Wall Street broker existence to the harsh ground of a poor alcoholic's fate, finally roaming the streets home- and pennilessly. As successful as Harland may have proved in building the networks that translated him into a famed and wealthy broker, these networks seem not stable and resilient enough to keep them from disintegrating when going through times of economic and personal crisis. Apart from this, the reader may also retrace the economic decline and ultimate bankruptcy of the Blackhead & Densch company – from the executives' initial view of power across the city and harbor from atop their downtown business high-rise (93–94), to the firm's eventual extinction as marked by Densch's flight to Europe (326–327, 332–333) and Blackhead's death (350–352).

As an effect of *MT*'s highly metaphoric, highly neologistic style, Manhattan appears as a fundamentally hybrid space filled with similarly hybrid actors that appear – if taking Dos Passos' metaphors literally – to be made up of human, animal, vegetal, material, mechanical, and architectonic components. People come along as castiron figures, porcelain dolls, linotypes, and writing machines;

their minds are “mechanical piano[s]” (229) or “busted mechanical toy[s]” that go “brrr all the time.” (400). Kerosene is licking people “with a white cold tongue” (230), telephones are “reach[ing] out shivering beady tentacles of sound” at them (235), “eyes snap steel traps” on them (159) and glances catch at them “like sticky tendrils of vines” (222). The “eyes of skyscrapers” stare at the city (332) and people walk on “nickelplated, goldplated streets enameled with May” (352) and “muddyglistening asphalt paths” (319). People are apples “fed down a chute into a press” and a newborn baby is a “knot of earthworms” (15), while on another occasion legs are “all warm gummy with blood” and a street “shrieks to throttling agony and bursts” (159).

Dos Passos’ is a language that proves extremely sensitive towards the agency of the urban environment, also and especially when it comes to its nonhuman components. Everywhere actors, be they natural, human, or mechanical, seem to merge and exchange agencies, all of them variously appearing active and passive, inscribing others with their programs or becoming inscribed by and with others. The various mergers performed among an endless list of entities usually carefully categorized in different realms, such as nature, humanity, or technology, in modern Western thought by way of Dos Passos’ countless metaphors, personifications, comparisons, and neologisms open up a vast panorama of the city as an arena for the universal hybridization of all its components, as different as they may be in themselves. This very monist-relational vision of the city as suggested by Dos Passos’ highly creative style in *MT* is not so far away from ANT’s conception of reality as an endlessly vast and complex network of most different actors symmetrically endowed with agency. And just as implied by the writer’s constant metaphors and neologisms, each actor within the urban macro-network comprises of an endlessly complex and differentiated network in itself: Thus, the people, buildings, machines, and streets described by Dos Passos really are hybrid due to both their inherent networked multiplicity and their constant association with and translation by the millions of actors they relate to in the city, thereby constantly exchanging attributes among each other. So when Dos Passos describes the act of seeing as eyes “snap[ping] steel traps” on the object beheld (159), he implies an association between the machinic and the human that brings forth a transfer of the machine’s mechanical attributes to a human organ, while on another occasion an expression like “eyes of the skyscrapers” (332) points to a transfer of human organs and qualities (vision) onto built structures in order to emphasize the skyscrapers’ ability of surveying the city much like human wardens within the vast metropolitan panopticon.

Within Dos Passos’ vast immanent cityscape, people are therefore not so much characterized by being compared to nonhuman actors but actually by

being them or being associated with them, by being always already entangled with them in intricate networks and agential partnerships. Seen from this perspective, common readings of *MT* as a narrative exploring the dissolution of humanity and subjectivity in a purely material realm appear obsolete, as they seem to be based on a clear-cut dualism and opposition of society and humanity on the one hand and technology and architecture on the other.⁷⁵

As demonstrated above, the city and its built and mechanic structures not only feature prominently in Dos Passos' metaphorically hybrid language and style that prove apt for capturing the inherent complexity of urban reality but also structure the novel's text regarding its content (technological innovations and popular songs as chapter titles, as metaphoric-symbolic topics of each chapter, and as ego ideals for certain characters) and narrative form (network narrative, short episodes, dynamic flow). Interestingly, *MT*'s language, style, and narrative structure may thus appear already much more aware and also celebratory of the city's (yet eventually of the whole of reality's) hybrid-immanent character than the plot's ultimately negative depiction and critics' subsequent interpretation of *MT*'s human-material-discursive hybridizations as a dangerous development undermining an allegedly always already 'purified' realm of humanity neatly separated from technology, architecture, and popular media.⁷⁶

75 A long tradition of critical commentary on *MT* has essentially agreed that, as Vanderwerken puts it, the novel's characters face the "ultimate danger [...] that the mechanical will dominate the human" or that the text at least "seems to grieve the absence of the complete human being in its cityscapes" (Vanderwerken 261, Koritz 116). While Dos Passos clearly adopts an overall pessimistic tone in almost all of *MT*'s storylines, critics like Lehan have certainly gone too far when arguing that the novel "expresses radical disaffection with the city" (Lehan 238). Some voices have even called Dos Passos "a cultural pessimist" or even downright "antiurban" on account of *MT* only (Harding 105, Lehan 235, see also Gefant 165–166).

76 Whereas there is a clear focus on hybridizations among human, mechanic, and discursive actors, *MT* also features several instances that suggest an intricate entanglement, if not a downright merger of humans and urban reality with media images, prompting Brevda to contend that "there is much in *Manhattan Transfer* which today we might call postmodern" (Brevda 89). Striking examples may be the man inspired by a Gillette advertisement to shave off his beard only to end up with "a face smooth as the face of King C. Gillette, a face with a dollarbland smile" (22), a girl commenting on a brutal fight that "it was like in the movies" (289), Mr Densch's impression that "the buildings of Manhattan" slide by "[g]ray like a photograph" (332) or Ellen's perception that she "had set the photograph of herself in her own place, forever frozen into a single gesture" (335).

It is in one of the novel's chapter-opening prose poems that Dos Passos comes closest to capturing the city's great inherently multiple immanence as already implied by the novel's entire metaphoric style as well as its network structure in one single panoramic vision:

Dark presses tight the steaming asphalt city, crushes the fretwork of windows and lettered signs and chimneys and watertanks and ventilators and fire-escapes and moldings and patterns and corrugations and eyes and hands and neckties into blue chunks, into black enormous blocks. Under the rolling heavier heavier pressure windows blurt light. Night crushes bright milk out of arclights, squeezes the sullen blocks until they drip red, yellow, green into streets resounding with feet. All the asphalt oozes light. (108)

In this highly color-intensive Expressionist vision of the city at nightfall, darkness (which may well stand in for the city at large) crushes and then condenses (associates) the myriad of human and nonhuman actors, that urban kaleidoscope of difference, into one single immanent network only to translate and stabilize it "into black enormous blocks" and thus the one vast black box one refers to when one commonly speaks of 'the city' (or 'the skyscraper'). Yet as much as that great urban network-entity may contract its components into a single black box, it may just as quickly reopen and unpack that box, decompose and literally 'liquefy', thus once more releasing the swarming colorful multiplicity of its individual actors again ("squeezes the sullen blocks until they drip red, yellow, green"). In this respect, Brevda has cogently argued that "[t]he structural principle of *Manhattan Transfer* is dynamism, which is manifested as both fission and fusion" (Brevda 97). Dos Passos' Manhattan constantly fuses (associates, connects) and black-boxes (stabilizes, hardens) its inherently multiple characters, objects, and buildings just as it simultaneously ceaselessly fissures, liquefies, and reopens its black boxes in order to release a "swarm of new actors" (Callon, "The Sociology of an Actor-Network" 29–30).

After all, the black-boxing as performed by the night or the city in the above-quoted prose poem may also be read as the very act of association and translation as performed by the novel's reader. In fact, "[t]he reader becomes an important active participant" in the novel's plot not only because he or she often shares the characters' vision and thoughts and thus perceives the city through their eyes and minds but also and especially because he or she constantly has to "connect the dots" of so many characters, storylines, and places in order to make sense of Dos Passos' experimental network narrative (Madsen 40, see also Brevda 98–99). As compared to a classical one-storyline narration, the reader of *MT* is much more drawn into and activated by the text as he or she ceaselessly has to associate the wild collage of episodes, characters, pieces of discourse, advertisements, songs,

and pictures into one or several networks that he or she may then black-box into a more or less coherent picture of the city. In this sense, the reader is, much like the novel's characters, lost in a liquidized modern city space, in that Pandorian opening of urban black boxes and has to reassemble the city and its many plot lines from that swarming chaos of actors by constantly following them. So it is also on the level of reception that Manhattan needs to be associated, literally 'transferred' from the text's abundant multiplicity of urban actors, animate and inanimate. What is true for Manhattan or even New York City in *MT* is then boldly extended to the entire country by Dos Passos in his later *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930–36) wherein "the interplay of [...] fragments [similarly] results in a semiotic web that drives Dos Passos' narrative strategy [just as much as the reader's reception] toward a totalizing vision of the nation and, indeed, history" (Beal/Lavin 17, see also Beal 3–10).

3. Reconfiguring the Skyscraper in the Shadow of Smart Technologies from the 1950s onwards

Abstract: The third chapter looks at the ways in which the increasingly complex actor-network of the skyscraper, its spatial structure, and heterotopic potentials change with the ever-intensified implementation of computer-based technologies, that is to say, its transformation into a 'smart building' in the course of the 20th century's second half. Its analysis of a number of American literary and filmic works from that period is guided by the question of how the potentials for assuming agency and realizing heterotopias within this increasingly smart architectural-technologic assemblage have shifted in the light of a slow but irreversible transition from a disciplinary to a control society, as conceptualized by Foucault and Deleuze. First of all, this comprises tracing the skyscraper's rise to a standard solution of housing as part of much-contested, but almost globally implemented postwar urban planning schemes, while at the same time providing a prime site for the installment of smart control technologies. As a consequence of this ongoing computerization, the buildings' radically transformed spatiality and thus also any kind of accessibility for association and subversive affordance in general is closely examined by drawing on conceptual frameworks provided by Gilles Deleuze, Manuel Castells, Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge as well as James J. Gibson and Donald A. Norman. These findings are then put to test in the following in-depth analysis of four movies and three novels including their respective movie adaptations while at the same time aiming to understand these works from within the specific cultural contexts and logics of their time. First, this chapter looks at two action catastrophe movies centering around failing or terrorist-seized ultra-modern smart skyscrapers, namely *The Towering Inferno* (1974) and *Die Hard* (1988), both offering scenarios of a struggle between a powerful skyscraper antagonist and an individual or a group of human protagonists attempting to resist or escape its perils. Then it turns to *Scissors* (1991) and *Sliver* (1993), two lesser-known neo noir thrillers exploring the possibilities of turning the smart high-rise building into a prime spatio-technological tool of specifically male violence when used for manipulating and entrapping preferably female victims. Based on their narrative similarities, these four movies are situated in the newly coined 'bloxploitation' genre, defined by its exploitation of vertical spaces as settings and narrative catalysts. A range of films and novels subsumed under this label are then classified according to the specific methods by way of which they produce a characteristic 'high-rise horror'. These lines of analysis are extended into a close study of the postmodern novels *American Psycho* (1991) by Bret Easton Ellis, *Fight Club* (1996) by Chuck Palahniuk (including their film adaptations by Mary Harron (2000) and David Fincher (1999), respectively), and *Cosmopolis* (2003) by Don DeLillo. These subchapters

are specifically interested in how the control logics of smart code/spaces are enacted narratologically and stylistically but also in the new modes of alienation and subversion explored in these texts and movie versions.

Keywords: Smart City, Smart Building, Society of Control, Code/Space, Disaster Movies, Bloxploitation, *American Psycho*, *Fight Club*, *Cosmopolis*

While Manhattan kept growing skyward throughout the first three decades of the 20th century, the skyscraper boom ended just as did the economic upturn of the Golden Twenties with the construction of the three monumental and still iconic towers of the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building, and the Rockefeller Center ensemble. The first two buildings in particular came to symbolize more than any other towers of Manhattan the megalomaniac hubris of the era as they faced delays and vacancies (“Empty State Building”) during and after their construction with the advent of the Great Depression that stopped major skyscraper construction for at least fifteen to twenty years (see Schleier, *Skyscraper Cinema* 61, C. Schmidt 31–82).⁷⁷ Only after World War II did new skyscrapers appear on the Manhattan skyline and only now did they really look truly modern on their outside, those of the early 1930s in effect still being richly decorated art deco edifices.⁷⁸ With prominent architects like Walter Gropius and

77 The link between often-illicit financial speculation and feverish skyscraper construction typical of the years before the stock market crash of 1929 – which also produced these “most distinctively “New York” buildings” – has been established in Edgar Selwyn’s 1932 movie *Skyscraper Souls* (1932): Set entirely in the vertical city of the fictional highest building of the world, the Dwight Tower, the movie strongly emphasizes that the grandeur of both bank owner David Dwight and his giant tower are founded on the former’s reckless exploitation and fraud of each of his employees and business partners (see Sanders 123–125, quote 124, Schleier, *Skyscraper Cinema* 62–79).

78 Only now, after the war, did the architectural vision defined by architect Phil Sandbourne in *Manhattan Transfer* become a reality (Dos Passos 234; T. Gibson 67–68). Certainly, the Chicago School of Architecture and its radical mantra of “form follows function” (Sullivan 408) may well be regarded as (at least theoretically) an important forerunner to the functionalist agenda of high modernist architecture as formulated most prominently in Europe by the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier during the 1920s and thus their subsequent realization in the postwar International Style. However early defined by American architects, ornamental historicist and art deco styles dominated skyscraper designs in the United States well into the 1930s, prompting an eminent modern architect like Frank Lloyd Wright to remark bitterly in 1930 that “[t]he light that shone in [Sullivan’s] Wainwright Building as a promise, flickered feebly and is fading away” (Wright 98, see also Condit 34–40).

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe having fled from Nazi Germany to the United States, the teachers of architectural modernism were now able to realize their program in bold high-rise blocks from the late 1940s onwards, quickly developing into an architectural vernacular (becoming known as the International Style) that not only crucially shaped the appearance of American Central Business Districts (CBDs) across the country but also quickly spread across the whole Western world and beyond. Mies van der Rohe's seminal skyscrapers, such as the lean and bronze-shimmering Seagram Building (1954–58) in New York or the Lake Shore Drive Apartments (1949–51) in Chicago as well as Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer's United Nations Headquarters (1948–52) in New York defined an architectural prototype of a clean modernist glass box that was and in many ways still is reproduced into the present time (see Douglas 175–180, Kahn 124–135).⁷⁹

But the modernist program not only manifested itself in architectural form; it also took hold of the design and shape of cities at large. Already in 1933, prominent architects, congregated in the IV. International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), had passed the *Athens Charter* of urban planning as a blueprint for a functionally divided city design that catered for one important and rapidly growing aspect of postwar urban life in particular: automotive traffic.⁸⁰

79 The name International Style derives from a MoMA exhibition and subsequent publication curated by H.-R. Hitchcock and Ph. Johnson from as early as 1932 that proved seminal in defining the characteristics of evolving modern architecture as well as in introducing the American public to that new style principally developed by European architects – even though the exhibition also included New York's McGraw-Hill Building and Philadelphia's PSFS Building and thus two early examples of American modernist skyscrapers (Hitchcock/Johnson 162–165, see also Scott/Rutkoff 168, C. Schmidt 105–106).

80 The *Charter* was published only ten years later, in 1943, by Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier whose ideas on architecture and urban design had a fundamental impact on the CIAM discourse on urban planning in general and the *Athens Charter* in particular (see Frampton 269–270). In his monumental architectural history written from a modernist standpoint *Space, Time and Architecture*, architectural critic and co-initiator of the CIAM Sigfried Giedion could only answer the question “whether the large city as it has been inherited from the nineteenth century, with its chaotic intermingling of functions, should not be allowed to die” by proposing a thoroughgoing transformation of the city according to a strict separation of its various functions: “The fundamental constitution of the contemporary city requires the restoration of liberty to all three – to traffic, to pedestrians, and to residential and industrial quarters. This can be accomplished only by separating them” (Giedion 609, 612).

Urban spaces should be divided into clearly separated zones reserved for the four urban functions of dwelling, working, recreation, and circulation (transport). An ideal city design would thus comprise an urban core that concentrates commerce and culture and is marked by office high-rises (work and recreation). A second zone surrounding the city center should harbor industrial and residential spaces (work and dwelling), which would in turn be surrounded by another larger circle of mostly high-rise residential quarters (dwelling only). All of these three city zones and their clearly separated functionalities should be accessible via vast motorways (circulation). Confronted with widespread destruction and housing scarcity in the immediate postwar years, municipalities around the world eagerly adopted the ideas for a modernist urban renewal as forwarded in the Charter and sought to realize these with often radical measures such as large-scale restructuring of longstanding neighborhoods, slum clearance, and the construction of massive (often high-rise) housing projects and infrastructures (Le Corbusier, *Athens Charter* II, Giedion 612–620, E.P. Mumford, 59–67, Zipp 4–29).

While essentially visionary, even utopic at the time of its formulation, the principle of the functionally divided, automotive city that so relentlessly guided urban planning not only in the postwar Western world was quickly enough called into question. In the U.S., Manhattan-based journalist Jane Jacobs – alongside architectural critics Lewis Mumford and Ada Louise Huxtable – was probably the most prominent and influential critic of the modernist urban agenda.⁸¹ In her seminal book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), she harshly castigated the monotonous designs of the modernist cityscape, its skyscraper blocks plunging whole streets into dark shadowland as well as the deadening effects of functional division on urban life, overcrowding some quarters, while virtually setting asleep many others. Only a mixing of urban functionalities and uses, of living, working, and relaxing within one and the same quarter or even street, she argued, would be able to revitalize the American city and thus create

81 While the American intelligentsia's crusade against the modernist mainstream in architecture and urban planning reached well into the 1980s, such as with Tom Wolfe's influential polemic *From Bauhaus to Our House* (1984), European intellectuals, from ideological backgrounds left and right, had joined their lament as early as the 1940s. Especially German philosophers like Heidegger (1951), Adorno (1951, 1965) and Mitscherlich (1965) had voiced their discontent with regard to the functionalist unhomeliness of German cities that had often been radically rebuilt and redesigned according to the Athens Charter principles after large-scale destructions suffered during WWII airstrikes (see Vidler 65–66).

functioning and vibrant urban neighborhoods (see Jacobs 143–175; Wilson 115, Zipp 10–32, 355–372, C. Schmidt 11–12, 324).⁸²

Surely enough, these criticisms of the skyscraper and zone-based urban planning were not altogether new in the 1960s but reached back to the early days of the 20th century. Back then, as Manhattan was hit by a first wave of skyscraper construction, critics like Montgomery Schuyler voiced similar complaints and demanded a restriction of skyscraper height and design (Schuyler 433–434). In the same vein, Lewis Mumford from the 1920s onwards fought against the gloomy and overcrowded skyscraper city in favor of a light-flooded, low-rise garden city. Harrowed by the modernist restructuring of cities in the postwar years, he continued to criticize the West’s “myth of the machine” that, in his view, essentially turned its metropolises into vast necropolises (L. Mumford, *The City* 430, 511; *The Myth*, picture 24).

Significantly, not only the commercial center of the city was to be a cluster of skyscrapers in the *Athens Charter* model but – and here one clearly sees Le Corbusier’s eminent influence – also the newly built residential satellite cities were meant to be constructed as modernist high-rise ensembles at the margins of cities all across the world (Le Corbusier, *Athens Charter* II, A29; Giedion 623, E.P. Mumford 85–86). Le Corbusier’s obsession with monumental high-rise construction, placed at large distances in order to provide for plenty of air and sunlight for each apartment cell as well as green park land in between, reached back to his 1925 Plan Voisin that proposed a radical high-rise redesign for the center of Paris, later elaborated in *The Radiant City* (1933); only after the war and after the Functional City design became widely accepted was he able to actually realize the envisioned residential high-rise architecture, first and famously in his Unités d’Habitation that were built in several French cities and in Berlin during the late 1940s to 1960s. One should note, however, that it was and still is typical of European cities to be surrounded by a circle of high-rise quarters or satellite cities while in American cities these complexes were often placed within existing urban sprawl areas and thus not at the very margins. Initially designed for middle

82 In his rich filmic oeuvre, French comic actor and filmmaker Jacques Tati has proven a clever satirist of modern life and technology and in two of his most celebrated movies, *Mon Oncle* (1958) and *Playtime* (1967), was particularly concerned with modernist architecture of the International Style. While the first movie ridicules the design and facilities of a modern family house, the latter is set in a permanently gridlocked Plan Voisin-like Paris entirely composed out of inseparable high-rise boxes that become the source of much disturbance due to their transparent glass surfaces, panoptic regimes and general failure of providing orientation and identity.

or even higher income families, these high-rise quarters quickly earned a reputation for being bleak and unattractive due to both their geographical isolation and functional homogeneity including little infrastructures for shopping, leisure, and education. While well-to-do citizens rather returned to central urban neighborhoods (thus accelerating development and gentrification processes) or settled in vast single-family homed suburbs (especially in America), the urban poor were increasingly pushed into these barren high-rise deserts. Thus isolating and concentrating the poorest and often jobless ranks of urban society (especially after deindustrialization hit the West from the 1960s onwards), they became hotbeds for all kinds of social problems and gained a generally unfavorable image among the city's population. In the U.S., in particular, these quarters or rather estates are also places of extreme racial segregation, nowadays almost exclusively inhabited by blacks and Latinos (see Wilson 117–119). For American urban planner Oscar Newman such high-rise estates constituted no less than a threat to urban security. Due to both their height and thus detachment from natural street-level surveillance as well as their alleged promotion of indifference and irresponsibility among the anonymous mass of residents, he regarded these vast tower complexes as ideal breeding grounds for all sorts of crime, while remaining virtually uncontrollable by law enforcement forces – vast archipelagos of illusion heterotopias scattered across the urban space (see Newman 22–39).

In the American context, the failure of this kind of urban planning powerfully manifested itself in the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex in St. Louis, completed by 1956, but a completely run-down ghetto segregated from the city around it by the late 1960s, so much so that city officials saw no other way to solve the boxed-up problems of the complex as to tear the entire estate down in 1972.⁸³ For architectural critics like Charles Jencks, the Pruitt-Igoe demolition marked “the day Modern architecture died” along with its utopic urban vision. In their view, that vision had proven a giant failure after only about forty years from its initial formulation (Jencks, *The Language* 9).

It is probably no coincidence that it was during the 1960s that a new generation of urban planners favoring functional mixing as well as of architects critical of the modernist aesthetic raised their voices against the dominant paradigm. In fact, architects like Robert Venturi harshly renounced the modernist principles of “form follows function” and “less is more” as being both monotonous and

83 Footage of the devastated state and toppling of the Pruitt-Igoe complex was later used in Godfrey Reggio's 1982 experimental film *Koyaanisqatsi* that critically engaged with Western civilization's imprint on human life and natural environment.

artificially imposed on any given environment; instead, he reformulated these modernist stances into “form follows fiction” and “less is a bore”. In their book-length manifesto *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972), Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour proposed a new visual aesthetics for a ‘postmodern’ architecture that was not to shy away from ornament and historical quotation (even of many styles in one and the same building) and take its inspiration from the richly decorated and eclectic vernacular of American commercial architecture that he saw epitomized in Las Vegas. It was, however, not until Philip Johnson built the AT&T Building in the form of a Chippendale furniture piece in the early 1980s that the postmodern aesthetic fully hit the Manhattan skyline – not counting the Gothicizing elements of the essentially modernist boxes of Minoru Yamasaki’s World Trade Center (1968–73) (see Jencks, *Skyscrapers* 68, Frampton 271–273, 290–295).

With the broad adoption of the urbanist schemes laid out in the *Athens Charter* by architects, city planners, and municipalities around the world, also the skyscraper, as architectural epitome of modernity, was globalized as it made its way from North American CBDs first to Europe (both capitalist and communist) and then to Central and South America as well as to all parts of Asia, Australia, and Africa (Khan 189–223). Nowadays, it seems there are hardly any larger cities in the world that do not boast a high-rise urban center or at least ensembles of high-rise estates on its periphery. And the trend for building high is still a vital one with gigantic skyscrapers being built at tremendous pace in the booming economies of China and the Gulf states. Within only a few decades, the *Athens Charter* and its thrust for a by and large high-rise city had turned that once genuinely American architectural innovation into a truly global phenomenon that nowadays appears to be even more typical of the Chinese, Indian, Latin American or post-Soviet city than of the average North American one.

Also, the skyscraper’s function has largely shifted from providing purely commercial office space in the beginning to an ever-larger proportion of residential high-rises or even mixed use-buildings in city centers. Initially, especially within the European context, skyscrapers were planned as high-standard residential sites within the *Athens Charter* scheme and were meant to appeal to a broad section of the urban population. And in fact, these modern vertical cities were endorsed and cherished by many new residents at the time, especially when compared to their former homes in often aged and run-down tenements. Only after living in these “radiant cities,” to use Le Corbusier’s words here, proved isolated, anonymous, panoptic, and bleak (because of the functionally homogenized nature of these new-built quarters), did they become increasingly unattractive to higher and middle income residents that in turn moved away, thus leading

to a concentration of poorer and disadvantaged people in these quickly dilapidating high-rise estates largely left to themselves by municipalities struggling with spending cuts in the face of economic downturn and deindustrialization. As became clear with the destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe project in St. Louis in 1972 as well as of many 1960s residential towers in Europe as early as the late 1970s, the skyscraper had quickly forfeited its utopian potential and was generally regarded as a failure of urban planning, aggravating rather than mending social problems (see Turkington 151–152).

In recent decades, however, one can clearly register a veritable renaissance of residential high-rise construction in favored city-center locations catering to the needs of often (super)rich international elites. This global trend has once more established high-rise living as an exclusive and desirable form of residence (see Graham/Hewitt, “Getting Off the Ground”, 79–80, Turkington 154–155). In the conceptual context of this study, this very development from the 1950s well into the present times can be considered as a cycle ranging from the ideal of the residential skyscraper as a utopia to the heterotopia of compensation in lived experience to a heterotopia of illusion in the form of either totally dilapidated estates or vertical gated communities for elite groups.

Particularly in his ‘disaster trilogy’, British author J. G. Ballard has proven a superb chronicler of modernity’s volatile heterotopic potentials between illusion and compensation: While *Crash* (1973) and *Concrete Island* (1974) focus on the automobile and its adjacent urban infrastructures, it is in *High-Rise* (1975) that Ballard retraces that very shift from utopia to heterotopia, first of compensation and then of illusion in fast-forward within one super-sophisticated residential skyscraper outside of London. Clearly modeled after the template of Le Corbusier’s famous Unité d’Habitation (only much higher), Ballard’s high-rise initially embodies the utopic ideal of a truly vertical city, a quasi-autonomous “sealed rectilinear planet” catering to the needs and tastes of a stock of middle to upper class residents (Ballard 103). Partly agonized by the building’s constantly failing facilities and a lack of privacy, partly lured by the building’s geographical isolation and its general degree of anonymity, the residents begin to rebel against the tower and its code of social conduct by willfully vandalizing facilities and then also attacking each other. In a quick chain of events, the tower’s citizenry slides into a tribalism of brutally rivaling gangs that creatively misuse the building’s modern technologies just as much as objects of everyday life, thus realizing a perfect illusion heterotopia, a world turned upside down. With the modern building effectually prompting “the emergence of [a] new social and psychological order” manifested in a violent but eventually liberating and satisfying state of archaism, Ballard delivers a cleverly sarcastic comment on modern

architecture's utopian promise of midwifing the birth of a new man and society (Ballard 76; see also Thomsen 121–125).⁸⁴

3.1 From Discipline to Control: Making the Skyscraper Smart

Even though architects of the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century generally sought to legitimize the provocation of their gigantic buildings by citing heavily from all kinds of historical styles and commonly accepted models, modernity had always been present inside these buildings. Modern were the technologies and materials that enabled the construction of these architectural giants in the first place and modern were the intricate networks of ducts, pipes, and wires that ran through them and made working and living in them comfortable, even though they were kept hidden behind richly decorated walls, floors, ceilings, and facades. Only with the advent and subsequent universalization of the modernist International Style from the late 1940s onwards did skyscrapers get rid of their historicist and art deco veils; only now did they open up their hitherto decorative black boxes in order to display face-on what they were primarily made of: steel, concrete, and glass. And it was only now that one of the principal laws of modernism, that “form ever follows function” was manifested in the style and design of the edifice that Sullivan was speaking about when he coined that famous dictum back in 1896 (Sullivan 408, see Buitenhuis 317–325). Thus finally, the skyscraper did also outwardly become what it had been from the very beginning in terms of its height, construction, and facilities: an icon of modernity; only now, the modern icon really became modernist.

One thing, however, that stayed the same was the fact that the skyscraper – due to its striking monumentality and its thus derived significant surplus – remained one of the architectural sites where the newest and most cutting-edge technologies were installed. Accordingly, the real revolution of the skyscraper in the second half of the 20th century was not to take place on its surface, in its shape, designs, or even its growing height but inside its walls. It was the new materials and technologies assembled within and smoothly embedded and integrated into the existing or newly built standard structures of the building that really made the skyscraper an ever more complex and “smarter” edifice in the course of the decades.

84 I have dealt in detail with Ballard's *High-Rise* and its 2015 film adaptation by Ben Wheatley on the background of modern high-rise architecture and urban planning in a recent article (see Klein).

As already seen in the chapters before, the skyscraper had been an intricate network of different, often-contesting action programs inscribed into its raw materials and high-end technologies, of interests and discourses made durable in it from the very beginning. The very agency, indeed the power these nonhuman actors (the materials and technologies but also the skyscraper at large) thus attained was clearly felt by the people using, living in, working in, or relating in any given way to these buildings and their material-technological components. As Zunz has shown for the early 20th century corporate skyscraper, a rigid gender politics that aimed at an almost complete separation of the sexes at the workplace was inscribed into the building's spatial structure by installing separate staircases, elevators, offices, or dining rooms for men and women respectively (see Zunz 119–126). Analyzing Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* has revealed how panoptic and panacoustic effects pervaded and thus limited the everyday lives of the high-rise city's inhabitants struggling hard to carve out a bit of privacy both in public and private spaces. Whether specifically intended by urban planners and architects or not, the choice of building materials, the design and structuring of built spaces in- and outdoor, the installment of windows and lighting (especially in the workspaces) all had their coercive effects on inhabitants and users who came to adapt their lives and habits to their environment's eyes and ears, both human and built. Buildings thus always, and high-rises – due to their extreme accumulation and juxtaposition of different spaces – in particular, functioned according to either intended or unforeseen coercive action programs that were inscribed into, made durable in materials, technologies, designs, and layouts making up the building's various spaces that were at times also aided by additional human actors, such as janitors, doormen, night watchmen, and supervisors.

However, as the above-mentioned examples also show, there were always ways, possibilities, strategies (antiprograms) devised by human actors to outsmart the smartened structures they lived and worked in: There were always opportunities for these men and women to subvert the rigid separation of genders and thus to meet each other in the corporate skyscraper, be it during work or on the roof gardens during lunch hours. Although seldom described by Dos Passos in *Manhattan Transfer*, there are counter-programs and strategies devised by his characters in order to protect themselves from the constant (real or only anticipated) gaze and eavesdropping of their immediate environment. Drawing blinds and curtains, whispering, disguising, retreating into darkness, fleeing over rooftops or climbing up fire escapes – the ever-creative walker in the city always finds his or her ways to circumvent or even counter the coercive

action programs, disciplines or morals embedded in whatever socio-spatial setting he or she moves through.

The more the skyscraper became a place to live in and not only to work in, high-rise dwellers thought up ways to shut themselves off from the effects of the urban panopticon and panacousticon produced by the extreme density of the high-rise city. Thompson has convincingly demonstrated how a number of sound-abating materials were produced as early as the late 1920s in order to cater for companies' needs to protect themselves from the city's relentless noise as well as to diminish the noise produced by the work itself in order to create a soundproof atmosphere inside their offices that was believed to make work more efficient. These materials installed inside the walls and ceilings of high-rise office spaces were quickly transplanted to private spaces so as to cut oneself off from both the city's constant din outside just as much as the noises produced by the neighbors next to, below or above one's apartment cell and thus eventually to heighten the degree of privacy in the middle of roaring city life around. Hence, no matter, whether installed to increase personal comfort in the private space or to make work more efficient as well as to make workers feel supervised all the time at office spaces, the newest technologies, designs, and materials were continually integrated into the building's network in order to inscribe a given action program, be this privacy or efficiency, relaxation or coercion, illusion or compensation into high-rise space and its inhabitants. However, the ways and possibilities for countering or subverting these programs ingrained in ever-smarter buildings, and the options to resist being translated by these programs into docile bodies changed with the very nature and functioning of the materials and technologies installed in the skyscraper.

From the second half of the 20th century onwards, this often meant the integration of automated and computerized technologies; buildings were increasingly made smart in a literal way by being able to sense movements and thus to react and adapt to every or even just to certain individual users. Once more, the skyscraper, as a representative and highly representational space, was at the forefront of this development, both in its residential and corporate function. One of the quintessential innovations of the industrial age, run by and held together by an intricate network of mechanics and industrial materials, by and by became a truly 'smart' structure run on algorithms and by computer technology. Apart from being a representative monument of corporate show-off, another reason for the swift and massive installment of computers in skyscrapers was the fact that these buildings have always been particularly complex systems of various use and service spaces, the latter filled with a myriad of ducts, pipes, wires, and elevator shafts. The higher the building and the larger its volume, the more difficult

and intricate is the task of installing and processing the multitude of these facilities and services which remain largely hidden from the eye of the user but nevertheless prove vital for making the whole building work.⁸⁵

Interconnecting and operationalizing these service networks by way of computer technology promised a better controllability (such as on large boards and monitors in control rooms or nowadays on small interfaces), higher levels of security and comfort as well as greater efficiency when it comes to energy consumption. The installment of surveillance technologies, personalized access, guarded entrances as well as panic rooms (to be fled to in the event of danger) turned the high-rise into an even more effective panopticon (or compensation heterotopia) than it could ever have been imagined in the industrial age of discipline and coercion – all in the name of granting more security to its fearful inhabitants who increasingly retreat to urban heights with growing crime and poverty haunting the streets below (see Graham/Hewitt, “Getting Off the Ground”, 79–81).⁸⁶

In this way, making the skyscraper smart seemed a way to render it less vulnerable to dangers from both outside and inside. While bad weather, thieves, or any other attacks on the building could easily be detected and blocked from entering, smart technologies also helped to make the building’s inside less uncanny with regard to its service systems and the dangers they might represent when failing or getting out of control (floodings, pipe blockages, gas leaks, fires, blackouts) – dangers that all too often became a reality in the early days of the skyscraper, as *Manhattan Transfer* has vividly shown.

Smartening up high-rises with computer technology thus largely happened in an attempt to make living and working in them more secure, comfortable,

85 Although not talking about building automation in a narrow sense, Merrill Schleier has given a detailed account of how office skyscrapers became prime sites for the installment and integration of computers and electronic data-processing systems due to their corporate tenants’ rising demand for storing and analyzing vast amounts of information as efficiently as possible from the 1950s onwards (see Schleier, *Skyscraper Cinema* 253–264).

86 Townsend warns us of the fact that smart cities along with their individual smart buildings “may also amplify a more commonplace kind of violence – that inflicted by poverty – [...] when sensors and surveillance are used to harden borders and wall off the poor from private gated communities” (Townsend 12, see also 280). And Deleuze adds that smart spaces of control “will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers, but with the explosions within shanty towns and ghettos” as “capitalism has retained as a constant the extreme poverty of three quarters of humanity [...]” (Deleuze, “Postscript” 6–7).

efficient, and green. As a consequence, autonomizing and/or interconnecting the high-rise space ever more from or with its immediate environment – the neighboring apartments or offices and the service shafts just as much as the noisy and polluted streets below, the buildings around, and the weather outside – was only possible via integrating ever smarter technologies into the building's fabric:

The heavily serviced building is a closed world in which “architectural” elements coexist uneasily with the “nature” that is embodied in services. The “green” building, which works with the external environment rather than this internal “other”, is less of a self-sufficient microcosm and more like an animal in its reciprocal relationship with the outside world. In more complex buildings, such animal-like strategies require the intervention of some kind of intelligence – a computer-based building-management system. (Bass 33)

In doing so, however, one largely black-boxed behind interfaces and algorithms the very mechanisms and functionalities of central infrastructures that were hitherto transparent to and thus open to intervention and manipulation by the inhabitants themselves. By integrating and black-boxing these facilities, one may, on the one hand, easily regulate and control them via an interface or program them to do so by themselves but, on the other hand, one loses both sight and manual grip of them as well thereby significantly minimizing their degree of basic affordance.⁸⁷ Automated and largely resistant to outward manipulation, smart buildings and their networked infrastructures gain the eerie quality of the living machine, the automaton brought to life, a condition probably even more uncanny than the constantly oozing and leaking building of the industrial era, always in danger of catching fire or being flooded. It is thus that Mike Davis is able to imagine the near-future potentialities of ever-smarter, ever-more autonomous, but also ever-more aggressive skyscrapers:

87 Originally coined by American perceptual psychologist James J. Gibson in the 1960s as a concept to denote what any given environment offers to an individual, the term “affordance” was later taken up by cognitive scientist Donald A. Norman in order to describe an object's [or – for this study's purposes – an entire building's] basic potential for being used or even creatively re- or misused in ways that are either readily perceptible or hidden to the individual actor. It thus allows one to describe the very degree to which an object or building allows for new associations with and new inscriptions by human actors (see J. J. Gibson 125–132, Norman 10–30, 145–149). The more black-boxed a technical object or built structure (such as by way of automation), the smaller its (manual or mechanical) affordance, its ability and potential for new associations with other actors (at least on a manual and mechanical level) and the greater its resistance to getting enrolled in potentially subversive programs of action.

A premier platform for the new surveillance [and other smart] technology will be that anachronism of the nineteenth century: the skyscraper. Tall buildings are becoming increasingly sentient and packed with deadly firepower. [...] The sensory systems of many of Los Angeles's new office towers already include panopticon vision, smell, sensitivity to temperature and humidity, motion detection, and, in a few cases, hearing. Some architects now predict that the day is coming when a building's own artificially intelligent computers will be able to automatically screen and identify its human population, and even respond to their emotional states, especially fear or panic. Without dispatching security personnel, the building itself will be able to manage crises both minor (like ordering street people out of the building or preventing them from using toilets) and major (like trapping burglars in an elevator). (M. Davis 368)

Making buildings smart and indeed sentient in the ways outlined by Davis means handing over more and more agency to them, transferring more and more capacities and jobs normally conducted by human actors to technologies that now effectively run buildings automatically. It is not simply the static grid of gazes, panoptic spaces, and coercion that the clever walker in the (vertical) city always knew to escape and subvert that one faces in these smart buildings but rather a reactive system that smoothly adapts to the movements and characteristics of its 'user', that indeed appears to 'know' its user. All the more flexible and able to react towards human actors, the smart building gains an uncanny agency and intelligence that seems well prepared when it comes to outsmarting the outsmarting tactics of the tricky walker in the city, as championed by Certeau. Every unpermitted 'intruder' to a smart building or anyone misbehaving within it in any possible way has to confront a powerful antagonist (made up of a network of human but increasingly only nonhuman actors, such as algorithms, sensors, and surveillance devices) far more effective than mere human security personnel. Such autonomized smart buildings or, by extension, entire smart cities as "places where information technology is combined with infrastructure, architecture, everyday objects, and even our bodies to address social, economic, and environmental problems" are no longer a mere phantasm but are already taking shape at a growing pace, be it in artificial (largely high-rise) model cities, such as Songdo in South Korea or Masdar in the UAE or in massive digitalization efforts undertaken by longstanding cities (Townsend 15). The horizons of such developments will consist of a complete redefinition of living and working within built space:

This kind of city-scale automation will one day fulfill the potential of building automation. Life in smart cities will be defined by these dynamic, adaptive systems that respond in real time to changing conditions at the very small and large scale simultaneously. They will fulfill the [...] dream of a building that learns from and adapts to us – their moves will be scripted by insights drawn from torrents of sensed data. (Townsend 29)

The very shift from societies relying on mechanic and optical regimes of power to societies based on smart control regimes for exerting power has been convincingly described by Gilles Deleuze in his much-quoted-from 1990 “Postscript on the Societies of Control”. It is here that Deleuze argues that the classical milieus of the disciplinary society outlined by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), those coercive heterotopias of compensation that have so powerfully pervaded the 19th and the first half of the 20th century in the form of schools, factories, offices, barracks, prisons, hospitals, and asylums (all at times realized in or to be imagined in high-rise spaces) have entered into a state of crisis “to the benefit of new forces that were gradually instituted and which accelerated after World War II” and eventually came to have a huge impact on people’s lives during the second half of the 20th century and well beyond (Deleuze, “Postscript” 3).

While the power regimes in the society of disciplines and enclosing milieus were structured grid-like and static, described by Deleuze as “molds, distinct castings,” the society of control works on modulations and thus on a flexible, dynamic power regime one may best imagine as “a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point” (4). While in the age of disciplines, the individual may still slip through the grid or sieve of power, in the age of controls, power smoothly adapts to the individual and reacts to its movements and actions dynamically, thus making it significantly more difficult to escape its grip. In analogy, the “industrial” skyscraper and its action programs inscribed into static materials, spaces, and technologies may be outsmarted and countered more easily than the dynamic, adaptive, and essentially intangible power systems of the code-run “smart” skyscraper. As Deleuze notes “the man of control is undulatory [i.e. wavy], in orbit, in a continuous network” (6).⁸⁸

And he further stresses his point by identifying the machines and technologies these two power regimes rely on:

Types of machines are easily matched with each type of society--not that machines are determining, but because they express those social forms capable of generating them

88 Although Foucault has focused his analysis on the disciplining societies and their panoptic power regimes, he has clearly recognized the “swarming of disciplinary mechanisms” and thus the passage from disciplinary to control-based regimes when he argues that “[w]hile, on the one hand, the disciplinary establishments increase, their mechanisms have a certain tendency to become “de-institutionalized,” to emerge from the closed fortresses in which they once functioned and to circulate in a “free” state; the massive, compact disciplines are broken down into flexible methods of control, which may be transferred and adapted” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 211).

and using them. The old societies of sovereignty made use of simple machines--levers, pulleys, clocks; but the recent disciplinary societies equipped themselves with machines involving energy, with the passive danger of entropy and the active danger of sabotage; the societies of control operate with machines of a third type, computers, whose passive danger is jamming and whose active one is piracy or the introduction of viruses. (6)

While disciplining was founded on mechanical and even electrified machines or even pure architectural designs, controlling relies on computers and their ever-more precise sensoria “that track[...] each person’s position – licit or illicit – and effect[...] a universal modulation” (7). But as Deleuze also remarks, there are specific dangers connected to each of these machines and their power regimes. Whereas the machines of the disciplinary regime may well be sabotaged, manipulated, and “creatively misused” to either the advantage or disadvantage of the individual human actor, those of control regimes face the danger of either system-immanent failures (“jamming”) or outward “infection” and manipulation via hacking. In much the same way, the mechanic machine of the skyscraper may either fail by accident, thus endangering its inhabitants (e.g. by fires), or it may be sabotaged to fail, or its inscribed action programs may be countered, all of which have been the case in *Manhattan Transfer*. While “normal accidents” may also struck the smart skyscraper, active sabotaging or manipulating only seems possible within the cybernetic field, such as by hacking, infecting, or rewriting its code, thereby precluding any manipulation on the purely mechanical level due to its complete black-boxing by way of the algorithm.⁸⁹ What may be grasped from this comparison is, of course, that the dangers of living and working in a smart building, in effect, are in no way smaller than those of inhabiting a purely mechanical one; in a certain sense they may even be greater – despite or even because of their massively enhanced controllability and securitization.

Firstly, due to the smart structure’s interconnecting and networking of virtually all infrastructural systems (electricity, water, gas, temperature, surveillance) any failure – no matter whether induced by a “normal accident” or by hacking – in one of these systems may immediately also affect the other ones, whereas before they functioned more or less independently from each other. Power failures within smart buildings may then, for example, also directly deactivate all surveillance systems or permanently lock or unlock automated doors. Heavily

89 In his influential study of 1984, Charles Perrow has convincingly demonstrated that normal accidents inevitably occur within any kind of complex and tightly coupled technological system – a fact that turns living and working in highly networked structures, such as smart buildings all the more into a calculated risk (see Perrow 62–100, 304–352; Townsend 256–257).

interconnected and networked systems may be swifter and smarter but also more dangerous and contagious when they fail or become infected by a virus.

Secondly, detecting and mending any kind of failure within the smart skyscraper may prove extremely complicated regarding its general opacity as a closed system, a black box that first needs to be freed from its smart shell in order to access the mechanical-material network inside and fix any kind of failure therein. Critics of smart cities and buildings thus agree that the latter are only and truly more comfortable, secure, and greener as compared to their analogue ancestors when they do not fail – which in turn requires them to install extremely high levels of protection against hacking as well as to guarantee highest qualities and continual maintenance when it comes to its materials and technologies – mechanical as well as smart ones (see Townsend 13, 253–255).⁹⁰

Smart technologies have once more spawned the utopic desire to build perfectly comfortable spaces, true heterotopias of illusion independent from and reversing the conditions of their immediate social, moral, and climatic environment outside or rather below. However, the installment of these technologies has often resulted in or at least bears the constant danger of turning these smart spaces into veritable heterotopias of compensation, instead. In fact, all those “countless new devices that record, recognize, influence, and control our movements and behaviors” in order to make ones’ lives more comfortable and secure, may easily turn one into a prisoner of one’s own “starkly capsular spaces of social secession, [...] access-controlled, only partially accessible, increasingly securitized and intensively surveilled and policed” as soon as they face normal accidents or get hacked and manipulated by criminal forces (Townsend 13; Graham/Hewitt, “Getting” 80).

Considering the intricate fusion of architectural space and digital code into an almost impenetrable black box that one encounters in smart buildings – and given the sheer amount and complexity of its technology, in skyscrapers

90 Considering these high standards required to make the smart city a safe and comfortable place, Townsend draws a rather pessimistic picture of the present situation when he argues that “the smart city may come crashing down under its own weight because it is already buggy, brittle, and bugged, and will only become more so. Smart cities are almost guaranteed to be chock full of bugs, [...]. But even when their code is clean, the innards of smart cities will be so complex that so-called normal accidents will be inevitable. The only question will be when smart cities fail, and how much damage they cause when they crash. Layered atop the fragile power grid, already prone to overload during crises and open to sabotage, the communications networks that patch the smart city together are as brittle an infrastructure as we’ve ever had” (Townsend 13).

in particular – one may well refer to its spaces as *coded spaces* or, even more so, as *code/spaces*. Both concepts were introduced by Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge in order to refer to the various degrees to which the functioning of modern everyday spatialities of, for example, transportation, consumption, and home living, is dependent on information technologies. Kitchin and Dodge contend that

Code/space occurs when software and the spatiality of everyday life become mutually constituted, that is produced through one another. Here spatiality is the product of code, and code exists primarily in order to produce a particular spatiality. In other words, a dyadic relationship exists between code and spatiality. [...] the sociospatial production of [such code/spaces] is functionally dependent on code. (Kitchin/Dodge, *Code/Space* 16–17)

Coded spaces, by contrast, refer to “spaces where software makes a difference to the transduction of spatiality but the relationship between code and space is not mutually constituted” (18). As a consequence, whereas a coded space whose functioning may still be granted, although less efficiently when its code fails, a code/space, such as a smart building, faces complete breakdown as soon as its code crashes.

The more networked and interconnected infrastructures are on the basis of software, and the more they are mutually constituted or rather co-productive, the more likely does the entire building’s functioning depend on these technologies and their codes, thus turning it into a vast code/space. This concept appears particularly apt, as it seems to capture the black-boxed nature of a space depending on a code that is effectually shielding off the intricate mechanical network that lies behind it, i.e. its hardware. Rather than being able to get an immediate grip on these analogue substructures, one is left only with the code when desiring to interact with or use that space. Space’s coded nature, its very encapsulation, indeed the effacing of its palpable material-mechanic basis (hardware) is thus paradoxically at the same time a protection (from e.g. mechanical manipulation or unwanted access) and an endangerment (in the form of e.g. internal failures or hacking) of that space.

While the disciplinary regime of the 19th and early 20th centuries still “consisted of an imperfect panopticon with blind spots and fissures that is best described as an oligopticon,” smart technologies “have been employed in an effort to make the systems and apparatus of governance more panoptical in nature – to ensure that citizens are always open to surveillance, regulation, and discipline [...]” (84). Traditional panoptic forms of surveillance, for example, are thus crucially extended by the application of software, such as in systems

of automated management that not only function without human steering but also leave people largely unaware that they are being surveyed or captured. As a consequence, software should be regarded as “a key actant in creating societies of control” and thus also code/spaces that do not so much stir self-discipline in its users (as the disciplinary regime aimed at) but rather actively and immediately disciplines and punishes “ill behaving” or “undesired” users by way of the totality of the panoptic, panacoustic, and sensory matrix predicated on the mutual permeation of code and space (86). With regard to the skyscraper, McNeill concluded already in 2005 – by referring to an early study on the code/spaces of modern air travel by Kitchin and Dodge (2004) – that “[t]here is growing evidence to suggest that tall buildings might be considered as code-space [...], given the complex security, climate and information systems used in regulating these structures [...]” (McNeill 53).

In addition to its infrastructural network of countless pipes, ducts, cables, and wires, the smart skyscraper is, above all, a space enacted and operating on a continuous flow of information, huge amounts of data processed in order to synchronize and regulate the building’s technological facilities and analogue infrastructures. In fact, the code abstracts these mechanical functionalities and material flows of water, gas, air, sewage, and electricity into its very own functions that may be operated or manipulated only via the code.

Sociologist Manuel Castells has meticulously described the shift from a “space of places” (which the skyscraper and city of the industrial age still were) to a “space of flows” as “the fundamental spatial dimension of large-scale information-processing complexes” that was initiated by the increasing introduction of and restructuring according to information technologies in virtually all domains of everyday life (including architecture) during the second half of the past century (Castells, *The Informational City* 170; see also 169–172, 348–353; *The Rise* 453–459). As to Castells’ eminent studies on the information age and network society, the space of places was still “influenced by the social contexts associated with the places of their location” whereas the networked space of flows enacts an abstracted sphere independent of its immediate social or cultural context, its specific place-ness (Castells, *The Informational City* 170). It is thus productive not only of a “placeless space” but also of a “timeless time,” a synchronicity of various time levels (“heterochronies”, Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 6) resulting in an increasing collapse of past, present, and future within global information streams, as well as a syntopology of various global spaces and realities in one code/space (Castells, *The Rise* 249–252). Though different from the way it is enacted as such, the smart skyscraper as a “large-scale information-processing complex” is as much or even more so a heterotopia as the skyscraper of the industrial age.

Ever more elevated or acoustically sealed off from the ground-level place-ness of urban street life, the spaces of the industrial high-rise were already abstracted spaces apt for the realization of heterotopias of all kinds. Yet the smart skyscraper as a networked space of incessant information flows radicalizes that very place- and timelessness by accessing and processing information from any distant time or place it may possibly be connected to, thereby emerging as an ultimate version of Foucault's heterotopias of space (third principle) and time (fourth principle) that may also be defined as a seemingly immaterial space, a digital node or hub in the global information network, largely unaffected by and thus independent from its material components (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 6–7).⁹¹

3.2 Smart Antagonists: Tales of (Losing) Control

As a consequence of the ever-growing mutual permeation of code and spaces as well as objects ('the internet of things'), it should come as a surprise, then, that the second half of the 20th century as well as the early 21st century is massively haunted by a latent fear of intelligent, autonomous machines, which is probably strongest with regard to humanoid robots.⁹² Again and again, novels and films feature artificially intelligent machines taking over control and turning their powers onto their human creators or co-actors. First, these apocalyptic visions were a common trope in the burgeoning field of science fiction literature and film of the 1940s to 60s – from Isaac Asimov's disobedient robots in the *I, Robot* short story collection of 1950 (later inspiring the eponymous 2004 movie) via super-computer HAL rebelling against its human companions by taking control of the spacecraft's smart spaces in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) up to Michael Crichton's frenzied entertainment androids in *Westworld* (1973) or the threat of android replicants in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982, based on Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel). On the one hand, the android threat was envisioned in ever more radicalized terms, such as in the post-apocalyptic scenarios of

91 As Graham and Marvin argue in their seminal study *Splintering Urbanism*, networks "bind spaces together across cities, regions, nations and international boundaries, [...] interconnect (parts of) cities across global time zones and also mediate the multiple connections and disconnections within and between contemporary cities [...]" thus enabling the realization of heterotopias of space and time in structures like the smart skyscraper (Graham/Marvin 11).

92 Humanity's uneasiness regarding its artificial doppelgänger has been termed the Frankenstein complex by Isaac Asimov in his 1950 short story collection *I, Robot*, while Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori has referred to the eerie effect of androids upon humans as Uncanny Valley.

machinic submission of humans in the *Terminator* (1984–2015) and *The Matrix* (1999–2003) movie cycles during the decades to follow. On the other hand, however, as the century progressed and smart spaces and machines (especially in the form of the personal computer) became a lived reality, fiction increasingly diffused into reality and novels and movies no longer had to retreat into a futuristic tomorrow in order to stage these struggles between humans and their intelligent creations or even cybernetic doubles (avatars). As code and space become ever more co-productive of each other, a spatialization of this very struggle is detectable in fiction, with smart buildings (*Die Hard*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Smart House*, *Entrapment*) or cyberspace (*Tron*, *The Matrix*, *eXistenZ*) increasingly appearing as its arenas (see Bukatman 215–227).

As spaces become smarter and thus ever more autonomous, Davis has determined within movies and novels “a new generation of architectural antiheroes as intelligent buildings that alternately battle evil or become its pawns” (M. Davis 368). Given their spectacular monumentality, their dramatic spatiality as well as a tendency to organize their infrastructural complexity by way of smart technologies, skyscrapers have appeared particularly often in the role of such “architectural antiheroes.” Most notorious may be the smart skyscrapers of *Gridiron*, a 1995 novel by British writer Philip Kerr, and two movies called *The Tower* (1985, 1993). When these buildings’ adaptive computer brains get ‘infected’ or simply follow their programs of security or energy recuperation, they start playing out the full range of their infrastructure and facilities (lighting, water, smell, music etc.) against the people trapped inside, virtually terrorizing them on all sensory levels (see Bass 33).⁹³

The transparency skyscrapers have gained on their outside with their shiny glass facades and architectural functionalism may be regarded as proportional to the opacity they have attained by way of their translation into smart black boxes (effectuated by the networking, indeed permeation, of code and space), working on codes that remain hidden and inaccessible to the buildings’ users. Any creative misuse or reconnection, as it has been deemed fundamental for the actions and movements of the walker in the (vertical) city, is foreclosed by regimes of control implemented in ever-smarter, i.e. code-produced buildings and cities. From the late 1940s onwards, computerized technology has entered American office skyscrapers and the cultural fears that accompanied this increased implementation has also been reflected in mainstream cinema from

93 The horror produced by these smart antagonists is dealt with in greater detail in section 3.2.1.2.

early on. John Farrow's *The Big Clock* (1948) has a giant computer-based clock (in the shape of a panoptic tower) rigidly determining the work processes inside a Manhattan International Style office skyscraper (although there was no such edifice in Manhattan in 1948)⁹⁴, while scientists in Walter Lang's *Desk Set* (1957) struggle hard to tame two super computers newly installed inside a broadcasting network's office building that at one point erratically send out pink slips to all employees, thus invoking already then widespread anxieties of white collar personnel being replaced by computers. At least partly in order to counter such popular fears surrounding computerization, America's beneficial ends (if rightly used!) to a broad public in a large number of animated short films, the most popular being *The Information Machine. Creative Man and the Data Processor* produced by Charles and Ray Eames in 1957 (see Schleier, *Skyscraper Cinema* 231–234).

The truly subversive actor seeking to enroll and translate such smartened edifices according to his or her own action programs, it seems, is no longer a clever mechanic or parkour free-runner but increasingly an IT-specialist able to hack the building's software, to rewrite its code, and thus to take over command of its infrastructure and facilities. In fact, the IT geek or hacker, no matter whether among the good or bad forces, has made a recurring as well as increasing appearance in novels and movies of all genres from the 1950s onwards. However, he (they are almost exclusively male characters!) is mostly no more than a character of secondary importance, eventually only assisting the real hero, often even surrendering in front of his screens while the true protagonist still remains a person of great strength, creative ideas, and good nerves; hence, he or she saves the day by fighting mostly analogue struggles against smart adversaries (buildings, robots, androids, hackers etc.). In fact, one gets the impression that in the vast

94 As the plot unfolds, one also learns that the tower's owner, media tycoon Earl Janoth, not only wiretaps certain key employees of his but also grants them hardly any free time, let alone holidays, thus demanding of them to turn into clocks or even computers themselves. When an alleged murderer is spotted in the tower, the building is immediately transformed into an even more fiercely policed high-security compensation heterotopia. Eerily, the tower's security personnel are clothed in uniforms highly reminiscent of Nazi organizations (BDM for women, SS for men) which heighten the viewer's uneasy impression that Janoth's highly surveyed office tower is turning more and more into a concentration camp to be left only after close inspection (selections!) – associations surely intended only three years after the Allied Forces' victory over Nazi Germany. Walking and climbing through this vertical fascist compensation matrix therefore constitutes a deadly risk for the movie's protagonist wrongly suspected as a murderer (see Sanders 120, Schleier, *Skyscraper Cinema* 155–192).

majority of postwar fictional accounts, computer scientists together with their workplaces, vast control centers filled with walls of computers and screens, are only there to sooner or later proclaim that they lost or never had control over the smart monsters they are supposed to be in charge of. Accordingly, Orson Welles has one of the clerks operating a mega-computer in his 1962 Kafka adaptation *The Trial* frankly admit: “Oh, we’re not in charge.”⁹⁵ And the list of movies featuring clueless scientists and IT experts vis-à-vis autonomous or failing smart machines goes on: From Stanley Kubrick’s 1964 *Dr. Strangelove* (The Domsday Machine) via Jean-Luc Godard’s 1965 *Alphaville* (the autocratic electron brain Alpha 60) to George Lucas’ 1971 *THX 1139* (the computer state deity OMM 0910) and Michael Crichton’s 1973 *Westworld* (“We don’t know exactly how [the androids] work”) to *Rollerball* (the ‘liquid’ computer brain erasing data at its own will, 1975) and *Tron* (the megalomaniac Master Control Program, 1982) – everywhere scientist controllers surrender while skill- and forceful heroes more successfully try to overcome and escape these smart machines and the deathly threats they pose.

Because the act of programming and hacking is generally much less spectacular than the jumps and swift escapes of the tricky walker in the city, both novels and movies concerned with the dangers of smart spaces tend to rather rely on ‘conservative’, i.e. analogue – because more action- and suspense-filled – ways of struggling with the smart building, such as entering, escaping or rescuing people from the edifice via the use of extreme physical power, creativity, or mechanical ingenuity – while scientists, potentially able to access the code/space’s software, fail or are too slow in their battle against the smart peril. Another analogue but even more spectacular way of rebelling against smart structures may consist of the partial or even complete destruction and/or artistic hacking of the building. Interestingly, one can see from a study of novels and movies from the second half of the 20th and early 21st century that while smart and cyber-spaces increasingly form the setting for action or are even identical with or under control of the antagonist(s), the ways of moving through, escaping and fighting against them

95 Although famous for its brilliant staging of panoptic spaces, Welles’ expressionist masterpiece also hints to the smart control spaces to come when it has K. and his uncle seek consult from a mega-computer as well as a computer scientist (the latter scene did not make it into the final cut). Given the insertion of these scenes, which are not part of the novel, into the plot of his film adaptation, it seems as if Welles was well aware of what Deleuze would later say about *The Trial* as being a story “placed at the pivotal point between two types of social formation,” i.e. the very transition from the panoptic-disciplinary to the smart control regime of power (Deleuze, “Postscript” 5).

often remain those clever tricks of the creative walker in the city known from the era of analogue mechanic spaces. With the exception of 1980s cyberpunk fiction, hackers or rather hacktivists only lately move center stage and may appear as protagonists in popular culture, such as in the TV series *Mr. Robot* (2015-).⁹⁶

3.2.1 The Skyscraper as Antagonist and Smart Prison in late 20th and early 21st Century American Films and Novels

The very consequences and in fact dangers of the above-outlined translation of the industrial-age skyscraper into a smart-computerized space of flows or code/space along with the changing possibilities for subverting and escaping its control regime will now be investigated in greater depth with regard to a number of selected movies and novels from the 1970s to the early 2000s that are set within or around more or less smart skyscrapers. As a highly complex and often heavily black-boxed network of actors, the skyscraper – and its smart version even more so – is made transparent and thus best studied on the occasion of its failure, of disaster occurring in it or in the event of its misuse by a single evildoer or a group of malevolent actors. This is precisely why most fictional accounts looked at here by and large adhere to the genre of disaster movie and/or crime thriller centering on people entrapped in a built structure that takes on the role of the antagonist and villain. Although fictional, these novels and films are nevertheless firmly rooted in the cultural discourses of their respective time of production. Their basic plotlines of entrapment and manipulation by and within smart buildings are thus variously in accordance with or even intensify certain power relations and cultural sentiments typical of the respective historical situation, thus stressing the fact that neither the smart skyscraper itself nor the texts and films depicting it exist disconnected from the larger material-discursive network of American culture.

With the exception of *Die Hard*, the films I have chosen to look at in this section have generally been little addressed in the academic research. *The Towering Inferno* (1974) has primarily been discussed as a central and prime example of

96 Regarding the minor potential for spectacle in fictional representations of programming and hacking Bukatman has noted that “the hurried and hushed pecking of fingers on keyboards lacks the visual interest of car chases and special effects pyrotechnics [...]” (Bukatman 216). And also Jameson has admitted that smart technologies “make very different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery of the futurist moment [...]” (Jameson 37).

the early 1970s disaster movie cycle and as such evaluated with regard to this genre's specific position in film history as well as its use of star actors (Keane, Britton). Although largely inspired by the former film, action movie classic *Die Hard* (1988) has been awarded significantly more academic attention, especially by gender and masculinity studies-informed surveys of American mainstream cinema (Jeffords, Ph. Gates, Cohen, Abele). Film scholars have also focused on its role as a genre-defining example of 1980s action cinema that triggered a successful series of sequels (Keane, Tasker, Flanagan). Although starring one of Hollywood's rising stars of the time, Sharon Stone, low-production psychological thriller *Scissors* (1991) is relatively unknown and thus almost altogether neglected by academia; the only exception is one article that critically discusses the ridiculing of the movie and Stone's performance in non-academic publications (Feasey).⁹⁷ While larger in production, erotic thriller *Sliver* (1993) also remains a movie only marginally discussed with regard to its gender and surveillance/voyeurism issues (Rutter, Žižek, Kellman, Mellier, Hart).

Most strikingly, however, none of these movies have been thoroughly analyzed concerning their spatial set-ups, namely their being set in and around massive high-rise structures and the influence on and productive role of these spaces, let alone their smart configuration, for their action and characters. Revealingly, the only (however short) considerations of two of these movies, *The Towering Inferno* and *Die Hard*, in an architectural and thus spatial context stem from two architectural critics (Bass, Basar).

By contrast, the trio of novels I address in greater detail after the following section, namely *American Psycho* (1991) by Bret Easton Ellis, *Fight Club* (1996) by Chuck Palahniuk, and *Cosmopolis* (2003) by Don DeLillo as well as – except for the latter one – their respective film adaptations, has been given much critical attention from highly diverse disciplinary and theoretical angles. A brief review

97 In fact, *Scissors* is specifically labeled a “bad movie” and ridiculed in E. Margulies and S. Rebello's 1993 *Bad Movies We Love* (see Margulies/Rebello 138–139, Feasey 178–182). Interestingly, even though Stone is derided here for her stereotypical role as “nudity-friendly vamp” and her generally lacking talent as an actress within an entire chapter, she nevertheless wrote the volume's foreword in which she not only self-mockingly approves of the ridicule but also cleverly justifies her films by calling into question the very distinction of good and bad movies (Margulies/Rebello 138, Feasey 181). Paradoxically, *Scissors* presents her neither in the stereotypical role of the femme fatale vamp nor in that of the dumb blonde; it thus appears that her ambiguous role of an independent, yet sexually not “available” young woman invites disdain and ridicule from the part of a decidedly male critic community.

of the general tendencies within the academic commentary on these works is provided at the beginning of each subchapter devoted to these prominent novel-movie couples.

3.2.1.1 *Cowboys on the Vertical Frontier – The High-Rise Antagonist in the Disaster Action Movies The Towering Inferno (1974) and Die Hard (1988)*

During the 1970s, it did not take apocalyptic scenarios of machine wars and malevolent smart spaces to unsettle Americans. In light of growing economic pains, failures, and political scandals, two of modernity's core virtues that had imbued policies and people especially after the Second World War, namely optimism and a firm belief in the progress of humankind by way of modern technology, seemed to have gone stale in just a few years' time.

And the list of things to worry about was long indeed: Since the mid to late 1960s the American economy was slowing down due to rising energy costs and the emergence of European and Asian competitors on the world market. The oil shocks of 1973 and 1979 brought the economy and public life to the brink of collapse and painfully revealed the Western world's vulnerability regarding energy. Already in 1972, the Club of Rome's report on "the predicament of mankind" had warned the world of the "limits to growth" regarding the scarcity of global resources; boundless growth, the myth underlying both modernity and capitalism, was revealed as an illusion. A seemingly non-winnable and painfully prolonged war in Vietnam became an ever heavier financial and moral burden. As already outlined above, doubts in modernist urban planning and its architectural megalomania, both in terms of the height and expanse of its projects, had multiplied during the 1960s, reaching their symbolic climax in the demolition of the desolate and racially segregated Pruitt-Igoe housing complex in 1972. The young generation and a burgeoning counterculture rejected the ideals and values of modern American life and eagerly adopted the general note of civilizational criticism. Waves of anti-war protests and race riots shook up the country as did racial and sexual minorities' demand of equal rights and were thus among the many factors that unsettled America's 'silent majority.' Looking back on "years that were filled with shocks and tragedy," President Jimmy Carter sounded almost as if he were delivering a homily to a flock of sinners when he bemoaned that "too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption" in his infamous "malaise" speech of 1979 that he did not intend as "a message of happiness or reassurance, but [as] the truth and [...] a warning" to the American people.

Taken together, the economic and political upheavals of the late 1960s and 1970s that brought about a radical shattering of modernity's optimism along with all its high-flying dreams and ideals were more than enough to convince the average American that things were indeed falling apart. The result was a general climate of pessimism and cynicism that was also reflected in the literary and filmic production of the time. The one popular genre which probably best mirrored the apocalyptic feel of everyday life in the U.S. as well as the Americans' lost confidence in modern technology was the early 1970s surge of high-budget disaster movies. Greene and Greene see a clear connection between these phenomena when arguing that:

The 1970s was a time of great political upheaval and resulting cynicism. With a faltering economy, the gas crisis, an inauspicious ending to the Vietnam War, the Church Commission, and the Watergate Scandal, the early seventies were a time of extreme socio-political stress in the United States. Coinciding with these "real world" events, a genre known as "disaster" films became prevalent in American cinema with "a veritable 'swarm' of 53 disaster movies" being released during this time (Keane 19). [...] [These] films provide insight into the social and political climates of the period in which the films were created, namely the early to mid 1970's. (Greene/Greene 3, quoting from Keane 19, see also 46)

If one only focuses on the most prominent examples of the genre, it indeed appears striking that the sites of the disasters these films depict typically comprise the modern technological icons of the early to mid 20th century: airplanes and airports in *Airport* (1970), a huge ocean liner in *The Poseidon Adventure* (1973) and – probably most symbolic of all these dramatic spaces – the skyscraper or even the entire high-rise city in *The Towering Inferno* (1974) and *Earthquake* (1974).

All of these immensely successful movies may be labeled "network narratives" as they consist of many intertwined plotlines as well as an often confusingly vast number of characters all variously involved in and struggling to escape and survive disasters ranging from hijacked airplanes, blizzard-struck airports, capsized ships, burning skyscrapers, and devastated cityscapes (see Bordwell 189–191). The complicated and networked structure of these narratives then finds its spatial complement in the multitude and complexity of spaces and milieus created by these modern super-structures on, above, and below the earth and sea. While nowadays prime examples of software-run code/spaces, these disaster sites – airports, planes, ocean liners, and super-tall skyscrapers – form the movies' central settings only insofar as their main action remains centered around these structures' specific spatial set-up as well as their mechanical and material components. Although smart technologies may already have been

integrated in their workings and indeed are visible in the movies, these modern super-structures seem to turn into monstrous antagonists not primarily because of their smart powers but rather as a consequence of the plain immensity of their materials as well as their spatial complexity – even though smart processes may be involved. As already mentioned in the previous subchapter, this is primarily due to the fact that these action-spectacle movies favor spectacular human struggles with graspable materials, technologies, and natural forces over comparably uneventful programming in front of computer screens and control boards. At times, certain ‘movements’ of the disaster-struck structure may be initiated by smart and automated processes, yet the causes for the disasters’ outbreak in these films are never failures or crashes of software and smart technologies but are always rooted in material and constructional flaws, human error or natural forces (storms, blizzards, or earthquakes).

The Towering Inferno (1974)

Outstanding for its suspenseful staging of high-rise spaces and their transformation in the face of disaster, *The Towering Inferno* (1974) henceforth forms the center of my analysis. Lauded for its compelling special effects and a cast of popular screen stars, such as Paul Newman, Steve McQueen, Faye Dunaway, and Fred Astaire, to name but the most prominent ones, *The Towering Inferno* is deemed by many critics the most accomplished release of the early 1970s disaster movie cycle. Loosely based on the novels *The Tower* (1973) by Richard Martin Stern and *The Glass Inferno* (1974) by Frank M. Robinson and Thomas N. Scortia, the film was directed by British adventure movie specialist John Guillermin but produced by American “master of disaster” Irwin Allen, famed for producing and directing many of the most well-known and commercially successful disaster movies of the 1960s and 70s (see Kaplan 3).

The movie takes place almost exclusively within the Glass Tower, the world’s newly erected highest and most advanced skyscraper in San Francisco, and follows a range of characters from the architect and the builder to various people working and living in the building as well as a number of firefighters when on the day of its dedication it catches fire due to flawed wiring, inexorably turning into a deadly firetrap. The fictional Glass Tower is an edifice that appears transgressive in many ways. At 550 meters and 138 stories, it is an odd apparition on the San Francisco skyline, truly dwarfing the surrounding cityscape including such iconic landmarks as the Golden Gate Bridge or the sharply pointed Transamerica Pyramid (1969–72). Although a sleek column in form, the Glass Tower is effectively a vertical city housing office space

from the first to the 80th story and residential space from the 81st floor up to its top and even has a heliport on its roof. And it is here, right on its top, that the two men behind the tower, its architect Doug Roberts, arriving via helicopter, and its builder and financier James Duncan, awaiting him at the heliport, meet on the morning of the tower's dedication. Imbued by their joint work on a range of superlative projects, Duncan informs the architect of his high-rising plans for building still more glass towers and even redesigning whole cities across the country: "You design them, I build them." Duncan is thus early on introduced as the prototypically megalomaniac modern urban planner who seems to fear no limits when it comes to the height and size of his projects, thereby revealing himself as a Babylonian builder challenging divine retribution, not knowing how fast it will actually come. Clearly suspicious of Duncan's Babylonian dreams and desiring to give up on his job for the sake of retreating to the countryside, Roberts musingly accuses his friend and partner of suffering from an "edifice complex." After this ominous opening conversation, the two men withdraw to their respective offices and studios also housed inside the tower.

As may be seen in the case of Roberts' office and that of the tower's Public Relations Officer Dan Bigelow, the tower's spaces flexibly transgress the border between office and residential function, public and private, compensation heterotopia and illusion heterotopia. It is thus that both Roberts and Bigelow may easily slip from the disciplinary set-ups of their open-plan offices and studios into private refuges for sexual encounters with their girlfriends. Considering the ensuing disastrous 'punishment' these 'transgressors' face (especially Dan Bigelow and his secretary-mistress Lorrie), *TTI* and other disaster movies share something of the same morally rigid transgression-punishment logic of mainstream American horror movies.⁹⁸

Apart from its vast spaces used and inhabited by people, the Glass Tower consists of and indeed depends on a vast network of service infrastructures, such as elevators and airshafts, ducts, cables, wires, pipes, and water tanks. Although not a code/space run on software, the tower is, nevertheless, an edifice

98 In fact, these lovers' intimate retreats are not the only moral transgressions within the illusion heterotopia of the tower: A conman (Fred Astaire) tries to woo wealthy single women at the dedication party, while Duncan and Simmons have cut costs on the building's wiring and thus subject everyone inside the tower to unknown dangers. Bass may thus conclude that "the Tower's precarious over-achievement, and the irresponsibility of opening it with a glitzy gala before it is even ready, are elements of a hubris that both invites and counterpoints the disaster which ensues" (Bass 26).

of state-of-the-art regulatory technologies whose brain sits in a massive control room complete with banks of computers, boards, and surveillance screens monitoring any kind of public and service space. It is right here, on one of its surveillance monitors, that the security staff first take notice of a small fire in a storage room on the 81st floor caused by an electrical short. A computer is asked for further information and it only knows to answer: "Heat factor critical..." While its capture by the computer and surveillance screens first make the fire seem small and controllable, it soon becomes obvious that the control room's size and technological inflation rather serves the psychological effects of reassurance than actually providing regulatory or securitizing powers in the case of real danger.

And the danger multiplies: Strangely enough, the automatic water sprinklers are not set in motion by the fire and smoke. Then, a generator in the control room overheats; soon technical malfunctions occur everywhere in the building and the security system is set out of function, thus allowing no further fire detection. Architect Roberts is informed and tries to fix the overheated generator by opening its black box (he is also a handy mechanic!), only to reveal a burnt-down wire. Infuriated, he confronts Duncan with the obvious wiring problem and bit-by-bit learns that there have been serious cost-cuts with regard to the wiring's quality undertaken by the building's electrical engineer Roger Simmons who happens to be Duncan's son-in-law and subcontractor. Only later does Simmons reveal that Duncan has forced him to do so (see Greene/Greene 3, 2). Because the building is still in accord with government code and a range of high-rank guests invited, Duncan dismisses Doug's concerns as false hysteria and wishes to have the dedication ceremony take place as planned.

While further investigating the building's sloppy wiring, Roberts comes to realize the problem's full range: Government code aside, a wiring that is not of the highest standards will not withstand the voltage inside a building of that size and complexity for too long. If the wiring and thus an infrastructural network running through the whole building and keeping so many of the building's vital functionalities (elevators, sprinklers etc.) alive, is flawed and producing short circuits in a row, indeed the whole system and everyone living and working inside is in permanent danger. But these miles of wires are far too deeply imbedded, far too entangled with the building's entire fabric, in order to fix the problem quickly. In fact, fixing it would require dismantling the whole tower. For the time being, the wires and thus the building that they are black-boxed into may act out uncontrollably at any moment. Basar has well described such uneasy surfacing of "the guts of architecture" (its infrastructural or material reality) as a Freudian return of the repressed:

Speaking of wiring, one of the traits of architecture depicted in the cultural imagination is that it tends to reveal itself most vividly at the moment of failure. [...] It may stand stridently, a cathedral to architectural hubris made of steel and glass, but its destruction is down to a few, tiny electrical switches that no one – neither the public nor the client – sees. [...] So, one way or another, shoddy electrics, poor plumbing or bad faith always returns from the (temporarily) repressed to wreak trauma, havoc and destruction. It's just a matter of time. And delay. (Basar 12)

What is always there, hidden behind walls, floors, and ceilings (and what should have remained hidden there) is now painfully coming to the surface. What should be a smoothly functioning “background anatomy [...] work[ing] silently, assiduously, and subjugated to our needs” is now brought to the fore threatening to hurt or even kill the ones it was supposed to serve (Basar 13).⁹⁹

As the fire slowly spreads, Duncan attends his tower's festive dedication aside the city's mayor and Senator Gary Parker, from whom he seeks to solicit further support for his ambitious projects. Before leading his guests up to the elegant Promenade Room at the building's top for a lavish party, he has ordered all exterior lights of the tower to be put on in order to transform it into a spectacularly gleaming beam of light. This, however, fully overcharges the building's brittle wiring network and causes more short circuits that subsequently set off fires in many more spots of the tower. Minute by minute, the tower thus evolves into a giant monster leashing out uncontrollably without the knowledge of most guests and residents.

Meanwhile Roberts – driven by the responsibility he feels for the building and its inhabitants – as well as various men from the security staff try to get the fire under control. When the first rooms are opened, staff men are badly injured by insidious backdraft explosions; they summon the help of the San Francisco Fire Department which immediately prepares for a massive scale operation, given the towers enormous height and number of stories. From the moment they first meet, Roberts and Fire Chief Mike O'Halloran (played by the two top-billing

99 As the workings of smart code/spaces are intricately connected to and dependent on the building's energy system but also similarly branched and embedded into every tiny bit of architecture, the failure and outranging of the electrical wire infrastructure in *TTT's* Glass Tower is a good example of what sort of disaster a failing or infected code/space, its havoc virally spreading through all interconnected systems while manually unstoppable, might tower up to. While already well familiar from the skyscraper's early days (such as seen in *Manhattan Transfer*), fires or other disasters do therefore gain a new and – paradoxically – more threatening quality the more technologically advanced and interconnected, in fact the smarter the buildings are that they occur in.

stars of the movie, Paul Newman and Steve McQueen) know that they have to join forces and collaborate closely in order to get the towering disaster back under control. Roberts immediately provides construction and floor plans of the tower and helps the Chief gain a rough overview of the building's spatial structure. And it appears clear to everyone that fighting the blaze and evacuating the tower will not be a matter of smart computing from within control rooms but rather a strenuous enterprise of pure physical strength, mechanical skill, and creative imagination.

At this state of events, the extreme parallelism typical of skyscraper life could not be more drastically rendered visible: While honorary guests and residents celebrate in the Promenade Room, the firefighters struggle to keep the inferno at bay on several stories. At the same time, Dan Bigelow and his secretary pay their secret retreat for lovemaking with their deaths in the blazing hell of the tower's administrative office floor. Moreover, the dramatic qualities of the skyscraper setting become terribly apparent in this scene: Whereas the complexity and vastness of the structure allow for a large number of separate milieus affected to different degrees by the disaster (thus building up the suspense), the extremely narrow space of the skyscraper surrounded by plunging abysses all around turn the very disaster occurring in the stories below into a potentially deadly entrapment, leaving one, as in the case of the two trapped lovers, only with the alternatives of either breaking through and/or surrendering to the peril inside (Bigelow) or jumping to one's death (Lorrie).

Whereas the majority of the firefighters are tied to the job of extinguishing the inferno, others, including Roberts and Security Chief Harry Jernigan, try to evacuate the apartments on the tower's upper stories. It is in one smoke-filled apartment that they are actually able to rescue two near-suffocated children. With the majority of spaces blocked by walls of fire and smoke, the escapers are increasingly restricted to the building's service spaces – or what is left of them after having exploded, collapsed, or melted down. They have to open the many firmly sealed-off technological black boxes of the tower's elevator shafts, airshafts, staircases, or water tanks hidden behind walls and ceilings and reuse them in order to make their way up and down the “upright labyrinth” as well as to save people and extinguish the inferno, thereby redefining these spaces' usual action programs (Whissel 24).

It is thus that Roberts and the rescued children have to climb down a stair-rail deformed into a strange kind of metal vine dangling over the chasm of a collapsed stairway. Later, the architect has to crawl through an airshaft in order to reach the Promenade Room, while two firefighters blast a blocked door open for the children to join the now terrified party crowd trapped on the tower's top

as all systems, including the elevators, have stopped operating due to the master generator's ultimate failure. Trapped in one of the elevators halted the moment of the power failure, Chief O'Halloran and three of his men have to climb out of the car and rope down the elevator shaft, thus redefining this dangerous tube as a space of non-electrical transport.

And the technical ingenuity of O'Halloran and Roberts is put to even greater challenges when it comes to rescuing the band of people stuck in the Promenade Room. As a helicopter rescue via the tower's roof heliport fails due to the strong winds up there, the Fire Chief has to devise another strategy which involves redefining the Glass Tower's larger environment. A rope is stretched from the Promenade Room to an adjacent skyscraper, the Peerless Building, and a breeches buoy is hung onto the rope by way of which the entrapped people are pulled one after the other from one building to the other and thus rescued. However brilliant this creative redefining and reassembling of objects and buildings may be, it would take hours for everyone trapped to be rescued this way. With the inferno quickly approaching the tower's top floors, it would be too late for most of the people to be saved.

Roberts, for his part, manages to set one of the exterior panorama elevators in motion by connecting a gravity brake to it. As the energy will only suffice for one ride to the ground, the remaining women and children are chosen as passengers. On its way down, however, the elevator is hit by a backdraft explosion and left hanging on a single cable. O'Halloran reacts quickly and is ready to take the risk of being taken to the elevator gondola by a helicopter, equipped with nothing but a tool kit. Up there, he succeeds in chaining the gondola to the helicopter which is thus able to heave it safely to the ground. Once more, a technological black box (the elevator car) has been redefined and creatively disassociated from the perilous skyscraper network and newly associated with the network of air travel for the sake of saving its load of occupants.

Only granted a few moments of rest, O'Halloran is ordered to undertake the next dangerous mission. A structural engineer has devised a plan for one final attempt to rescue the men trapped on top before a relentlessly nearing blaze consumes them. Blasting the tower's water tanks just below its roof will set free a large enough mass of water to extinguish all fires below. Although not knowing whether he will survive that enterprise along with the people trapped above, the Fire Chief takes up the responsibility and is once again carried up to the roof by a helicopter. Up there, Roberts joins him, helping him to place the explosives on the tanks ("I know where to put them and you know how"). Afterwards, they hurry down and tie themselves firmly to columns and rails before the tanks are blown up and a massive load of water floods the Promenade Room, instantly

transforming the entire tower into a giant water fountain. While some men get carried out of the building with the floods, the majority of them, including Roberts, O'Halloran, and a rueful Duncan, survive.

As the survivors gather in the devastated tower's lobby, the whole scale of the disaster becomes apparent. Having dismissed danger for too long and ordered the disastrous cost-cuts in the tower's wiring, Duncan is ultimately responsible for the disaster. Now bemoaning the deaths of, among others, his son-in-law and the Senator, he becomes repentant. Having challenged God and the forces of nature with his Babylonian edifice, he prays to God that he may forgive him his hubris and prevent him from challenging Him again with his excessive projects: "All I can do now is pray to God that I can stop this from ever happening again." In this sense, it seems that the hubristic and the guilty are acquitted, purged by the flaming purgatory from their sins in order to "survive[...] exactly so that [they] can go on to build a better, safer world" (Keane 41).¹⁰⁰

Irate over architects' and builders' hubris of erecting ever-taller "firetraps," it is Chief O'Halloran who raises the voice of reason and eventually also proposes an agenda for building "a better, safer world": "You know we were lucky tonight; the body count is less than 200. You know one of these days you're gonna kill 10,000 in one of these firetraps. And I'm gonna keep eating smoke and bringing out bodies until somebody asks us how to build them." Directed at Roberts, the Chief's proposal for future collaboration on the design and safety of buildings is taken up eagerly by the exhausted and repentant architect. In the end, it may be a logical consequence of their by and large successful and, above all, cool collaboration within the Glass Tower on that night.¹⁰¹ Both the tower's evacuation and

100 Joe Dante's comedy horror movie *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* (1990) stages a similar scene of repentance in the aftermath of high-rise disaster: While Clamp Center, "the most advanced" fully automated and controllable smart skyscraper in America, is already plagued by constant power failures, malfunctions, and other inherent flaws, it is literally wrecked when a horde of gremlins (themselves a metaphor for the high-rise code/space's inevitable bugs) multiplies within and subsequently takes over the entire building. It is only after the evil monsters are defeated in the end, that the by now ruined tower's owner, reckless real estate developer-billionaire Daniel Clamp (a more-than-obvious caricature of Donald Trump) is able to admit to himself that his building "wasn't a place for people anyway." Turning away from further high-rise developments with "talking elevators," he rather seems to be converted into a Mumford-like apostle of the "traditional community" and its realization in low-rise garden city neighborhoods at the movie's end (see Sanders 130–131).

101 Considering the calm and reassuring way that both Newman and McQueen guide their characters and thus also the audience through a succession of extremely

the final extinction of the inferno were predicated on connecting and mutually complementing their respective know-how on and experience with architecture, mechanics, and security issues, the fusion of abstract knowledge and practical experience. Establishing new networks of knowledge and experience by associating as many specialized actors (also technological ones like helicopters, beeches buoys etc.), thus the movie suggests, offers a way to prevent and deal with crises more effectively, thereby assuring people of a safer future.¹⁰² And maybe it is the advantage of network narratives such as *TTI* and many other disaster movies that they invite association between and translations of a vast numbers of characters who may assemble their various forces, know-how, and experiences into more stable actant-networks in order to overcome peril more effectively.

Especially for Roberts, this disaster has not only been a lesson but also a transformative event: Starting out as the god-like, helicopter-riding architect, Roberts works and lives in the abstract place of his plans and buildings. Going through the material hell of his uncontrolled, un-black-boxed building, however, he is forced to turn into what Chief O'Halloran and his men have always had to be: a practitioner of space, a trickster capable of flexible and creative maneuvers and thus a true walker and climber in the vertical city, to stay in Certeau's terminology, who knows about the practical use, the mutability (i.e. affordance) and dangers of the tower's hidden service spaces and technologies.

In this sense, the movie's two heroes (along with the other firefighters) emerge as the cowboys on the vertical urban frontier.¹⁰³ They stay cool and are prepared

dangerous situations, Keane has rightfully remarked that "these two are the kings of cool united in a film full of heat. [...] Newman and McQueen have icy, piercing, steely stares, and only they can face up to the flaming disaster ahead" (Keane 40). Also note how the blue of the sea during the initial helicopter ride and the blue background to the closing credits correspond to the reassuring blue within the eyes of the two lead actors and thus safely frame this 'hot' movie.

- 102 As *TTI*'s producer Irwin Allen has remarked, the movie has in fact led to stricter legislation for skyscrapers' safety and construction regulations: "In eleven countries throughout the world where the picture has been shown, legislation is undergoing a rethinking to try to put an end to this suicidal nonsense of people living and working in fire traps," thus turning *TTI* retrospectively into a "message movie" (Allen quoted in Bass 27).
- 103 Indeed, architect Roberts seems to spend most of his time living as a cowboy on the natural frontier of Montana "wrestling with grizzlies" and even desires to retreat there for good, while modern-day cowboy O'Halloran – wearing his fireman's helmet like a cowboy hat – demonstrates that one may as well find one's frontier within the vertical cities of urban America, wrestling with fire and buildings. In fact, both Newman and McQueen were already known for impersonating heroic cowboy characters in earlier films.

to take on any kind of disaster because they know what is behind the black boxes of modern civilization and they possess both the physical strength and creative ingenuity to (re)associate with any kind of actor (human, mechanical, or technological) for the sake of rescuing their and others lives. They (and not IT experts) are the reassuring prototypes of the 'home front hero' in a decade that knows how fast disaster can strike at home, in the middle of its most sophisticated and technologically advanced urban centers. If responsible for these disasters (Roberts) or not (O'Halloran), they are willing and ready to take responsibility and risk their own lives for the rescue of the helpless. Physically steeled, mechanically skilled, and creatively ingenious, they are the ones that America can rely on in times of crisis. This is the reassuring message of the *The Towering Inferno*.

Greene and Greene have argued that the reassuring message of early disaster movies like *The Towering Inferno* is after all one that stabilizes 'the system' (meaning American culture and capitalism) as they present its main characters, all of them being representatives of state authorities, government, or business and thus of 'the system', as capable and reliable managers of crisis (Greene/Greene 3, 2). Yet, as the flaws and perpetrators causing disaster come from within the system as well (e.g. a capitalist pursuit of profit), these movies indeed, as I would argue, motivate their audiences to question and criticize this said system. At the end of *TTI*, it is Roberts and thus one of the reassuring characters himself who invites such criticism when he ponders the future of his wrecked tower: "I don't know. Maybe they just ought to leave it the way it is: a kind of shrine to all the bullshit in the world," thereby alluding to at least "two aspects of the 'bullshit' involved in its creation: the corruption (nepotism and penny pinching by the developer) which blighted the building and caused the conflagration, and the ignorance of architects and legislators about the potential dangers of tall buildings" (Bass 27).

Apart from this, Greene and Greene fail in their argument as they appear to black-box too great a heterogeneity of actors under the label of "the system" (government, authorities, business), thereby ignoring the fact that individual actors that make up institutions may always follow different and indeed contradictory action programs to what they are officially 'programmed' to do. Not a structure built according to just one program, the Glass Tower (just as any building) is an intricate network made up of a range of actors, human and non-human, all mutually or contradictory defining the building's shape, structure, and fate. Along these lines, *TTI*'s Glass Tower is, however, not so much a symbol of hubris because of its excessive height and lavish design but rather because the

builders' hubris of capitalist greed was made durable in the form of brittle and thus dangerous wiring.

Die Hard (1988)

Regarding their massive production budgets, all-star casts, and special effects, the films of the early 1970s disaster movie cycle in many ways proved to be the blueprint for 1980s big-budget action-adventure blockbuster cinema appealing to a mass audience (Keane 48). In this respect, film critics like Andrew Britton argued that *The Towering Inferno* and the blockbuster disaster movie cycle it was part of marked the beginning of the end of 1970s alternative New Hollywood cinema (Britton 3–4). Looked at from today, however, early 1970s disaster movies seem however far removed from 1980s blockbuster cinema; in fact, they appear to share more with such classic New Hollywood network narratives as epitomized by Robert Altman's movies than with 1980s mainstream action cinema whose characters and general atmosphere have little in common with the pessimism and civilizational criticism pervading 1970s cinema (disaster movies included) but rather seem marked by ever witty-optimistic heroes and the Reagan years' "prevailing mood of relief and reinvigorated strengths" (Keane 46–47).

Precisely because it shares so many similarities on the structural level of plot and setting with *The Towering Inferno*, the ensuing close analysis of John McTiernan's 1988 action disaster classic *Die Hard* will elucidate the ways in which the basic narrative of the "cowboy on the vertical frontier" has been successfully transferred to another historical and discursive setting. Given the fact that *Die Hard's* literary template, Roderick Thorp's *Nothing Lasts Forever* (1979) was directly inspired by *The Towering Inferno*, it should come as no surprise that its film adaptation of 1988 shares a lot of details or may even consciously refer to it when it comes to basic elements of its plot (see Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies* 61).

New York cop John McClane (Bruce Willis) comes to Los Angeles for Christmas in hope of reuniting with his estranged wife Holly (Bonnie Bedelia) and kids. When he attends the Christmas party of his wife's company at the super-sophisticated Nakatomi Tower, the building is seized by a group of terrorists who hold all partygoers hostage on one of the tower's middle floors, thus replacing *TIT's* fire blaze as the main source of disaster. While the terrorists try to steal the company boss's 640 million dollar bearer bonds from the tower's electronic vault, McClane escapes into the building's service spaces and starts battling the intruders from therein. More obstructed than aided by the local police's and

FBI's rescue attempts, McClane – like *TTI*'s architect and fire chief – fights his way up and down the skyscraper by, among other things, crawling through airshafts, climbing up elevator wells, and swinging along on a fire hose, until he has killed every single terrorist and thus saved the day. Explicitly quoting from *TTI*, the movie's fierce battle for the tower involves such spectacular acts as a failed helicopter rescue and the blowing up of the building's top. And just like the entrapped residents of *TTI*'s Glass Tower, McClane has to “survive the building itself” while recurrently confronted with its spatial extremes on his quest for peace and justice (Keane 56).

Moreover, *Die Hard*'s entire action is also set in and crucially shaped by the extreme and highly dramatic spatial structure of a high-rise, thus building much of its suspense on parallel events taking place in various spaces within the same tower: McClane roaming the service spaces, the terrorists and hostages on the middle floor, the police and FBI at the tower's foot, and Argyle, McClane's hired limousine chauffeur, waiting in the underground garage. Similarly, the movie's spectacle is largely based on the extremity of the skyscraper's “spaces whose vertiginous vertical drops, extensive horizontals, and mechanical contraptions offer an elastic topography for cinematic action” (Bass 30).

Yet as opposed to *TTI*, *Die Hard* is set in a fully-fledged smart skyscraper. In fact, the Nakatomi Tower, actually being the solidly postmodern Fox Plaza (1985–87) in Century City¹⁰⁴, may well be regarded as an advanced code/space, especially when it comes to its security facilities. Apart from a maximum security electronic vault protecting Nakatomi executive Joseph Takagi's assets, it is further equipped with exhaustive video surveillance turning every traditional form of ‘analogue’ intrusion, let alone robbery from the building into a physical impossibility. Yet the terrorists seem to know exactly what kind of edifice they are dealing with and thus appear well prepared for their grand coup. Indeed, the German terrorist group, led by criminal mastermind Hans Gruber (Alan Rickman), is not only armed with high-end weaponry and explosives but also includes an IT specialist, whose only task is to hack into and open Takagi's smart high-security vault bearing the desired bearer bonds. These high-tech terrorists

104 As may already be guessed from its name, the Fox Plaza houses the headquarters of *Die Hard*'s production company 20th Century Fox that thus self-referentially turned its corporate home into a movie set. As if this would not be enough symbolism for one building, the Fox Plaza also housed former President Reagan's office for some years after he left office, as though the actor-President deliberately chose as his headquarters the architectural hero of one of the movies that probably best epitomized the cultural-political ideology of his presidency.

perform a hostile takeover of the tower in smart-age style: With a minimum of bloodshed and use of weapons (killing only the guards at ground level) they enter the building and immediately start reprogramming its smart spaces for their own uses.¹⁰⁵ While IT-specialist Theo seals the tower off from the outside (shutting doors and gates, powering off the elevators, cutting all telephone lines) and goes about hacking the passwords to all seven locks on Takagi's vault, Gruber fails to press the final code from the executive and thus shoots him cold-bloodedly. However, he only does so because he rightly anticipates the FBI to later besiege the tower and shut off the building's power, thereby unknowingly opening the vault's final lock.

Considering the terrorists' smooth takeover and operation by and of the building's smart and service infrastructures, one may well draw on the body metaphor employed by Bass, however falsely, in order to describe McClane's liberation of the tower from the terrorists' grip. Rather, I would like to reformulate Bass's statement in order to capture the terrorists' smart seizure as opposed to *TTT's* analogue inferno's takeover of the tower: "If the building can be conceived of as a body, then the film depicts the workings of [an infection or intoxication] rather than the [infliction] of wounds," such as *TTT's* blazing inferno does to the Glass Tower (Bass 30). In fact, such smooth kind of smart takeover as performed by Gruber and his accomplices in *Die Hard* gives us a good impression of how markedly non-physical and action-less crime and war may be conducted within smart spaces – were it not for John McClane, the fearless cop who single-handedly manages to re-analogize the struggle for the Nakatomi Tower into an extremely explosive and bloody action spectacle.

As McClane changes clothes in his wife's office, he is not present when the terrorists crash the party and take hostages and so is able to slip away unnoticed. In order to circumvent detection via the building's smart technologies seized by the terrorists, he retreats to the largely forgotten service spaces and uncompleted floors not (yet) under surveillance. As a consequence, much of "*Die Hard's* plot is worked out almost entirely within [the] alternative topography" of such non-spaces as elevator wells, airshafts, construction sites, and machine rooms (Bass 30, see also Abele 37). And precisely because that alternative service topography is by and large out of the building's smart technologies' reach, *Die Hard* eventually turns into a screen orgy of extremely material and physical action.

105 Keane has appropriately described Gruber's gang as "going about their business with military precision and technological know-how, in effect using the technological advances of the [smart] building to their advantage" (Keane 53).

Only here is McClane, increasingly stripped down to the bare physicality of his hard body¹⁰⁶, able to play out his physical strength and practical ingenuity against the seemingly boundless power of his technologically advantaged opponents and its reprogrammed and thus probably most potent ally, the smart building itself. Yet the tower is not a fully smart structure and the more McClane manages to draw the action into its non-smart, analogue spaces, its services and infrastructures, the higher is his chance of defeating his overly powerful enemies. Only by thus ‘rematerializing’ the building, by moving along and creatively redefining, i.e. inscribing new programs into the tower’s various spaces, facilities, and technologies can he wrest the building from the terrorists’ control. In a telling scene, McClane battles Gruber and Karl within an empty cube farm interior, their continuous gunfire shattering all computers and smart office facilities around to the bare materiality of tiny bits and splinters.¹⁰⁷

Seizing a gun and a radio device from one of the terrorists he manages to kill, McClane reveals himself to Gruber and henceforth imposes an analogue cat-and-mouse game on him. Greatly underrating the powers of that single maverick roaming the building, Gruber sends out one of his henchman after another in order to find and eliminate McClane. However, confronted with only one of them at a time, the lone cop is able to overwhelm them all – thanks to both his bodily strength and clever use of the building’s non-coded space. The weapons and explosives he may thus seize from them turn into tools for his prolonged struggle against the building and its evil controllers. While using the radio device to inform the police of the tower’s terrorist seizure as well as to provoke and misguide Gruber about his whereabouts, he throws out one of the terrorist’s corpses from a tower window in order to alarm a passing police car. Moreover, the guns and other weaponry are key to winning out an array of shootouts with the criminals and the C-4 explosives stolen from them is later dropped down

106 Jeffords has determined the ultra-muscular “hard body” – in certain sense a super sign of the Reagan years’ resurgence of national strength – as the defining feature of 1980s Hollywood action heroes. She concludes that “what determines a hero [in 1980s action cinema] is his possession of a hard body. Though other characters may be quick-witted, charming, experienced, or clever, without the hard body to go with it, they cannot be heroes” (Jeffords 53). The same is true for John McClane.

107 Tasker stresses McClane’s “intuitive understanding of space” (Tasker, *Hollywood Action* 149) – an understanding that Flanagan rates as fundamental to his ultimate success when he argues that “McClane evades capture by achieving an instinctive, intimate understanding of the layout of the building, using its secondary structures (access tunnels, air vents) to move around in” (Flanagan 114).

an elevator shaft by McClane, the explosion killing two of the terrorists who used heavy anti-tank weaponry against a SWAT armored car that unsuccessfully attempted to storm the building. But it is not only weapons, explosives, and elaborate technology that McClane creatively reuses against the seemingly advantaged terrorist gang. As Tasker rightly argues, McClane “achieves extraordinary feats by using what comes to hand: parcel tape to strap a handgun to his back, a fire hose round his waist to leap from the burning roof, strapping explosives to a computer monitor and dispatching them down an elevator shaft” (Tasker, *Hollywood Action* 147). One may thus follow Abele when she stresses “his ability to improvise” and further argues that “John [McClane] does not succeed on his own, but relies on others throughout the film” (Abele 39). However, while Abele restricts that reliance only to human actors, such as the LAPD cop Al Powell with whom he communicates via the radio device or Argyle, the limo driver waiting in the tower’s garage and later beating down one of the terrorists, I would extend the circle of McClane’s aids to the material world and thus all the spaces, technologies, and objects he relates to and relies on in his struggle with the enemy.¹⁰⁸

It is thus essential to his success that he is continually able to break up or look behind the smooth black boxes of the smart tower’s spaces in order to reveal and then connect with the swarm of actors thus set free, such as when he opens up and then later climbs and crawls through elevator and air shafts, thereby redefining their original action programs. By opening up these black-boxed smart spaces and facilities of the tower and connecting to them in new creative ways, McClane makes clever use of spaces and materials in order to outwit and eliminate the terrorists one after another but also greatly relies on his absurdly inexhaustible strengths provided by his increasingly stained and wounded hard body. Not unlike *TTI*’s restless heroes Roberts and O’Halloran battling the inferno, McClane thus emerges as a clever but also physically strong “walker and climber in the vertical city,” partly a descendant from the responsible American everyman heroes of 1970s disaster movies and partly heir to 1980s hard body action heroes, as most famously impersonated by Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger (see Jeffords 24–63, Ph. Gates 139).

108 Generally, I would argue that Abele vastly overrates McClane’s dependence on other human actors, as for the most part he struggles on his own and has to kill every terrorist by his own hands. In fact, in the ever-prolonged battle he has virtually no one else to rely on but his hard body and his creative cleverness. Compared to his own effort, the assistance of Al and Argyle as well as that of his wife is all but marginal (Abele 37, 39–42).

Yet there is also another American archetype that McClane's heroic masculinity is rooted in, another ideal already familiar from my analysis of *TTI* and one that produces McClane as "the epitome of the self-reliant, self-effacing modern hero, squaring up to the technological terrorists with ingenuity and true grit" – the cowboy (Keane 55). Strikingly, it is Gruber who needs to exchange only a few words on the radio device with McClane in order to mockingly identify his anonymous enemy as "just another American who saw too many movies as a child, another orphan of a bankrupt culture who thinks he's John Wayne... Rambo... Marshal Dillon," henceforth addressing him simply as "Mr. Cowboy" (see Jeffords 62–63, Gates 143–144, Cohen 74–75). McClane, for his part, only too willingly adopts and emulates Gruber's ascription, even going into details with him about the right actor, thus demonstrating his expert knowledge about his childhood's screen heroes turned ego ideal: "I was always kind of partial to Roy Rogers..." Paul Cohen has thus rightfully argued that

While professing a mock partiality for Roy Rogers, McClane turns out, of course, to be an updated, urbanized version of the John Wayne or Gary Cooper cowboy archetype who saves the day. Spending much of the film barefooted, wearing a sleeveless, increasingly tattered and bloodied undershirt – a costuming choice that strips the hero down to naked power – McClane performs a series of feats that demonstrate his mastery of [...] "traditional manly virtues" [...]. He climbs down elevator shafts, jumps off buildings, explodes bad guys and, ever at the threshold of death, wins every fistfight and gun battle in the film. (Cohen 74)

Even more explicitly than the heroes of *TTI*, McClane therefore embodies the ideal of a veritable 'cowboy on the vertical frontier', a frontier within the middle of skyward-growing American cities that emerged at the very historical moment when the geographical Western Frontier had closed (1890) and a supposedly 'wild' West along with its 'untamed' denizens ceased to exist (see Mitchell 26, Kimmel 101). Cohen has convincingly defined the mythical cowboy ideal of authentic masculinity against that of the degenerate, corrupt, or even effeminate masculinity of the corporate men populating the vertical urban frontier of American high-rise CBDs. In the case of *Die Hard*, a clear line can thus be drawn between the only truly manly cowboy McClane and a whole number of 'false' corporate or institutional men ranging from businessman-criminal Gruber and his corrupted henchmen, Holly's slick and treacherous colleague Harry Ellis, a bunch of ignorant and inflexible police and FBI officials 'sticking to the rules' down to McClane's fearful businessman seatmate on the plane. Cohen concludes that

Die Hard, then, would seem a Reagan-era variation on the cultural opposition, rooted at the turn of the century, between the age of the self-made businessman's open pursuit of wealth and an imagined muscular, pre-capitalist age when real men, though noble, were as untamed as the frontiers they were conquering. (Cohen 79)

Once more then, the skyscraper, and in this case also the smart one, emerges as a vertical (urban) frontier where only the tricky and clever cop-cowboy can survive the deadly struggle against evil men and technology, a place where 'authentic' masculinity may be (re)gained or defended against a corrupt or effeminate one. It is thus that the very vertical frontier of the Nakatomi Tower appears as the real goal of McClane's westward journey from New York to Los Angeles. Without a 'real' Western wilderness, it is in the city or its smart buildings struck by disaster or crime that the American man can prove his manliness in his struggle to regain control both over the buildings in peril (in the hand of villains, struck by natural forces, or 'malprogrammed') as well as to re-embody his idealized role as protector of the weak and helpless (see Cohen 78–80, Kimmel 99–101).

In fact, as a true cowboy, McClane, just as his 1970s forerunners in *TTI*, harbors a deeply rooted unease towards giant and complex modern technologies. During the opening scene of *Die Hard* one encounters McClane as a noticeably uncomfortable, if not anxious passenger as his plane lands at LAX. A master of malleable analogue and material space, he is suspicious of the virtually intangible, autonomized code/spaces of air travel's smart infrastructures (see Kitchin/Dodge, "Flying", *Code/Space* 137–158).¹⁰⁹ Aware of McClane's discomfort, his seatmate, an 'effeminate' businessman-denizen of the smart space of flows, used to its opaque workings, unsuccessfully tries to teach him exercises against airsickness. However when landed, he spots McClane's gun stuck in his trousers, a seemingly archaic symbol and co-actor of empowerment within analogue space, and recoils in fear, obviously disturbed by that relict of physical violence, seemingly obsolete in the securitized realm of non-physical code/space

109 Strikingly, *Die Hard*'s 1990 sequel film *Die Hard 2* once more follows the path of 1970s disaster cinema, namely *Airport* (1970), and stages its action spectacle entirely within the code/spaces of planes and Dulles International Airport. Moreover, the film series' fourth installment *Live Free or Die Hard* (2007) continues its engagement with the possibilities and dangers of smart structures, only on a much larger scale, as its antagonists comprise of an entire hacker group manipulating the key computerized infrastructure grids of the US. Strikingly, an aged, but grittier-than-ever McClane is also aided by a young hacker in his hunt for the cyberterrorists, thus suggesting that another twenty years into the smart age even a John McClane can no longer rely on nothing but his physical strength, practical ingenuity and firepower.

(see Cohen 73).¹¹⁰ Similar to his unease on and with airplanes, McClane also feels a certain discomfort regarding his wife's workplace, the smart Nakatomi Tower, and thus another modern structure of almost megalomaniac height and complexity. Indeed, the cowboy-cop's almost intuitive suspicion towards vast and complex code/spaces, such as airplanes and smart skyscrapers "which, unlike guns, jeopardize self-reliance," anticipates their inherent dangers and thus the coming disaster in the form of high-tech terrorists intruding and reprogramming the smart building according to their own criminal ends (Cohen 73).¹¹¹ – McClane opens black boxes and reassembles things to his own ends thus constantly escaping and outwitting the terrorists and their non-physical smart technologies.

Eventually, John McClane appears as the movie's super-actor as he is not only able to successfully connect himself to the tower's analogue actor-network of infrastructures and gadgets by way of a set of clever spatial tactics, thus circumventing and ultimately overbearing the terrorists' – and by translation also the tower's – smart control strategies. In doing so, however, he does also manage to reconnect himself to the network of his estranged family, thereby reinstalling himself in the normative role of protective husband and father – the original and true aim of his westward pilgrimage to Los Angeles.¹¹²

110 Both men seem to understand full well what Latour has argued with regard to the micro-network of man and gun: "You are different with a gun in hand; the gun is different with you holding it. You are another subject because you hold the gun; the gun is another object because it has entered into a relationship with you" (Latour, "On Technical Mediation" 33).

111 With regard to the use of technologies in *Die Hard* and other 1980s action blockbusters, Jeffords has argued that "[t]hese domestic enemy films portray technology largely in [a] negative fashion, primarily because it is invariably used [...] as a way to deny human participation in and control over events. [...] domestic hard-body films display sophisticated military hardware [and one may add: smart technologies] only in the hands of enemies [...], and used only to deny human "freedoms" [...]. It is then the task of hard-bodied heroes to thwart these negative technologies by employing and then restoring to others the "freedoms" of human ingenuity" (Jeffords 54).

112 From that perspective, Doug Roberts' fiancé Susan (Faye Dunaway) as an independent business woman in *TTI* prefigures Holly Gennero/McClane in *Die Hard*: through the disaster both women become more or rather reattached to their heroic cowboy men and eventually seem to revert to a more normative role of femininity (mother, wife). Going through the disaster, so these movies seem to imply, brings them closer together or even binds them for good; while in later movies of the early 1990s, independent women are killed or trapped by the desiring men themselves, in *TTI* and *Die Hard* it was still the disaster or the villains who would have to do it for them.

As my detailed analysis has hopefully demonstrated, *TTI* and *Die Hard* both share in their scenario of a skyscraper that turns into a dangerous antagonist after disaster struck, with *Die Hard's* tower relying more on smart technologies than *TTI's*. Thus transformed into perilous vertical frontiers, however, the towers also allow a few brave men to reactivate their 'cowboy masculinity' enabling them to walk and climb fearlessly through the vertical city via its various networks of usually black-boxed service infrastructures and thus to save not only their own but many others' lives from these vertical traps. In this sense, these movies stand in the tradition of early 20th-century (post-)apocalyptic disaster narratives, such as those novels and short stories I have looked at in subchapter 2.1, which similarly imply a reinvigoration of normative gender (as well as racial) identities and hierarchies among formerly estranged corporate men and women in the face of an existential struggle on a dangerous post-apocalyptic urban high-rise frontier.¹¹³

However, in terms of their (whether intended or not) political messages both movies very much prove to be children of their historical moment. Much in keeping with a general 1970s climate of suspicion regarding 'the system', *TTI* appears much more politically subversive. Its blazing inferno is ultimately caused by cost cutting and thus the pursuit of capitalist profit, therefore turning its disaster into a systemic crisis. *Die Hard*, by contrast, externalizes the cause of its disaster as a foreign evil force intruding or rather infecting a clean system. There is no remorse, no bad conscience in the end as in *TTI*, no pledges for reforming and rethinking the system but only the satisfaction of having saved what has always been good. The only one to feel remorse and an obligation to change in *Die Hard* is Holly who comes to interpret her careerism and negligence of family life as an unjustified transgression, only to be 'cured' by reverting to a more normative role as caring wife and mother.¹¹⁴

113 Michel de Certeau seems to have implied the cowboy as a model for his envisioned trickster-tactician within smart hegemonic city space when he argued that "[i]ncreasingly constrained, yet less and less concerned with these vast [techno-architectural] frameworks, the individual detaches himself from them without being able to escape them and can henceforth only try to outwit them, to pull tricks on them, to rediscover, within an electronicized and computerized megalopolis, the "art" of the hunters and rural folk of earlier days" (Certeau xxiii-xxiv).

114 This stays true even though *Die Hard's* immediate sequel of 1990 (*Die Hard 2*) shows Holly as still working in her old job in Los Angeles and John having moved there, now working as cop in the LAPD in order to stay with his now reunited family. Although Abele argues differently, that set-up changes nothing with regard to the initial movie's anti-feminist or at least conservative gender message (see Abele 42).

3.2.1.2 *Damsels under Control? – Escaping the Smart High-Rise Prison in the Neo-Noir Thrillers Scissors (1991) and Sliver (1993)*

As one could already see with regard to *Die Hard*'s conservative gender politics, the cultural climate of the 1980s and thus also the ideological framing of its mainstream cultural products significantly differed from that of the two rather progressive decades that preceded them. While the 1960s and 70s were marked by powerful thrusts for social change that manifested itself, among other things, in racial (such as blacks and latino/as) and sexual (such as women and the LGBT community) minorities campaigning for greater freedoms and equality as well as in generally more liberal cultural and sexual mores, the 1980s experienced something of a conservative resurgence including what journalist Susan Faludi has famously termed an “undeclared war against women” in her Pulitzer Prize-winning manifesto *Backlash* of 1991. That war took the form of a massive backlash against women's struggle for greater equality and independence as well as feminism in particular within American society and popular culture ranging from press, cinema, and television up to fashion and beauty trends. Whatever cultural shape it took, the backlash's discourse usually centered around an argument whose basic line of reasoning Faludi translates as “women have achieved so much yet feel so dissatisfied; it must be feminism's achievements, not society's resistance to these partial achievements, that is causing women all this pain” (77). In other words, feminism and its thrust for women's equality had gone too far; the independence and self-reliance thus achieved was now threatening to wreck the institution of marriage and traditional family values by promoting single life, divorce, childlessness, and child negligence. Dismissing any other socioeconomic reasons for such phenomena, the highly publicized backlash discourse found its scapegoat for it all in feminism.

Faludi has convincingly shown how conservative anti-feminist discourse and Hollywood cinema as among many other popular media have mutually reinforced themselves in their backlash message: “The backlash shaped much of Hollywood's portrayal of women in the '80s. [...] And Hollywood restated and reinforced the backlash thesis: American women were unhappy because they were too free; their liberation had denied them marriage and motherhood” (113). Parallel to a 1980s movie mainstream that typically punished independent and rewarded subservient woman characters or tracked the metamorphosis of the former into the latter type, the late 1980s and early 1990s also saw a wave of neo-noir movies that classically feature single businesswomen femmes fatales that are highly attractive but also dangerous to the often married male protagonists (see K. Davis 51–55). A continuity between these films is even suggested by

a recurring appearance of certain actors in lead roles: In probably the most famous movies of the subgenre, *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Basic Instinct* (1992), and *Disclosure* (1994) it is Michael Douglas who stars as the 'endangered' male protagonist (Ph. Gates 188). And while Sharon Stone appeared as the mysterious and provocative femme fatale in *Basic Instinct*, she also held the lead role in two lesser known movies of the neo-noir cycle, namely *Scissors* (1991) and *Sliver* (1993), that I want to take a closer look at in this subchapter. These two movies, however, differ from the classic neo-noir formula by reversing the gendered role schema: Here, one does not encounter femmes fatales luring male protagonist into dangerous sexual adventures and thus into jeopardizing the sacred bonds of their marriage and family. Rather these movies focus on more or less independent single woman protagonists who make the acquaintance of one or more hommes fatals that lure, manipulate, or force them into situations, set-ups or relationships that significantly limit their initial freedoms, thereby seemingly restoring the very normative gender conceptions under attack in the classical strand of neo-noir movies. As Faludi argues, that sort of 'homme fatal' movies thus "achieve[s] [a] reverse metamorphosis, from self-willed adult woman to silent (or dead) girl, through coercion, others through the female character's own "choice"" (Faludi, *Backlash* 116).¹¹⁵

In *Scissors* and *Sliver*, however, these hommes fatals make use of high-rise architectures as well as high-end smart technologies of entrapment and surveillance in order to realize their obsession of 'taming' and controlling these formerly independent women. Once more, yet within a completely different discursive setting and to vastly different ends, smart skyscrapers emerge as antagonists. As the very technological and architectural manifestations of male control obsessions they turn into powerful enemies that the heroine seeks to escape and overcome in order to save her independence, freedom, or even her bare life.

Scissors (1991)

Released in 1991 and thus in between her still most successful film appearances in Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall* (1990) and *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Scissors*, a little-known psychological thriller directed by Frank de Felitta, was Sharon Stone's first major lead role appearance. Stone plays the role of Angela Anderson, a young

115 Gates has largely followed Faludi's argument and pointed out with regard to the Hollywood crime film that "[t]he 1980s were dominated by a masculine backlash [...], whether the erotic thriller with a male hero as the victim of the lethal femme fatale or the cop action film with the hero who had eyes only for his male buddy and pushed women to the margins as damsels to be distressed" (Ph. Gates 187).

single woman having recently moved into an apartment in a rather expensive residential high-rise building.¹¹⁶ Not working in the beginning, she spends most of her days with her hobby of obsessively collecting and repairing damaged children's dolls.

The movie starts out as a veritable horror scenario in line with Faludi's anti-feminist diagnosis in *Backlash*, also published in 1991: As an independent single woman, Angela is reduced to a sexual object by almost every male character she encounters. During the movie's first ten minutes she is groped by her antique dealer, almost raped by a brutal assailant in the elevator, and heavily wooed by her neighbor Alex Morgan. To make things worse, it soon becomes clear that her neighbor's brother Cole appears to be obsessed by Angela, constantly peeping on her in her apartment just opposite to that of the Morgan brothers. And while Alex seems to woo her more intensely at every meeting, she is attacked and threatened once more in a movie theater and is also in treatment with Dr. Carter, a lecherous elderly psychiatrist.

As revealed in her hypnotherapy session, Angela's generally fearful and withdrawn behavior is not only a (certainly understandable) reaction towards the male aggression she is exposed to on a daily basis. As Dr. Carter assumes, Angela's sexual repression and thus her inability to incorporate, indeed, to perform and live normative womanhood ("All my friends are married and have children!") is founded in a deep-rooted childhood trauma that Angela herself seems incapable of determining more closely. In this sense, her creepy hobby of repairing damaged children's dolls also seems to be grounded in that trauma: As is later revealed, her stepfather used a hand puppet to cheer her up the very moment her mother stabbed him to death with a pair of scissors – the exact hand puppet she always carries along in her bag. But since the majority of her puppets are little girls, her obsession for collecting them and repairing their damages seems to express an unconscious desire for the 'repair' of her traumatized, i.e. 'wounded' psyche.

The violence and harassment Angela is subjected to by the men around her is, however, not always and only of a direct nature but rather appears materialized in the panoptic architectural set-up of her tenement building, especially with regard to her immediate neighbors, the Morgan brothers. While Alex Morgan constantly beleaguers Angela's door trying to get as close to her as possible, his

116 The exact place of action is not unequivocally determinable. While plot-internal hints, such as various addresses on letterheads, point to Chicago, acknowledgements to the LAPD in the movie's credits rather suggest that the movie was shot in Los Angeles.

brother Cole, a disabled and wheel-chair-bound painter, spends most of his day observing Angela in her apartment which is located immediately opposite to theirs. As is soon revealed, Cole Morgan only fakes being hampered in order to give his envied brother (a rather unsuccessful soap actor) a bad conscience, as Alex has caused the accident that supposedly left him disabled. Nevertheless, he seems to represent a malevolent doppelgänger of Hitchcock's wheel-chair-bound protagonist in *Rear-Window* (1954), who spies on his neighbors living in the houses just opposite of his out of boredom and curiosity.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Cole must have spied on Angela in the opposing apartment given the amount of knowledge he has collected of her life and has subsequently worked into his paintings. When revealing his obsessive peeping (“You’re very, very careless with your blinds. [...] I watched you. I know you intimately”) along with his paintings to her, Angela is shocked and immediately realizes her entrapment within the panoptic regime of her housing situation.¹¹⁸

All the more aware of Cole's peeping as well as his verbal intimidations, Angela henceforth has her blinds down almost all the time, lights her apartment only scarcely, and dares to walk onto the balcony only at nights, even though very fearfully. She is thus a victim of a classically panoptic set-up with a lecherous and malevolent gaze potentially directed at her at all times – either through the windows or the peephole of her door. That gaze, the film is very clear about, is a male one seeking to objectify and thus discipline her into more normative behavior and sexual availability. In effect, the panoptic regime of her apartment house, indeed a heterotopia of compensation, only drives her more paranoid and increases her fear of potentially abusive men, thus forcing her to withdraw and self-discipline herself in ever more excessive ways.

When Alex suggests Angela should seek distraction from both her trauma and Cole's terrorizing by taking a steady job, she is quickly invited to a job interview at real estate developer Richard Bailey's office. Climbing up a mysteriously deserted six-story building under renovation, she enters into the developer's luxuriously furnished office-apartment, unaware that only now the real nightmare begins.

117 In fact, the script for *Scissors* was originally written for the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* TV series (1955–65, 1985–89). Not realized at the time, co-writer De Felitta later decided to make it into a movie under his own direction.

118 Later on, it seems that Cole and Alex's ex-girlfriend Nancy, an interior decorator and successful independent woman, are only present as characters in order to make the viewer believe that they (rather and more likely than Angela's psychiatrist) have entrapped Angela in the smart apartment in order to deprive Alex of his love interest and thus take revenge on him.

As the doors snap shut behind her, she is momentarily relieved to discover an out-of-office message by Bailey. Thus trapped and with nothing left to do, she starts exploring the apartment. In an adjacent show room, Angela discovers a large model of the immediate downtown neighborhood that uncannily comes to life when she presses a button and an automatic presentation is set off. With the apartment automatically showcasing its high-end facilities, such as electric window shades as well as various light settings capable of creating a range of moods, the space of Angela's entrapment is revealed as a state-of-the-art smart home.¹¹⁹ At first glance, the smart apartment may appear as Angela's desired heterotopia of illusion, an isolated high-rise space where she can seal herself off from the greedy gazes of neighbors and the harassment of unwanted intruders. However, quickly, Angela has to realize that the smart code/space of the apartment is not just another but also a more perfected regime, in fact, as Dr. Carter later puts it, "a theater" not for simply self-disciplining herself but for directly manipulating her into performing a role she is not yet familiar with.

Bit by bit, Angela learns that she is caged in a smart prison allowing for no communication with the outside world (the telephone is dead, the windows are soundproof and not to be opened) and in which she is bound to perish with no food and water supply provided. Frantically searching the apartment for a way out, she also gets to the bedroom, only to find a dead Bailey lying on the bed. The man being stabbed with scissors, it begins to dawn on Angela that not only this crime scene but the entire apartment is a personalized set-up built on her very own inner demons – complete with a speaking crow accusing her of being the man's killer, squealing sounds of her cat, videos of her immediate past (revealing that she as been peeped on even more thoroughly than she thought) as well as a number of puppet ensembles relating to her traumatic childhood.

As becomes clear through these personalized items, the smart home apartment is a code/space running on the code of Angela's trauma. Unconscious to herself, the trauma kernel has been extracted during the hypnotherapy sessions by Dr. Carter and then translated into the code, architecture, fitments, and props of the smart apartment in order to manipulate, indeed, drive Angela crazy and make her (and the police) believe that she murdered the real estate developer who happens to be Carter's wife's lover; that very plan shall serve Carter, the 'castrated' and cheated-on husband, to regain power and control over his

119 Angela's entrapment in the smart apartment is foreshadowed at the movie's very beginning by the zoom-in on the video surveillance screens at the doorman's office as well as the subsequent rapist attack in the elevator of her own apartment building.

ambitious, unfaithful politician wife (running for mayor) and literally blackmail her back into staying with him.

However, Angela, even though deeply disturbed by Carter's personalized psycho theater, manages to resist that manipulation by refusing her enrollment into Carter's carefully set-up murder drama program. She denies the role of murderer that is hammered into her by the speaking crow ("You killed him!") and instead seeks for ways to escape her smart prison.¹²⁰ This involves creatively misusing a lot of the apartment's objects and fitments, although most of them are fixed to the floor and walls with screws. Most things in the apartment, it thus seems, are completely unusable or inaccessible for manual misuse and thus inscription with any kind of counter-program. Moreover, Angela has no opportunity to interfere with the automated psycho program enfolding around her, as she faces a smart antagonist into whose fabric Carter's 'drive-her-crazy' code is intricately embedded and made durable. When finally discovering a stool not fixed, she tries to shatter the windows with it, only to learn that the windows are made of bulletproof glass destroying every object hurled at them. Then, probably inspired by the white dove (the bird of peace and freedom) sitting on the windowsill outside (a heavy reference to Picasso's famous poster design), she turns to the crow in hope of enrolling it into her very own action program of rescue. In fact, Angela proves an able mechanical trickster, as she possesses technical skill due to her hobby, especially with scissors; she thus uses the scissors stuck in the stabbed man to open up an airshaft and release the crow with an appeal for help bound to its claw. Apart from that, she hammers onto and writes "Help" on the apartment windows in order to attract the attention of passers-by. Yet because of her smart prison's isolated location on the sixth floor as well as the busy traffic noise on street level, she fails to do so.

As a consequence, Angela is further subjected to Carter's spatialized psycho-terror making ample use of the apartment's smart facilities, such as constantly changing light situations. The strange camera angles employed in the scenes within the smart apartment not only mirror Angela's increasing psychic distress but also take on the quality of the abstracted gaze of surveillance cameras constantly following and reading out Angela's actions in every corner of the place and from any possible angle, such as most prominently, a full bird's eye shot

120 In a small article adjacent to a longer interview with her in British film magazine *Empire*, Sharon Stone has ironically claimed that in *Scissors* she "played a beautiful blonde who was trapped alone in an apartment" which has the potential of becoming "the next Rocky Horror Picture Show" (Stone 93).

panning over several rooms.¹²¹ Gaslighted by ever more personalized objects and media contents as well as the full range of smart facilities, Angela finally breaks down and experiences a full flashback of the event that traumatized her as a child.

When the next day, Angela roams the apartment marionette-like, one senses that she has completely plunged into psychosis, unaware of anything around her – including Carter who has emerged from his hideout from which he has orchestrated his diabolic psycho-theater. As he is holding a stage beard, one now understands that it was him in disguise who attacked Angela earlier on in the elevator and movie theater. When his wife finally enters her lover's apartment, Carter reveals his masterfully devised plot for 'rescuing' their marriage by making a psychotic Angela responsible for killing the developer (actually killed by Carter). Shocked but deeply concerned with her public image in the upcoming mayoral elections, Ann Carter lets herself get enrolled into her husband's program. Yet while the Carters are busy with the finishing touches to their perfect crime, Angela flees through the now open door, shutting it behind her and thus entrapping Carter and his wife in the apartment. However, not until Angela looks back up to the apartment from ground level and briefly smiles vengefully at a distressed Dr. Carter, does one realize that she has trapped him deliberately and might not be as deranged as she initially seemed after going through the mental torture of the smart prison. With the knowing and revengeful look upwards, Angela manifests her escape from and victory over male control and its technological accomplices. Traumatized (still and anew) and weak as she might be after that night of terror, one nevertheless gets the impression that she will not surrender to normative inscription, not even for Alex's sake who has welcomed her outside the building and guided her into a taxi. On this view, *Scissors* ends more reassuringly than, for instance, a number of Hitchcock's movies that have distressed women fleeing into the arms of strong men, obviously giving up on their initial independence.¹²² Nevertheless, the movie's plot revolves around various men preying on, (ab)using, or trying to tame and win a

121 When Margulies and Rebello mockingly attest *Scissors* the ability to not only drive its protagonist but also its audience crazy, they actually point out a quality of the movie attained mainly via its use of creepy props and dizzying camera movements (Margulies/Rebello 139).

122 Especially with regard to *The Birds* (1963) and *Marnie* (1964), it seems that formerly independent single women (both impersonated by Tippi Hedren) are 'normalized', i.e. forced into the caring control of men by way of the shock of frenzied birds or a psychoanalytic cure, respectively.

‘renegade’ woman. In doing so, they recruit and cooperate with a range of technological and architectural actors so as to entrap, manipulate, or control that woman in most elaborate networks in the form of either disciplinary-panoptic or smart control regimes.

Sliver (1993)

After the major success of her follow-up movie *Basic Instinct* (1992), notorious for its provocative display of nudity and (bi)sexuality, Sharon Stone reappeared in *Sliver* (1993), directed by Phillip Noyce and based on the eponymous novel by Ira Levin. Apart from several rather explicit sex scenes, however, *Sliver* has a lot more in common with the only little known *Scissors* than with the neo-noir classic *Basic Instinct* when it comes to its basic narrative set-up. Sharon Stone appears in the lead role, this time as a successful and rather wealthy career woman working as a book editor. And like Stone herself at the time of the movie’s production, her character Carla “Carly” Norris is 35 and has a seven-year marriage behind her. When she newly moves into an exclusive Manhattan residential skyscraper known as Sliver, another one of these access-controlled vertical gated communities housing a stock of well-to-do urbanites, she is, similar to Angela Anderson in *Scissors*, wooed by at least three bachelors and fellow residents of the Sliver tower: Zeke Hawkins (William Baldwin), a mysterious and younger computer game designer (and, as later is revealed, the owner of the tower), Jack Landsford (Tom Berenger), a modestly successful fiction writer, and Gus Hale (Keene Curtis), an elderly lecturer at NYU.

Excited by all the possibilities of her new life in the exclusive tower, an illusion heterotopia of sorts, and certainly flattered by the pack of men courting her, her high mood is, however, dampened by the mysterious goings-on in the building’s recent past. It is from Gus Hale that Carly first learns that she looks very much like Naomi Singer, the woman who inhabited her apartment before and who fell to her death only weeks ago. While most characters believe it was a suicide, the audience knows it was murder, as the movie starts with the scene of Naomi being thrown from her balcony, with the murderer’s face staying hidden under a hoodie. As a consequence, from the very beginning of the movie, there is an uneasy atmosphere of mystery haunting life in the Sliver tower. The high level of suspense thus established early on is heightened even more, as surveillance screen footage from seemingly all spaces of the skyscraper, both private and semi-public, is continually cut into the main narration, thereby implying that someone is able to monitor all procedures within the tower – including Naomi’s initial murder.

As one sees more surveillance footage from inside a hidden control room, this time also from a naked Carly in her bathroom as well as of Gus Hale having collapsed in his shower, the viewer is left to sense that the anonymous voyeur (human or nonhuman) is not an altogether benevolent actor, all the more so as one learns that Hale has died in the shower and another police investigation within the tower is under way the following day. Obviously, the voyeur has not called for help upon discovering the collapsed man, be it only for the sake of keeping the illegal mass surveillance apparatus secret.

Soon, however, it is revealed that the Sliver tower is not only an ultra-video-surveyed structure of countless more or less hidden cameras and microphones and thus a truly panoptic and panacoustic space with eyes and ears but also a fully fledged smart skyscraper allowing its mysterious controller to easily manipulate virtually all its facilities and functionalities, such as locking and unlocking doors or causing power failures at will. In an early scene, Carly is seen alone in the tower's subterranean laundry room when suddenly the lights fade. Panicking to get out as fast as possible, she is however stopped by the door that mysteriously appears to be locked. After a short moment of terror, the door opens again and she is reassured by Zeke and a janitor that everything is in good order. Nevertheless, that small scene already foreshadows the motive and possibility of malevolent entrapment inside the smart high-rise structure, already well familiar from *Scissors*. It is also a sufficiently disturbing enough incident to make both Carly and the viewer suspect that, in fact, as Jack later jokes, "nothing in a haunted house is what it appears to be."

Already worried because of these proceedings within her new home, Carly is all the more surprised to find a telescope, a present from "a secret admirer," installed in her apartment when coming home one day. As she is now able to partake in a small-scale voyeurism, such as when she observes Jack and Vida, her immediate neighbor and another single career woman, on the street below exchanging intimacies or when, during her house-warming party, a love-making couple is discovered in the high-rise building just opposite her tower, it appears likely that the anonymous video controller has sent it to her in order to establish a connection between them. Carly's telescopic surveillance, however, is less total and potentially violent, indeed archaic when compared to the control facilities embedded and back-boxed within the walls and ceilings of the tower, thereby turning it if not into a code/space, then certainly into a cutting-edge coded space inviting large-scale manipulation from the part of its operator.

Soon it is Zeke, the withdrawn but charming young man who approaches Carly more determinedly, inviting her over to a gym, touching (actually groping) her, taking her to his top-floor apartment and finally seducing her. Afterwards, he

confesses that he is more than a normal resident but, in fact, the superrich owner and designer of the tower. The more he displays his affection towards Carly, such as by sending electronic messages to her office computer (that he obviously hacks into) or sending over tons of roses to her apartment, the more the other man in the game, Jack Landsford, tries to intervene and warn Carly of Zeke, who allegedly had a closer relation to Naomi than anybody thinks. Apart from that, Jack also seems convinced that Zeke is her murderer due to a love-and-kill obsession for women (like Carly and Naomi) that resemble his physically absent but screen-present actress mother. Though Jack's psychoanalytic theorizing manages to nourish Carly's suspicion of Zeke, it is shortly thereafter that Jack is arrested for killing Vida in a dark stairwell after another power failure occurred, thus driving her back into Zeke's arms. The latter then reveals himself as the "electronic voyeur" to Carly by leading her into his six million dollar master control room immediately adjacent to his apartment (Kellman 177).¹²³ Carly seems shocked and fascinated at the same time by the real-life tragedies and comedies, pornos and soap operas, thrillers and melodramas unfolding on Zeke's sublime "televsive Wall of *Weltanschauung*" (Hart 118). The massive video wall, in fact, condenses the very essence of high-rise life, the simultaneity and immediate juxtaposition (both spatially within the tower and electronically on the screens) of most different, even contradictory social and cultural set-ups and their emotional microclimates, these various high-rise realizations of heterotopias of illusion and compensation well-secluded from the public order of street level (see Mellier 47–49).¹²⁴

Following these drastic occurrences and revelations, Carly is drawn between the two men and their claims to truth, however wary of both their potentially romantic and/or murderous relations to the two dead female residents. Zeke, however, tries hard to whitewash his criminal voyeurism by presenting himself as an all-seeing Robin Hood ("We'll only do good things"), caring for all the misery he observes in his tower, such as when he successfully forces a pedophile man (whose activities he has observed on screen) to take his hands off his

123 The viewer knows it by the time because another earlier shot of surveillance footage has panned around the control room to reveal Zeke as the intent observer of its massive bank of screens.

124 As I have already noted in the case of *Scissors*, Žižek also stresses *Sliver's* voyeur scenario's indebtedness to Hitchcock's *Rear-Window* (1954), only realized "[a]t a higher technological level." Nevertheless, Zeke's electronically enhanced panoptic theater also "remains attached to a central voyeuristic gaze that is part of the diegetic reality – the gaze of the millionaire in his safe haven" (Žižek 209).

distressed stepdaughter. Imbued with this success and the controlling power he possesses over the tower's residents, he even suggests to Carly the megalomaniac vision of surveying the entire city's population as some sort of anonymous law-and-order watchdog. Carly, however, clearly registers and scorns his hubris of "playing god" by the grace of technology. In an earlier conversation, during which Zeke traps Carly in the control room in order to keep her from leaving, his strategy for involving her in his scopophilic fetish becomes apparent, all the more so when he finally admits that he was the one who had sent her the telescope:

Carly: You watch them? You watch these people?

Zeke: So do you, Carly, with your telescope. I just have better technology. [...]

Carly: It's wrong...

Zeke: [...] Nobody gets hurt. They don't even know.

Contrary to Zeke's line of reasoning here, there is of course an important difference between the minor disciplinary power exerted by Carly's telescope and the immediate control regime based on smart technology as embedded in Zeke's skyscraper.

Zeke's surveillance is not disciplinary; it does not instill self-discipline in the residents, as they do not know that they are being observed and wiretapped all the time. They only show the well-familiar habit of drawing blinds and curtains to their high-rise apartments in order to block out the curious and thus disciplining gaze of the people living opposite or whispering and turning up the music when they want certain conversations or noises not to be overheard by their immediate neighbors. In one scene, Zeke mocks Carly for drawing the curtains, confronting her with the reciprocity of the disciplining urban gaze: "What are you worried about? Somebody's watching you like you watch them?" And indeed Carly does once observe with her telescope a couple in the residential high-rise just opposite hers using a telescope for the pleasure of scanning the goings-on in the Sliver tower, thus uncannily returning her very own curious gaze (another allusion to Hitchcock's *Rear-Window*).

As opposed to the high-rise city's panoptic regime highlighted in these scenes, Zeke's surveillance, in fact, is a smart control regime by way of which he may not only manipulate and terrorize residents actively (such as when blackmailing people with the secrets he learned from monitoring them) but also enact and enhance physical violence passively, such as, for instance, when he refrains from intervening at the sight of Naomi's murder or the collapse of Gus Hale (although he claims the opposite) and thereby indeed hurting them. When Jack risks one last, however violent, attempt at convincing Carly of Zeke's malevolence, he his

overwhelmed by the latter and killed by a gunshot that Zeke obviously wanted to be deadly, thus eliminating his last competitor in the game of winning Carly's favor. Now, however, it is up to Carly to unravel the mystery of Naomi and Vida's murderer.

If there is a psychological code that Zeke and by translation his smart surveillance apparatus as well as the tower's general architecture (that Zeke helped design) operates on, a program that all these actors are enrolled in, then it is the one partly suggested by Jack, partly revealed by Zeke himself: When accepting preferably single working women who also visually resemble his mother as residents to the tower, observing them on screen, learning their intimate secrets and habits in order to win their trust and then seducing them (all with the help of the tower's architecture and smart technology), he both reiterates and fulfills his oedipal desire of having his ever absent, yet TV-present and then early deceased actress mother with these women. Moreover, the tower's general aptitude for entrapment as well as the entirety of Zeke's smart systems greatly help him to trap, fixate, and control these otherwise mobile and self-reliant career women in order to compensate for the trauma of being neglected by his always absent working mother. From this perspective, Zeke does not, as Rutter argues, try to "liberate" Stone [meaning Carly] from her insularity" but indeed increases her insularity and entrapment within the narrow space of the tower in order to keep her under both his emotional and panoptic control (Rutter 102).

Feminist critics have harshly reproved the way that Sharon Stone's character, while seemingly so subversive in *Basic Instinct*, is once more pressed into the Hollywood scheme of a dependent damsel in distress and thus manipulated according to the psychological code outlined above. Rutter appears especially infuriated by the fact that

Sharon Stone has her 90 minutes of fame as a fatale femme in *Basic Instinct*, but was safely anaesthetised in her follow-up role in *Sliver* [...] [and] to see a mould-breaking icon get pushed right back into the same old stereotyped cast. (Rutter 101, 103)

The very operation of forcing an independent and self-confident working woman into the role of a sexually and emotionally dependent object of male (oedipal) desire may well be read as the essence of 1980s American culture's misogynist and anti-feminist backlash diagnosed by Faludi in 1991.

Jack's theory that Zeke has also killed the two women and thus compulsively repeated his mother's early death (or alternatively taking revenge for her negligence) is, however, debunked at the very end of the film, when Carly and the viewer along with her finally get a glimpse of the tape of Naomi's murder and

may now clearly identify Jack as her killer.¹²⁵ With respect to Zeke's permanent surveillance and Jack's murders, one may get the impression that both men do in fact complement each other in their violence against women. In this sense, Zeke deliberately causes a power failure in the stairwell, so that Jack can murder Vida without himself being able to see the act on screen and thus not carrying any responsibility for not having intervened or aided police investigation. The same is true for Naomi's murder: Although Zeke has surveyed and taped how Jack throws her from the balcony and also knows that Jack holds a key to Naomi and Carly's apartment, he keeps silent about it for the simple reason that he wants his criminal habit of mass-surveillance to stay secret. That however strange collaboration between Zeke and Jack complemented by the building's coded and architectural spaces is also a highly uneven one.

Of course, Zeke as the technology-backed hacker clearly has an advantage over Jack, who acts out altogether analogously in his murders of Naomi and Vida. By way of his smart surveillance system, Zeke is able to gather most private information on each and every resident of his tower, and is thus the spider within the building's network of actors. He is its most powerful actor because he is technologically connected to all other actors within, whom he is capable of manipulating according to their personal secrets, such as, for example, Jack's erection problems or another resident's pedophilia. The very conformity in the design of all apartments also facilitates the almost rationally automated scanning of the procedures in every space of the building by providing easy orientation for Zeke's all-seeing camera eyes. Also at times, Zeke makes use of the building's networked facilities and infrastructures, such as when entrapping people in their apartments or in the elevator by automatically locking doors or causing power failures. Once more, the skyscraper's very spatial structure, its isolated apartment cells far removed and sealed off from public life and order on the city streets, play into the hands of Zeke's obsession for trapping and exclusively controlling his mother surrogates.

Indeed, it is Zeke's manic action program that is inscribed into and carried out faithfully by the architectural spaces and technological devices at his disposal throughout the movie. Only towards the movie's end is it disturbed or even countered, such as when Jack confronts Carly in the darkness of her apartment and thus avoids being observed by Zeke's surveillance cameras. Unlike her character in *Scissors*, Stone's Carly has a significantly harder time to escape

125 Different from the movie, Zeke also appears as the women's murderer in Ira Levin's 1991 literary template.

both Zeke's physical and the smart tower's technological grip – too emotionally involved is she with the mad voyeur, too perfected are the surveillance and entrapment apparatuses of his tower. The only way she sees for reversing power relations within Zeke's smart control matrix is to seize his surveillance apparatus and turn it against him. She is thus able to spy on Zeke when he opens his secret store for tapes. Having unearthed and watched the tapes of his sexual encounters with both Naomi and Vida (using the selfsame flattering talk as with Carly), she locks Zeke out of his voyeur playground, the centerpiece of his optical power, and turns his own surveillance apparatus onto him. Zeke, however, can enter again by quickly un-black-boxing the walls and manually opening the door via short-circuiting two cables (the movie's only display of direct manual interaction with the materiality of the smart space). In the movie's final scene, Carly holds him back with his gun but instead of him, shots at the surveillance screens within the control room and destroys them. Her final revenge, then, consists of (however temporarily) depriving Zeke of his smartly extended panoptic eyes and panacoustic ears. Newly empowered, she grabs the remote control and 'switches off' both Zeke and the movie itself with the words "Get a life!"

This highly abrupt ending has been rightfully criticized for leaving not only many questions unanswered but also a good deal of problems unsolved (see Hart 118). Also, Carly reiterates a common mode of rage against smart control power by destroying the screens and boards of Zeke's control room, which for the time being, appears to her as the only viable way of opening up the smart skyscraper's oppressive black box and thus stripping Zeke of his manipulative force. As a superrich inheritor, however, Zeke, may of course easily repair or replace all the shattered technology and start anew. Once more, the end of *Sliver*, confronts us with the dilemma of coming up with a permanent solution to misusing smart technology and turning buildings into violent antagonists. While the audience may find satisfaction in the fact that Carly, for her part, has escaped Zeke's electronic grip, it will hardly be able to do so at the prospect that many others will end up in his smart trap again. On this view, *Scissors* offers a more radical solution to the problem as it entraps the perpetrator (Dr. Carter) in his own smart trap at the top of a high-rise.

What stays true for *Scissors*, *Sliver* and similar movies of the time, however, is that they are deeply reflective of the period's clash of a reactionary 1980s gender ideal and the feminist ideal of independent, self-determined womanhood. Although affirmative of the escaping single woman in the end, *Scissors* and *Sliver* present the most radically abusive use of smart technology and architecture by men in order to 'tame' or instrumentalize independent women among the many films of the neo-noir 'gender thriller' era during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Considering the larger cultural and film historical context, these technologically and architecturally enhanced *hommes fatals* represent transitory figures within the “shift from male victims [Carter as the victim of his careerist wife, Zeke of his absent mother] to serial killers and from women as empowered to women as victims of predatory men,” thereby becoming the predecessors of male psychotic characters of 1990s and 2000s serial killer narratives, in which “women – the major threat to dominant masculinity – are kidnapped, tortured, raped, mutilated, and killed in a spectacularly gruesome manner” (Ph. Gates 188).¹²⁶ Though highly expressive of Susan Faludi’s argument in *Backlash*, *Scissors* and *Sliver* do in fact refute her theorizing on a crisis of masculinity due to a lack of manual-bodily labor in a technology- and image-based American culture, as put forward in her 1999 follow-up publication *Stiffed. The Betrayal of the American Man*. Contrary to her argument here, the obsessed men in both movies do indeed demonstrate how their very use and interaction with smart media and technologies aid them greatly in maintaining or regaining their cultural dominance – this, however, only at the expense of women.¹²⁷

126 Certainly, the most gruesome violence against women explored in fiction of the time is that of misogynist serial killers Hannibal Lecter and Jame Gumb in Thomas Harris’ *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988, movie 1991). The special case of serial killer Patrick Bateman and his inescapable complicity with architecture in Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho* (1991, movie 2000) will be examined in detail in subchapter 3.2.2.

127 Seen from a broader perspective, *Scissors* and *Sliver* do however share a predecessor in 1975 horror thriller *The Stepford Wives* (like *Sliver* based on a novel by Ira Levin) featuring a group of suburban men, deeply agonized by women’s liberation, that use an array of high-end technologies not to trap and tame their wives but rather to replace them altogether by perfectly look-alike servile housewife androids, thus most immediately inscribing their conservative gender ideals into technology. While situated in an otherwise perfectly analogue and low-rise suburb, the movie nevertheless anticipates *Scissors* and *Sliver*’s spatial entrapment in its dramatic showdown when it has its female protagonist futilely trying to escape the labyrinthine smart mansion of the Men’s Association only to get trapped in a cell where she encounters her android doppelgänger which has been programmed to kill her. Apart from that, Schleier has shown that many 1930s Depression-Era Hollywood movies set in and around skyscrapers worked according to the same logic of women’s entrapment and gender rehabilitation, thus being (similar to many 1980s and 90s movies) emblematic of a resurgence of conservative gender morals after the seeming excesses of the first three decades of the 20th century, such as to be seen in Hollywood’s pre-code liberalism regarding the depiction of crime, violence, independent women, and sexuality (see Schleier, *Skyscraper Cinema* 59–65).

It is precisely the agential partnership of these men and their smart technologies or architectures along with the symmetrical translation they thus undergo that is crucial in turning them into dangerous actants: Just as Latour has demonstrated with regard to the agential partnership of man and gun, men like Dr. Carter and Zeke are transformed from embittered, yet rather powerless neurotic/sexist/misogynist individuals into powerful manipulators and eventually criminal perpetrators in the same way as these technologies and spaces – initially designed for heightening comfort and security – turn into perfect weapons of entrapment and manipulation when ‘teaming up’ with each other. It is thus neither one group of actors, the men or the technologies and spaces, alone that one can blame their crimes against women on but only the agential network of men + space + technology as a whole, all of its members having been crucially translated and transformed through their association, that may be deemed responsible in this respect (see Latour, “On Technical Mediation” 32–34).

3.2.1.3 *High-Rise Horror and the ‘Bloxploitation’ Genre 1970s–90s*

Few other structures than the skyscraper have spurred so much fear about architecture’s or technology’s potentially destructive force or, more broadly spoken, a nagging unease regarding the vastness, autonomy and uncontrollability of human creations. Indeed, the monumentality of this structure has always conveyed as much the feeling of sublime marvel and supremacy as it has prompted the uncanny feeling that humans may easily be crushed by the size, height and complexity of their own work – especially in the moment of accident and catastrophe.

Overlooking the rich cultural productions in a great variety of media that the skyscraper has inspired since its emergence, it is a striking discovery to see how often it was linked to notions not only of the fantastic, catastrophic and apocalyptic, but also to ideas and scenarios of the uncanny, mystery and horror. High-rise architecture and the intricate technology and infrastructures, the vast network of nonhuman actors that its construction and functioning depends on have always conveyed the ambiguous impression of a mass of supposedly undead matter gaining agency and thus an autonomous life of its own. The vastness and often-labyrinthine structure of its spaces, its specific optical, acoustic and micro-climatic milieu, the high degree of dependence on a host of technologies and materials and, finally, one’s vertical isolation in the sky that always bears the danger of deadly entrapment in the event of catastrophe all seem to produce a specific kind of ‘high-rise horror’ akin to Vidler’s architectural uncanny (17–68). How can one then be surprised to find that the skyscraper has featured

so prominently as a setting or even as an uncannily autonomous antagonist in so many literary and filmic fictions of catastrophe and horror?

First showcased in the 1974 disaster blockbuster *The Towering Inferno* and its literary templates, the skyscraper's spectacular views and spaces as well as the spectacular action invited by them, were to inspire a considerable body of movies of the action/horror and/or catastrophe subgenre during the following two decades. As diverse as these movies and novels may seem at first glance and as diverse their ways of distribution and their degree of popularity – ranging from high-grossing Hollywood blockbusters like *TTI*, *Die Hard* and its most recent 2018 remake *Skyscraper* to obscure television or home video productions – may be, they are all united by the fact that they exploit the skyscraper's spectacularity and inherent uncanniness for telling suspense- and action-filled stories. As the architecture's extreme spatiality crucially determines, if not even produces large parts of their plotlines, one may well subsume them into an exploitation subgenre in its own right, a true 'bloxploitation' genre, having strong affiliations with the confined space and haunted house action and/or horror subgenres. In these bloxploitation films and texts the high-rises' extreme vertical seclusion always produces a degree of confinement and isolation that invites the installment of (illusory or compensatory) heterotopic milieus from which the protagonists try to escape (see Tab. 5).

In all of the films discussed so far in this chapter (*TTI*, *Die Hard*, *Scissors*, *Sliver*) and a good number of other filmic and literary examples from the bloxploitation genre the agent and force behind that high-rise horror is either one or sometimes also an association of human, natural or technological and architectural/spatial agents. In its most plain form, such as to be observed in the movies *Visiting Hours* (1982), *Enemy Territory* (1987) and *Trapped* (1989), these fictions feature an individual or a group of (psycho)killers, brutes and slashers that use the confinement or labyrinthine complexity of a residential, office or in the case of *Visiting Hours* even a hospital tower block for trapping and killing their human victims. After repeatedly escaping these slashers and their spatial or architectural accomplices, the protagonists of these scenarios can often only rid themselves of the high-rise horror by killing the slasher(s) themselves. In the classic high-rise disaster or catastrophe scenario, such as most prominently executed in *TTI*, the human agents of horror are simply replaced by a natural force, mostly a fire that chases and entraps the protagonists through and within the tower. In the other three movies addressed in greater detail earlier in this chapter, more technologically sophisticated, yet no less malevolent human actors (co-)produce the high-rise horror: slick villains like *Die Hard's* cyber-terrorists, *Scissors's* Dr. Carter and *Sliver's* Zeke take command over skyscrapers by way

Tab. 5: Selected 'Bloxploitation' Movies and Novels and Their Agent(s) of Horror

Movie/Novel	Agent(s) of Horror: the building +	Sort of Agent: architectural +
<i>The Towering Inferno</i> (1974)	fire	natural
<i>High-Rise</i> (1975, film 2015)	residents	human
<i>Shivers</i> (1975)	residents turned zombies	human/monstrous
<i>The Prisoner of Second Ave</i> (1975)	brittle/failing infrastructure	technological
<i>Somebody's Watching Me!</i> (1978)	janitor	human
<i>Visiting Hours</i> (1982)	psychokiller	human
<i>The Tower</i> (1985)	supercomputer	technological
<i>Demons 2</i> (1986)	demons	supernatural
<i>Enemy Territory</i> (1987)	youth gang	human
<i>Poltergeist III</i> (1988)	poltergeist	supernatural
<i>Die Hard</i> (1988)	terrorists	human
<i>Dark Tower</i> (1989)	ghost of the architect	supernatural
<i>Trapped</i> (1989)	killer	human
<i>Gremlins 2</i> (1990)	gremlins	monstrous
<i>Scissors</i> (1991)	psychiatrist	human
<i>Candyman</i> (1992)	ghost	supernatural
<i>Sliver</i> (1993)	high-rise owner	human
<i>The Tower</i> (1993)	supercomputer	technological
<i>Gridiron</i> (1995)	supercomputer	technological
<i>The Horde</i> (2009)	residents turned zombies	human/monstrous
<i>The Veteran</i> (2011)	criminal residents	human
<i>Skyscraper</i> (2018)	terrorists	human

of a range of smart technologies in order to spy on, trap, terrorize and kill their victims, who, in turn, have to escape into the buildings' analogue spaces or turn these technologies onto their sly controllers in order to survive. An early, yet less smart technology-based precursor to this subcategory may be found in John Carpenter's 1978 made-for-television film *Somebody's Watching Me!*, featuring a never really visible janitor terrorizing a woman in her high-rise apartment by spying on her and manipulating the building's entire infrastructure at his will.

Flirting with science fiction, other bloxploitation fictions literally merge these human villains with their smart technology and vertical architecture in order to bring about the high-rise horror: here, artificially intelligent computer programs running ultra-sophisticated smart skyscrapers either get infected or simply follow their coded rules too strictly, thereby erroneously trapping, attacking or

even killing their human occupants. In the 1985 Canadian made-for-home-video movie *The Tower* supercomputer Lola starts trapping and hunting its smart skyscraper's occupants in search of energy sources. It literally 'absorbs' them in order to regenerate its energy storage regardless of the fact that it kills them when doing so. Another home-video movie called the *The Tower* (1993) and Philip Kerr's 1995 novel *Gridiron* also feature hypersensitive or infected smart skyscrapers that similarly turn into deadly traps when terrorizing its human occupants falsely identified as illicit intruders with the full range of the automatized infrastructures and technologies at their disposal. In some examples of this subset of bloxploitation fictions, the 'smart horror' emanates from just one single infrastructure of the high-rise, such as most prominently the elevator. Thus, in movies like Dick Maas' *The Lift* (1983) and its American remake *Down* (2001) an autonomously and increasingly maliciously operating smart elevator inside an ultramodern skyscraper produces a unique sort of 'elevator horror' in its own right, elements of which also feature prominently in more classic bloxploitation scenarios containing scenes in and around elevators.

The other half of these bloxploitation fictions, however, stages the forces and agents of high-rise horror as supernatural or monstrous, thereby literalizing the rather abstract uncanniness associated with architectural vastness and technological autonomy. In some of these films and novels, skyscrapers transform into gigantic haunted houses as they fall into the hands of a whole range of prominent horror characters, such as zombies (*Shivers*), demons or poltergeists (*Demons 2*, *Poltergeist III*, *Dark Tower*), gremlins (*Gremlins 2*) and other monstrous agents and paranormal powers. It seems that once the horrors produced by these monsters and ghosts were tested out in the confines of low-rise suburbia, such as in the case of the *Poltergeist* and *Gremlins* film series, they also had to be transferred to the vertical spaces of more or less smart residential and office high-rises. Here they could easily thrive on and lend a monstrous face to a common, yet abstract fear of 'normal accidents' and bugs as well as their potentially catastrophic outcomes in (smart) skyscrapers (see also footnote 100). The motive of the gremlin in particular springs from a long tradition of imagining often-unfathomable accidents and faults in (originally only airplane) machinery and technology as malevolent monstrous or elf-like agents. Moreover, these creatures' often swarm-like invasions of high-rise spaces, such as staged most radically in *Gremlins 2*, strikingly resonate with ANT's idea of imaging technology as animated or haunted by 'swarms' of black-boxed actors which are set free once these technological or architectural black boxes are opened up in the event of accident or catastrophe (e.g. Callon, "The Sociology of an Actor-Network" 29–30). In analogy to Latour's statement that "things do

not exist without being full of people [and nonhuman actors], and the more modern and complicated they are, the more people [and nonhuman actors] swarm through them” one may thus conclude that the more complex and black-boxed these technologies and architectures are, such as is certainly the case with the smart skyscraper, the more uncanny and haunted by ‘gremlins’ or poltergeists they become (Latour, “The Berlin Key” 10). In *Dark Tower* (1989) this uncanny release of black-boxed actors is staged in a shocking way, when an architect’s ghost, which has been haunting the office tower he designed as an invisible force for weeks, literally breaks through the tower’s walls at the very end. By this final opening of the architectural black box, one of its repressed key actors is able to resurface traumatically on both a material and psychological level as the architect’s ghost ultimately seeks to take vengeance on his wife, now a successful architect herself, for murdering him, thus inviting yet another strongly misogynist interpretation (see Freud 241).

In other fictions of manifest bloxploitation horror, the horrifying force taking control and haunting the skyscraper does not stem from an external or internal (swarm of) supernatural or monstrous agents or phenomena, but lies within its human occupants, which, for various reasons, turn monstrous themselves. Set in residential towers only, this subgenre’s roots reach back to a novel and a film, both released in 1975, which seemingly tell the same story with one remaining in the realm of realism and the other one relying on a classic motive of horror. While J. G. Ballard’s novel *High-Rise*, already mentioned earlier, meticulously retraces how one supermodern London tower block, perceived by one protagonist as “a huge and aggressive malefactor, [...] determined to inflict every conceivable hostility” on its population (Ballard 57), causes its well-to-do tenants to slowly regress into an illusory-heterotopic state of archaic and quasi-ghoulish tribalism, David Cronenberg’s *Shivers* explores the same topic of civilizational breakdown within an ultramodern and isolated Montreal apartment tower with the less abstract means of body horror. In *Shivers*, thus, the violent shift to illusion heterotopia within the vertical city is not triggered by the residents’ own psychic impulses and desires but more graphically by the spread of an aggressive parasite (which may well be read as a metaphor for these anarchic human impulses) transforming everyone it infests into a zombie of boundless sexual desire.¹²⁸

128 A somewhat lighter version of this motive explored in *High-Rise* and *Shivers* is offered in Melvin Frank’s black comedy *The Prisoner of Second Avenue*, strikingly also released in 1975. Here, a middle-aged couple inhabiting a small apartment in a modern high-rise complex on Manhattan’s Upper East Side is gradually driven toward nervous

Whereas these early bloxploitation examples of the ‘monstrous resident’ subgenre found its setting in ultramodern vertical cities catering to the urban elites and middle classes, it soon resettled to and eventually came to be identified with the crime-ridden and neglected high-rise estates that house the urban underclass. The subgenre thus vividly reflects the fall from grace of high-rise housing over the decades. Decrying these estates as uncontrollable urban territories (illusion heterotopias) and ideal breeding grounds for all kinds of social misdemeanors, influential American urban critics like Jane Jacobs and Oscar Newman had their share in invoking the specter of high-rise estate horror in public discourse.¹²⁹ Crime and police films of the era – from *The French Connection* (1971) over *Taxi Driver* (1976) to *Fort Apache, The Bronx* (1981) – also staged the urban wasteland surrounding these estates as a true “horror city” filled with criminal gangs, sex workers and drug addicts (Kael 389). Demolition, it seemed, was the only way to regain control over these danger zones strewn all across American cities, such as it was first and most prominently done in the case of St. Louis’ Pruitt-Igoe estate complex in 1972, an event staged as a powerful symbol for modernity’s failure in Godfrey Reggio’s 1982 experimental film *Koyaanisqatsi*. Thus demonized as giant failures and eerie no-go areas by politics, the academia and the media, these often-derelict vertical slums with their potentially uncontrollable mass of boxed-up residents have unsurprisingly become a preferred setting for bloxploitation’s high-rise horror, both realistic and supernatural.

One of the first fictional scenarios that conflated the setting of neglected housing estates with horror elements in a typical bloxploitation narrative is the 1987 action-adventure film *Enemy Territory* featuring a single white insurance agent stuck in a tower block, which forms part of an ill-famed New York housing project. Evaded by police forces, the entire project and its graffiti-scrawled towers in particular appear like Newman’s worst nightmare of an uncontrollable urban space. Its almost entirely black occupants are regularly terrorized by a violent youth gang called “The Vampires” – the name being both a willful self-demonization in the classic register of horror and a rather blatant hint at

breakdown by their living conditions involving a general lack of privacy, thin walls (panacousticon!), heavy traffic noise and stinking garbage from the streets below, permanent quarreling with their neighbors, and constantly failing elevators, water supply, and air conditioning.

129 With its screaming girl jammed between two concrete tower blocks, the cover design of Newman’s most influential work, *Defensible Space* (1972), could almost pass for a random bloxploitation film poster (see Architectural Press edition published in 1973).

their practice of virtually ‘sucking out’ the community in nothing but their own interest. The agent’s dangerous and arduous escape from the beleaguered tower can only be completed by associating with a couple of ‘good’ local actors and ‘eliminating’ the gang’s believed-to-be-immortal leader “The Count” in a show-down typical of escape-bloxploitation scenarios. A similar premise of project-based high-rise horror underlies the 1992 movie *Candyman*: a graduate student undertakes research into an urban legend prevalent among residents of Chicago’s Cabrini-Green high-rise estates (built 1942–62, demolished 1995–2011), which are staged – in the movie just as in actual public discourse – as just another nightmarishly failed vertical community.¹³⁰ Their entirely black occupants, so the scholar believes, blame a monstrous slasher not only for a series of gruesome murders, but for the ills of their neighborhood in general. Despite the fact that *Candyman* is eventually revealed to be an actually existing malicious ghost, he no less than the Vampires gang in *Enemy Territory* operates as a metaphor for the ‘horrifying’ effect of high-rise (project) space on its residents, either because it urges them into criminal and violent behaviors or because it compels them to fear their own ‘haunted’ neighborhood in much the same way that the wider urban community does.

Yet while in these early scenarios single or small groups of monstrous actors appear as personified carriers of the high-rise horror, a whole wave of recent European bloxploitation films do not shy away from imagining entire estate or project populations as horrifying creatures. Being ‘merely’ depicted as a brutish, decivilized mob of criminal psychopaths in British films like *The Veteran* (2011), *Citadel* (2012), *Comedown* (2012) and *Tower Block* (2012), they are unabashedly staged as zombies and thus uncannily autonomous dead creatures in movies such as *The Horde* (2009) and *Devil’s Tower* (2014) where they go after small groups of still human residents. Seamlessly transferring the potential horror emanating from high-rise spaces onto their human populations by imaging them as non- or barely human creatures from the register of classic horror scenarios unmistakably bears the danger of perpetuating already existing (neoliberal or right-wing) discourses that debase underclass social milieus, if not downright denying them their status as human beings. Here, a striking contrast becomes apparent: What could still be presented as an eventually positive illusion heterotopia of orgiastic-archaic regression in the elite towers of *High-Rise* and *Shivers*, where degenerative

130 With its static top-down tracking shot along a Chicago freeway and its monumental Philip Glass score, *Candyman*’s intro almost appears like an outtake from *Koyaanisquatsi* and thus deliberately sets an audiovisual tone of skepticism towards modern civilization and its built space for its very own scenario.

social processes were triggered or at least catalyzed by the extreme conditions of high-rise space, can only be imagined negatively and thus in accord with the general public opinion in the social horror bloxploitation scenarios addressed in this paragraph. The latter's occupants are no longer mere victims of a brutalizing high-rise condition, but rather appear inherently psychopathic or monstrous. Such transfer of the architecture's horror on and thus also identification with its residents ultimately short-circuits any causality: the viewer is no longer able to tell if it is vertical cities that turn their occupants into monsters or if it is an inherently criminal, violent or already monstrous population that turns these towers into horror houses.

3.2.2 Smooth Execut(ion)ers – Architecture's Uncanny Collaboration in *American Psycho* (1991/2000)

At first glance, Bret Easton Ellis's controversial novel *American Psycho* appears an odd choice as a text to be examined for its built spaces given the novel's few instances that architecture of any kind is addressed at all – especially when compared to its overwhelming and excessively detailed focus on, for example, fashion, beauty products, food, music criticism, as well as a confusingly large number of flat and indistinctive characters. I would like to nevertheless elucidate the novel's spatial configuration – no matter whether addressed directly or, still more often, indirectly – as I am convinced that a close analysis of the high-rise spaces of *American Psycho*'s late 1980s Manhattan proves extremely fruitful for a fresh and unconventional interpretation of both the novel's first person narrator and protagonist Patrick Bateman as well as the historical urban setting at large.¹³¹ In doing so, I will also include the novel's 2000 film adaptation by Mary Harron as it not only – as a visual medium – is bound to depict significantly more of the urban high-rise environment the story is set in but also purposefully stages this built space in order to intensify crucial themes and topoi raised in the novel. I thus intend to demonstrate that both novel and film work on and maintain a close and intricate relationship between the characters and the spaces they inhabit, a relation that manifests itself both on a representative and/

131 Overall, the aspect of space has been poorly investigated with regard to *American Psycho* and thus a text that has generally been awarded much analysis from many different critical and theoretical perspectives. While most criticism has been concerned with making sense of the novel's postmodern set-up and its serial killer protagonist, the text's spatial structure has remained a critical blind spot with the exception of a few marginal (Heyler, Heise) or insufficient engagements (Giles).

or symbolical level (metaphorical relations) as well as in terms of a direct functional interaction (metonymical relations).

The fact that space claims a crucial role within the set-up of *American Psycho* – despite or even because of its by and large literal absence from the text – is made clear at two decisive points already in Ellis' novel, namely its opening and end: While in the very first sentence a graffito “scrawled in blood red lettering on the side of the Chemical Bank” quotes from Dante's *Inferno* and urges us to “[a]bandon all hope ye who enter here” thus literally encouraging one to enter into the ‘infernal’ urban setting of *American Psycho*, the novel's very last sentence focuses on a door which is “not an exit,” a phrase echoing Sartre's 1944 Existentialist play *No Exit* (Ellis 3, 399). Already from these sentences, steeped in literary tradition and embracing the 400 pages of the novel, one may extract the basic configuration of entrapment, of entering (although upon a warning) and being denied exit, that is at work on many levels and for various characters within *American Psycho*.

But what space does one enter into here? The world of 26-year-old Wall Street executive Patrick Bateman, spending his nights as a psychopathic serial killer, is that of late 1980s Manhattan, a deeply polarized social space embodying the socio-economic effects of Reagonomics and its neoliberal agenda in a most radical way.¹³² Only two social groups seem to inhabit that space: While the economic elite feasts in its ever increasing wealth thanks to lavish tax cuts and deregulated stock markets, capsularizing themselves in super-expensive, exclusive high-rise spaces, restaurants, and limousines, the urban poor face ever harder times carving out a miserable existence as underpaid wage slaves or as homeless people roaming the streets (see Helyer 738, Giles 161).¹³³ This scenario

132 With regard to the movie version, Abel has argued that “we can enjoy the film for its humor, its ridiculing of its characters and their world, and all the while remain convinced that we are living in a better world, that we have progressed, and that we are neither the perpetrators nor the victims of violence in any form” (Abel 53). But is Ellis' satire really limited only to the 1980s as a historical period? Can we not sense the actual strength of Ellis's fiction in the fact that it is becoming ever more relevant with the progression of history? After all, we are far from an end of consumer capitalism and the neoconservative legacy of the 1980s. Mark Fisher has thus sarcastically commented that “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism” (Fisher 2).

133 In their seminal article “Getting off the Ground” summarizing recent trends in urban geography devoted to the vertical as well as volumetric study of cities, Graham and Hewitt also attend to “the vertical aspects of urban secession and social fragmentation” manifesting itself in “the global proliferation of iconic as well as more prosaic high-rise residential, corporate and hotel skyscrapers [that] contribute in many cities

is already encapsulated within the novel's first pages introducing us to the protagonist and a friend of his as they ride a taxi through downtown Manhattan (see Storey 64). During their ride, Bateman and Timothy Price, two young elite urban professionals, despise the whole panorama of urban plight to be observed on the streets they pass or scandalized in the tabloid newspapers they read (see Heise 156–157). Neatly secluded in their taxi bubble and counting a total of thirty homeless people on their way, they are appalled by the poverty largely produced as a direct result of the policies and ideologies that they thrive on; they despise everyone not fitting into their narrow racist, sexist, and classist worldview: homeless, poor, mentally and physically ill, gays, transvestites, blacks, and almost everybody “not [looking] American” (Ellis 3).

On another rare occasion that the urban and architectural environment is focused on towards the end of the novel, the capsularization of the wealthy few from the many poor within New York City's CBD is also manifested on the vertical urban axis:

Walking down Fifth Avenue around four o'clock in the afternoon, everyone on the streets looks sad, the air is full of decay, bodies lie on the cold pavement, miles of it, some are moving, most are not. History is sinking and only a few seem dimly aware that things are getting bad. [...] I notice the skyline has changed only recently. I look up, admiringly, at Trump Tower, tall, proudly gleaming in the late afternoon sunlight. In front of it two smart-ass nigger teenagers are ripping off tourists at three-card monte and I have to fight the impulse to blow them up. [...] I move away from the bum, noticing, instead, a little girl smoking a cigarette begging for change outside Trump Tower. (385–386, see also 278)

The almost apocalyptic scenery Bateman encounters on his stroll down Fifth Avenue is marked by the sharp division between the shiny splendor of Manhattan's high-rise palaces high up and the epidemic homelessness and urban decay at street level spreading in their shadows.¹³⁴ Yet instead of drawing

to the emergence of a myriad of vertically stratified, gated ‘communities’, [...] starkly capsular spaces of social secession [...] which are access-controlled, only partially accessible, increasingly securitized and intensively surveilled and policed [...]” (Graham/Hewitt 79–80).

134 In her movie adaption, Mary Harron uses lighting as a means for capturing the division of urban spaces within Manhattan; most of the outside scenes are shot in dark, gloomy, and often run-down environments. Contrary to the novel, Bateman is almost always seen outside at night. The exclusive inside spaces of Bateman's apartment and office, the restaurants and bars are, however, well lit, yet mostly in an artificial and sterile way.

a connection between, let alone recognizing a mutual conditionality of both phenomena, that the “citadels of corporate power do not stand aloof [...] but sprout from the urban degradation they manufacture” the protagonist appears trapped in his own elitist ideology and rather holds a grudge against the already disenfranchised struggling to survive with petty street games (Heise 154).

In a strict sense, however, the novel’s urban and architectural spaces are not mere mirrors of the social and economic realities of the late 1980s, thus implying two discrete realms of study – space and architecture on the one hand and society and economy on the other hand. Rather, there are a whole lot of actors, human and nonhuman, variously connected and related to reach other, entangled in one large urban assemblage and mutually co-productive of each other: The gleaming high-rise spaces and the misery on street level are not merely symbolic or reflective of but a material manifestation of inequality, a social process of division made durable.

The aggravating urban plight of Manhattan’s homeless is a recurring motive and thus one of Patrick Bateman’s everyday experiences just as watching the *Patty Winters Show* and returning videotapes are to him. Almost every time Bateman descends from his lofty apartment located in the exclusive American Gardens Building¹³⁵, he recognizes at least one homeless person in the streets and sometimes even mistakes random people not adhering to the elegant dress code of the Manhattan elite for beggars, such as in the case of the student girl into whose coffee cup he accidentally throws a dollar bill (85–86). Maybe he comes closest to grasping the harsh reality of urban life in Manhattan when – immediately after the incident with the student – he “hallucinate[s] the buildings into mountains, into volcanoes, the streets become jungle, [and] the sky freezes into a backdrop” (86). Bizarre as this vision of Manhattan as a giant prehistoric tropic wilderness may seem, it, nevertheless neatly captures the scenario of a few ‘predatory’ capitalists and elite members (such as Bateman himself) preying on and exploiting large sections

135 Inhabiting a luxurious residential high-rise (similar to the Sliver skyscraper in the eponymous movie studied above) located in downtown Manhattan, Bateman pioneers a then new trend of repopulating American CBDs (here the Wall Street district) with elite residents. In his study of American cities, Hahn has argued that from the 1980s onwards “[d]owntown living has become attractive again for certain sections of the population, namely middle and upper class groups, often one- or two-person-households without children (“yuppies”, *young urban professionals*, or “dinks”, *double-income-no-kids*-households). For twenty to thirty years now, one has discussed these processes under the term of *gentrification*” (Hahn, *USA* 40, my translation).

of the population that face an existential struggle for survival in the urban jungle.

Except for this scene and other minor instances, such as when Bateman realizes that “the entire block he’s lurching down is gentrified” (350, also see 128, 297), the protagonist appears completely blind to his architectural environment and its reshaping under the aegis of neoliberal urban policies. Instead, his attention is much more focused on the opening and closing of expensive restaurants, bars, clubs, designer stores, or delicatessens where he spends most of his free time.

Apart from the omnipresent homeless, there is a limited number of signs that keep recurring within the novel’s urban environment or at least in Bateman’s selective perception of it. These signs, however, are themselves indicative of the social division present everywhere: Again and again, Bateman sees posters advertising the hugely successful *Les Misérables* musical in the streets and on the buses of Manhattan (3–4, 6, 113, 151). The musical, however, is also discussed between Bateman and other elite socialites (94, 182), its CD recording plays as muzak in a restaurant (137) and also in Bateman’s home (171–172) or its poster is proposed as a graduation present (122).¹³⁶ The repeated reference to *Les Misérables* may well be read as a bitter commentary on the commodification and aestheticization of the misery of the common people as depicted in Victor Hugo’s classic novel into a commercial musical. Only after poverty and plight has been turned into a signifier, into yet another consumer product, so it seems, can it be of interest to Bateman and his elite friends. However, mostly debating on the best recording of the musical, they stay just as oblivious to the injustice featured in the musical and its literary template as they remain regarding the army of miserable people in their own urban environment.

Another signifier that one encounters over and over again throughout the novel is Donald Trump, New York’s business icon and celebrity socialite. In fact, Trump’s name and face are present in many forms and media: The towers and hotels built and bought by him (163, 200, 297, 385), posters and magazine covers featuring his face, TV and newspapers containing interviews with him (109–110, 256, 380–381), or his autobiographical book *The Art of the Deal* on Bateman’s office desk (276). On a purely representational level, Donald Trump,

136 In the 2000 movie adaptation, a framed poster of the musical also hangs right above the toilet in Bateman’s bathroom and there is a moment when he stares at the reflection of his face in its glassed surface, thereby juxtaposing himself to the iconic portrait of a young and rag-clad Cosette. The movie thus also links (an aestheticized image of) poverty to Bateman’s lavish home and lifestyle, thus implying their mutual interdependency.

whom Bateman seems obsessed with (194), stands for the greedy and reckless business mentality of the 1980s as well as the real estate speculation responsible in part for the described urban plight – as was already implied in the above quoted passage (385).¹³⁷ In relational terms, Trump appears as the multi-medial mega agent within Manhattan's urban assemblage, able to connect with each and every actor, thus turning his name into a brand that can literally cover everything: buildings, hotels, casinos, books, magazines, parties etc.¹³⁸ Utter poverty among the many urban 'miserable' and aggressive capital accumulation among the few rich have been sublimated into the omnipresent urban signifiers of *Les Misérables* and Trump that appear so glossy and mediatized that they successfully obscure the material implications and interconnections of their real-life referents.

On the occasion of Bateman's accidental meeting with one of his other idols, the actor Tom Cruise, who happens to live in the penthouse atop Bateman's residential tower, Ellis subtly inserts another allusion to the connection between high-rise urban space and the violence needed to produce and maintain it along with the cultural ideals of the 1980s. Early on in the novel, Bateman meets Cruise – the late 1980s Hollywood ideal of young masculinity (see Ph. Gates 223–225) – in the elevator of the American Gardens Building that they both inhabit (Ellis 71–72). When Cruise makes Bateman aware of his bleeding nose (probably from doing too much coke) the latter tries to muse his shame away with the words “Must be the altitude.” [...] “We're so high up” (72). Bateman's seemingly ironic coupling of residential altitude and violence may be read as a dead-on observation on the structural violence of a vertically segregated 1980s Manhattan, thus elucidating (although unintended) the violence operationalized and black-boxed within the socially polarized high-rise space he inhabits.

137 Another revealing scene that seems to link Trump as a signifier and his real estate marauding, has Bateman pass an array of “[f]aded posters of Donald Trump on the cover of Time magazine [that] cover the windows of another abandoned restaurant, what used to be Palaze,” a sight that curiously fills Bateman “with a newfound confidence,” thus implying that Bateman thrives as much on these urban processes as does Trump (163).

138 It is interesting to note that Trump seems omnipresent in the novel although he never appears in person. He is present only as a signifier. In fact, Trump nowadays mostly capitalizes on his own branded name that signifies a long list of buildings, hotels, golf courses, and consumer goods such as steaks, wine and vodka without actually owning them. His excessively visual presence as a brand of his own within American culture may then also have played a crucial role regarding his ascent to the presidency in late 2016.

With regard to Bateman's later murders, his comment may also reveal the violence Bateman has to exert in order to maintain and defend his privileged elite position "high up" against everyone marginalized and therefore excluded from Bateman's and by proxy 1980s American normative ideal of straight white masculinity effectively embodied by Cruise of whom Bateman is "a big fan." As a living model for Bateman, it is thus only logical that Cruise resides on top of Bateman's tower. As a consequence, every step or rather story further up and thus closer to the ideal he takes seems proportional to the amount of violence he has to wield on the 'other', the amount of their blood he has to shed – a form of logic that is terribly put to action in the pages to follow that seemingly pointless encounter between Bateman and the actor. That scene also introduces Bateman's exclusive high-rise residence as a space of violence, an apparent heterotopia of illusion in the form of a deadly trap high above and thus well removed from what may be left of social order and ethics on the civic ground spaces of Manhattan. In fact, as shall be demonstrated below, there is no heterotopia possible because one cannot distinguish between an amoral above and a moral ground level in *American Psycho*.

If one thus already got the impression that the urban space of Manhattan is not only reflective of but actually produced and operated according to the ideals of the 1980s economic and political elite that Bateman belongs to, it should come as no surprise that Bateman's private spaces, mainly the lavish apartment and downtown tower he inhabits together with all the other elite people and their attendants, are no exception from that rule. In fact, Bateman's ever more gruesome murders that he first commits in the streets and later on in his own apartment or that of a killed colleague are not only generously tolerated and ignored but at times even actively aided by the network of human and nonhuman actors making up the complex assemblage of his high-rise tower as well as the city at large. Williams has thus rightfully stated that "Bateman's entire social world [and from an ANT-perspective this also includes material objects and architectural space] is complicit in his activities and denies his every involvement in his crimes, [...]" (Williams 408).

What is probably just as shocking as the graphically spelled out violence that Bateman uses to torture and murder his victims is the fact that no one seems to take any notice of these gruesome deeds that certainly do not go about sound-and-stainlessly. As if the Manhattan skyscraper had never been a panacousticon, Bateman is even able to open the windows and terrace door of his apartment during one of his murders (Ellis 246). The stains that his regularly staged bloodbaths leave on his clothes, bedding, floors, and walls seem to alarm neither the dry cleaners (81–84) nor the maid that "waxes the floor, wipes blood

smears off the walls, throws away gore-soaked newspapers without a word” (382). Similarly, no one appears to be disturbed by the careless way in which Bateman disposes of his victims’ corpses and body parts. After murdering his business rival Paul Owen, he seems to face no obstacles, let alone qualms about getting caught:

[...] I place Owen headfirst and fully dressed into a Canalino goose-down sleeping bag, which I zip up then drag easily into the elevator, then through the lobby, past the night doorman, down the block, [...]. [...] I hail a taxi, effortlessly manage to swing the sleeping bag into the backseat, hop in and give the driver the address in Hell’s Kitchen. Once there I carry the body up four flights of stairs until we’re at the unit I own in the abandoned building [...]. (219)

The same is true for his handling of his old girlfriend Bethany’s corpse:

[...] I’m thinking of ways to get rid of Bethany’s body, or at least debating whether or not I should keep it in my apartment another day or so. If I decide to get rid of it tonight, I can easily stuff what’s left of her into a Hefty garbage bag and leave it in the stairwell; or I can exert the extra effort and drag it into the street, leaving it with the rest of trash on the curb. (249)

Even after variously confessing his bloody deeds passingly to friends and colleagues or eventually insisting on having committed a long list of murders in front of his lawyer, Bateman is never taken seriously. Accordingly, he faces neither investigation nor prosecution. The detective investigating the sudden disappearance of Paul Owen does not really suspect Bateman of any involvement in the case and in the movie version, which further develops the investigation plot, he finally even clears Bateman of any suspicion whatsoever. The one time that the police actually chase Bateman after he randomly kills a street musician, culminates in a dramatic shootout in the course of which Bateman – much to his own surprise – manages to shoot various policemen as well as to cause the police car to explode. The police helicopter seemingly taking up the pursuit thereafter either gives up or was directed towards another target (348–352).

It is important to note here that it is not only human actors that make Bateman’s killing sprees such smooth operations by way of their almost uncanny disinterest, ignorance, clandestine acceptance, or ineptitude. There is also a good number of consumer goods – of which Bateman has by far more to say on than of all of the novel’s characters taken together – that prove to be handy tools and aids during the torture of his victims. Apart from the actual tools, weapons, and torture instruments Bateman buys and orders, he frequently strips these otherwise venerated consumer articles off their value form for the sake of “creatively misusing” them for most horrible acts, thereby redefining their original

use value (if there is any at all).¹³⁹ It is thus that Bateman prepares for the slaying of Paul Owen by covering his living room floor with “copies of *USA Today* and *W* and *The New York Times*” in order to “protect the polished white-stained oak from his blood” and may later place his corpse in a designer sleeping bag by Canalino (217, 219). On other occasions, he uses “a camel-hair coat from Ralph Lauren” to cover a victim’s head so as to “drown[...] out the screams, sort of” (245) or has the “ripped pages from last month’s *Vanity Fair* stuffed into [another victim’s] mouth” (290). During the torture of two escort girls he “put[s] a CD of the Traveling Wilburys into a portable CD player [...], to mute any screams” while one of the girls “is tied up with six pairs of Paul’s suspenders on the other side of the bed [...]” (304).¹⁴⁰

Most strikingly it is architectural space itself that appears to collaborate with Bateman during his murderous excesses. While the “creative reuse” of consumer objects as just demonstrated seem to stress Bateman’s sadistic agency, the architectural space of Bateman’s apartment and building rather manifests an agency of its own and at times even appears to outdo a baffled protagonist in terms of the smoothness and perfection of ‘its’ crimes and their obscuring. I have already remarked above on the aptitude of the high-rise milieu for committing crimes, indeed transgressions of any kind due to its vertical seclusion from, its virtual ‘aboveness’ regarding the norms and orders of the horizontal city space below. Apart from this, it is a space of almost complete entrapment with little or no possibility for escaping horizontally without risking to fall to one’s immediate death. The connection to a supposedly safe ground level and, as it were, the only way down or rather out may be a staircase or elevator, which, however, represent spaces of entrapment in their own right. One should therefore not be too surprised to learn that none of Bateman’s victims that he chooses to torture and murder in the high-rise space of his or Paul Owen’s apartment manages to escape from there. The only victim that comes close is Elizabeth, a young model and acquaintance of Bateman’s, who tries “to escape, heading for the door” (289). Yet even before reaching the door out of Bateman’s apartment, she is struck down and then killed by the relentless protagonist in perfect

139 See chapter 3.2.3. for more intense scrutiny on the aspect of commodity fetishism and its subversion.

140 Of course, the very use of these consumer objects as part of Bateman’s torture marathons may be read as a harsh criticism of the act of consumption itself. But the creative reuse of these objects offers no catharsis like in *Fight Club*, gains him no more authentic life but rather results in turning the dismembered corpses into designer objects themselves!

murderous company with a butcher knife and the floor slippery from the blood already shed.

It is Mary Harron's movie adaption that takes up the thread of this escape scenario and fleshes it out, although changing the victim and location for this scene. Here it is Christie, a prostitute already familiar from an earlier scene, not Elizabeth whom Bateman has already killed in bed, who attempts to escape as soon as she recognizes what Bateman is really up to. Not yet injured, she frantically paces through Paul Owen's apartment (into which the whole scene is relocated in the movie) in order to find a way out of the place. As the camera follows Christie, hunted by a naked Bateman manically brandishing a chainsaw, what initially appeared to be a small apartment turns into a confusing maze luring her into several 'dead end' rooms and cabinets already filled with corpses. After almost being tracked down by Bateman in the bathroom, she manages to escape once more from his clutches. Finally finding her way out of the apartment, she desperately screams and hammers onto the doors of neighboring apartments in order to attract the attention of anyone inside. As the whole building seems to be devoid of any other people, she paces down a staircase, only to "meet[...] an unbelievable end" when being slashed by Bateman's falling chainsaw (Findlay 86).¹⁴¹ Once more a whole building conspires with Bateman not only by way of its mazing and entrapping spatial structure but also because again not a single resident appears to take notice of the horrible bloodbath. In fact, no one seems to be alarmed in any way by either Christie's frantic screaming or Bateman's ghoulish growling.¹⁴²

In one important scene, however, that very conspiracy between Bateman and his environment is taken to an almost surreal extreme. When, towards the end of the novel, Bateman returns to Paul Owen's apartment he is virtually shocked to

141 I will return to this scene further down in order to assess the potential of resistance within *American Psycho*.

142 The apparently empty high-rise that one encounters in this scene brings to mind Baudrillard's observation that in Manhattan it seems "as though there were no one inside the buildings, as if there were no one behind the faces [and doors]. And there *really* is no one. This is what the ideal city is like" (Baudrillard, *America* 63). In fact, urban geography has shown that there is more to this observation than pure rhetoric: While concentrated skyscraper ensembles in American CBDs still convey the impression of being "zones of highest economic power, [...] significant vacancies hide behind new skyscrapers from the 1980s onwards" (Schneider-Sliwa 49, my translation) and "in some cities there is 7 to 23 percent of vacant space in new buildings" (Hahn, *USA* 63, my translation; see also Graham/Hewitt, "Getting Off the Ground" 79–80).

find that not only all the corpses he stored in there have miraculously vanished but that the whole place has been cleaned up, painted, and is now presented to a couple by an eager realtor (Ellis 367–368). The scene becomes even more mysterious when Mrs. Wolfe, the realtor, confronts Bateman and seemingly implies that she knows more about the apartment's and Bateman's prehistory than she wants to admit. In the end, she urges a completely confused Bateman to leave, telling him to "make no trouble" and "[d]on't come back" (369–370). Now that built space and its administrators have come to back Bateman's murderous escapades by way of 'cleaning up' after him and disposing of any traces even without his knowledge, their all too close collaboration seems to take on an almost patronizing and thus eventually uncanny trait. Bateman, whose supreme agency had been granted by the assistance of a diverse network of actors clandestinely operating in his interests, now has to realize that he, in fact, is at the mercy of an autonomously acting system beyond his control. Patronized like a dumb kid, he desperately demands "to know what happened" while "feel[ing] sick, [his] chest and back covered with sweat, drenched, [...]" (369). Even more than the novel, Harron's movie adaptation stresses Bateman's shocked disbelief in that very scene just as much as it has him wondering about the magic superpowers of his gun after he was able to make a police car explode with only a single shot in her staging of a scene already mentioned above.¹⁴³ With things and space thus slipping away from his control, should one be surprised that Bateman – not unlike Stan Emery and Jimmy Herf in *Manhattan Transfer* – starts encountering (or rather hallucinating up) strangely animated objects claiming an agency of their own towards the very end of the novel? While he has already seen "a Cheerio [...] interviewed for close to an hour" on his favorite talk show earlier on (386), it is in the novel's last chapter that Bateman informs us that his "automated teller has started *speaking* to [him]" as well as that he "was freaked out by the park bench that followed [him] for six blocks last Monday evening and it too spoke to [him]" (395).

Uncanny and patronizing as space may have turned for Bateman at the end of the novel, it has always backed him and will continue to back and assist every gruesome crime he will commit, no matter how surreal that assistance may look,

143 Some critics usually refer to these scenes as proof for a reading that has Bateman imagine most or even all of his murders (see e.g. Giles 168–173). Yet, Ellis' novel, essentially postmodern in its set-up, offers no final evidence for such reading, thus leaving it up to the reader to judge on that. For my reading, however, it is of no relevance if Bateman imagines his deeds or not, for the logic of spatial collaboration stays as viable in fantasy and dream as it does in the real space of Manhattan.

such as in the miraculous apartment cleanup or the unlikely killing of Christie in the movie version. When trying to explain that extreme form of collaboration between an individual elite actor and the spatial network around him, one may well turn to Henri Lefebvre's influential theorizing on the production of space. Essentially Marxist in its outline, this theory conceptualizes space as a social product, which does – independent of all later possibilities of resistance it allows for – first of all, always reflect the ideology and interests of the ruling class. As a consequence, Lefebvre may contend that “the space thus produced [not only] serves as a tool of thought and of action” but is also and always “a means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (Lefebvre 26). If one would like to harmonize that selfsame theoretical conception of space with the methodological framework I have chosen for this study, one should be safe to say that it is in no way contradictory to an ANT-reading but rather makes concrete what stays rather abstract or on a metaphorical level in Lefebvre's statement quoted above. Space may well turn into a means of control and domination when the ruling discourse or, for that sake, the ideological program is inscribed into material and technological just as much as into human actors who are thus enrolled to operate on its behalf. The violence of a discourse is thus made durable and structural in these either animate or inanimate actors that make up any given space, thereby forming what Foucault has convincingly described as the components of the *dispositif* (Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh” 195).

But what exactly is that discourse, the very ideology, the action program that both Bateman and his spatial environment have so successfully incorporated in order to commit that array of gruesome acts? The answer is at hand when one pays close attention to Bateman's very own ideals and beliefs that are in striking accordance with neoliberal and neoconservative values of the American political mainstream of the Reagan 1980s: As a profiteer of capitalism unleashed, Bateman endorses the free market that allows him to follow his greatest obsession of all: consumption.¹⁴⁴ Apart from that, he is the perfect representative and proponent of 80s cultural normativity, despising virtually every human being not sharing his very own characteristics: wealthy, white, male, and straight.¹⁴⁵

144 All this is true despite the morale-laden political speech he delivers over diner in the first chapter, the only instance of direct political commentary from the protagonist (15). Based on his remarks in this monologue, he actually seems to endorse liberal policies, although it remains fairly dubious whether these commentaries are really meant to be taken serious.

145 With regard to his prominent idols also mentioned in the text, one may say that Bateman's ego ideal is an amalgam of Tom Cruise (outward appearance), Donald

And if one closely scrutinizes what people are executed by the smoothly operating agential partnership of Bateman and his high-rise network, one should not be surprised to find that the deadly machine follows exactly that code of normativity, designating as victim each and everyone not conforming to it. Except for the murders of Paul Owen and his ex-girlfriend Bethany whose killings are spurned by his humiliated ego in surges of foaming Trump-style narcissism, each and every victim executed by Bateman and his spatial allies belongs to one of the categories outlined in the following.

For a start, there are the countless homeless and urban poor that Bateman runs into as soon as he cares to step into the streets of Manhattan. While at times he takes sadistic pleasure in mocking them and their hardship, such as when he asks beggars or prostitutes if they take American Express (Ellis 7, 169) or when squeezing another beggar's "cheek affectionately, then laugh[ing] out loud" (178), at other times he appears simply infuriated by their existence because he believes them to be indolent and thus to be blamed for their miserable state. This becomes clear when he urges one of them to get a job and continues to provoke the man by asking if he "think[s] it's fair to take money from people who *do* have jobs [and] *do* work" (129–130). As Heise has shown, Bateman, not only in this scene, turns into a mouthpiece of "a neoconservative discourse that argue[s] that the poverty piling up around us is the outcome of personal failings and biological predispositions" (Heise 154). That Bateman too thinks of poverty in hereditary terms becomes obvious, for instance, when he passingly refers to a homeless man as "a member of the genetic underclass" (Ellis 266). As a consequence, Bateman's first murder victim (at least based on what he tells us) is the black homeless man he accused of indolence earlier on, a man Bateman senses he has nothing in common with. After having preached the neoliberal gospel to him, he simply translates the violence of that discourse and the policies it inspired into actual violence and just stabs him along with his dog, only to continue his midnight stroll thereafter (131–132). With regard to Bateman's behavior towards the marginalized, Williams has convincingly argued that

[i]n his attacks on helpless outcasts, Bateman is also taking to logical conclusions the policies of Ronald Reagan but also those of Bill Clinton who actually achieved what the

Trump (reckless economic behavior and style), and Ronald Reagan (political conservatism and neoliberalism). Reagan, whom Bateman watches twice in the novel delivering a speech on TV, has actually been read as a template and doppelgänger of Bateman when it comes to the discrepancy between their amiable public persona and the harsh policies implemented or gory deeds committed by them, respectively (see Vogan 214–218).

Gipper failed to do, namely “end welfare as we know it,” using Clinton’s phrase. Bateman is the most logical product of American mainstream values. He relies both on social ideology and the complicity of others for his murderous actions. [...] Like the film version, the novel strongly intimates that Bateman is Reagan’s monster from the id who acts out what his neoconservative political father cannot actually do. (Williams 404, 411)

Then there is race. Contrary to Heise’s argument that Bateman’s racist slurs are secondary to his neoliberal-inspired class hatred, one has to come to the undisputable conclusion that he still passes for a true racist when looking at the evidence in the text (see Heise 146–149). From the very first pages of the novel, it becomes clear that Bateman and his entourage harbor a deeply rooted racism, such as when Bateman remarks that the driver of his taxi is “black, not American” (Ellis 3). Though he is able to hide his anti-Semitism behind a tolerant mask in certain situations (37), it is latent all the time and may suddenly burst out of him, such as when he desperately tries to order a cheeseburger and milkshake in a kosher delicatessen and ends up insulting the manager as a “retarded cocksucking kike” (152). On another occasion, Bateman makes an acquaintance read out one of his deeply racist poems that closes on the line “Black man is debil” (233). And after a friend of his ranted about the Japanese taking over Manhattan, Bateman feels motivated to kill a random delivery boy whom he believes to be Japanese, only to recognize later from the Chinese food the boy carried that he “accidentally kill[ed] the wrong kind of Asian” (180–181).

And then there is gender. Overall, Bateman appears to be hypersensitive when it comes to his heteronormativity. Any sight of, let alone approach by gay people seems to have a deeply unsettling effect on him, thus nourishing a violent homophobia in him. When on one day, he accidentally runs into a gay pride parade, he stands paralyzed, watching “with a certain traumatized fascination, [his] mind reeling with the concept that a human being, a man, could feel pride over sodomizing another man [...]” Truly unsettled, he rushes back into the safe, vertical asylum of his apartment where he has to change clothes, give himself pedicure and torture a little dog to its death in order to regain his composure (139). No wonder then that his second murder is that of an “old queer” and his shar-pei dog whom he kills on an open street at twilight (164–166). Still more disturbing to Bateman, however, are the repeated approaches by his colleague Luis who seems to be infatuated with the protagonist (159–160, 223–224, 293–296). Bateman tries to avoid meeting him and when he does, fights him off with a knife (223–224) or even attempts to strangle him (158).¹⁴⁶

146 Bateman’s excessive fear of everything gay as well as his aroused reaction at a U2 concert (147) may point into the direction of repressed homosexual impulses with the

And finally, there are, of course, women. In fact, most of the controversy *American Psycho* spurred even prior to its release in 1991 centered on Ellis' depiction of the extreme abasement of and violence against women who also make up the vast majority of Bateman's murder victims.¹⁴⁷ However, contrary to all the other people Bateman murders, one needs to differentiate in the case of his female victims as they seem to fall into several categories, each of them stirring Bateman's hatred and bloodlust for different reasons. Firstly, there are a number of successful, single businesswomen, whom Bateman seems to despise and kill (although he never says so) because they do not conform to the conservative ideal of womanhood as propagated by many influential institutions and media during the 1980s. Another motivation for his hatred of this group of women is probably that Bateman tries to compensate for his own 'unmanly' workless job at a firm practically owned by his father. Whenever women bring up this fact, he is sure to be infuriated within seconds (221, 237). Then there is a subgroup of these independent career women consisting of young women usually not working in business but as models. Bateman and his male friends are especially attracted to them precisely because of their conforming to a certain beauty ideal ("big tits, blonde, great ass" (30)) and are commonly referred to by them as "hardbodies" or "bimbos." On one occasion, one of Bateman's colleagues provides a deeply chauvinist definition of this 'ideal' type of woman as "a chick who has a little hardbody and who will satisfy all sexual demands without being too slutty about things and who will essentially keep her dumb fucking mouth *shut*" (91). Although they are physically attractive to Bateman, he supposedly feels the same reason to kill them as he does for the larger group of independent, young women (see Storey 66). Then there is the group of prostitutes and escort girls that Bateman seems attracted to precisely because they are "person[s]-as-commodity" to him and thus totally controllable beings that he can rent, consume, and kill at will (Heise 147). They are commodities to him and thus only good for satisfying his needs; apart from that, they are of no value at all to him and may therefore also be murdered. The last group consists of the neurotic and sedated women of Bateman's elite circle, such as his much-hated fiancé Evelyn (of whom he frequently has torture and murder fantasies) and his lover Courtney who are probably too similar to himself (rich, not really working, embodying mainstream gender ideals) in order to fall prey to his bloodlust for the non-normative.

protagonist. This has also been remarked on by Giles when he contends that "a gay subtext is present in *American Psycho*" (Giles 169; see also Helyer 736 and Storey 65).

147 For detailed accounts on *American Psycho*'s complicated and scandalized publishing and reception history see Abel 39–40, Findlay 80–82, and Heise 138–140.

In conclusion, one may say that regarding the many women Bateman murders in the novel, he is once more acting out violently what proponents of the 1980s conservative gender agenda could not even have dared to say or write, namely that “the best single woman is a dead one,” as Susan Faludi has claimed bitterly in *Backlash*, which was (probably not that) coincidentally also released in 1991 (Faludi 123). Against the backdrop of popular 1980s antifeminism, Bateman stands in line with the manipulative men in *Scissors* and *Sliver* (released in 1991 and 1993, respectively) that have been discussed in the previous subchapter: They lure and entrap young and independent single women in their heterotopic high-rise spaces (phallic power!) in order to either intimidate them and break their will or to murder them right away – even though Bateman does not explicitly use and collaborate with smart technologies but rather relies on ‘traditional’ spatio-material actors for his crimes.¹⁴⁸

The normative code upon which Bateman judges and executes his victims, however, is also the one he applies most rigorously to himself. Indeed, Bateman and his elite friends try to internalize this code so much that they almost seem to suffer from it. Checking their style constantly, keeping themselves updated with the latest trends in fashion, popular music as well as Manhattan’s restaurant and club landscape, working out almost everyday as well as undergoing lengthy and costly beauty routines – these activities generally relegated to the realm of free time turn into the real work of these barely working members of the social elite (see Vogan 214–215). Heise has thus remarked that

Bateman and his yuppie colleagues engage in the most rigorous forms of self-discipline, continually monitoring themselves and others to make sure that they are perfectly coiffed, sporting the right combination of accessories, and following every protocol relating to their own comportment. They over identify with these protocols so as to appear resolutely heteronormative. Ellis hyperbolizes male rituals of self-disciplining, self-creation, and social surveillance [...]. (Heise 152)

Having almost perfected these modes of self-disciplining and self-modeling, Bateman and his male entourage turn into prototypical models; they represent the master products of the control age, no longer needing panoptic coercion. Accordingly, Bateman is not longer coerced by others’ gazes but by his very own

148 Although Bateman’s powerful and privileged position is in no way endangered for real by the groups listed above, I think one can still follow Storey when he states that “Bateman’s world is one in which the “other” increasingly penetrates his sphere of existence; therefore, his reaction toward them needs to become increasingly hostile to maintain the distance. [...] Everyone he “murders” presents some kind of challenge to his position of patriarchal supremacy” (Storey 65).

mirror image that he seems to catch almost automatically wherever he goes, virtually mirroring himself in everything (because he is so similar to the milieu he inhabits!).¹⁴⁹ One of the ironic conclusions to be drawn from his rigorous self-disciplining is that Bateman qualifies as an ‘American psycho’ not because of his deviance from the norm but precisely because he has incorporated the normative codes of 1980s America so meticulously, over-identified so excessively with them, that his attitudes and actions turn monstrous, in fact ‘normopathic’.

As a direct consequence of such over-identification with the selfsame code and its scrupulous translation into the matter of their bodies and clothes, the members of Bateman’s elite peer group come to resemble themselves in an almost uncanny way. As Walter has noted, “each New York setting of *American Psycho* is populated by undifferentiated yuppie stereotypes” (Walter 142). In fact, Ellis seems to be taking to extremes in his third novel a characteristic feature of his earlier two novels, namely the excessive similarity of his central characters due to their adherence to a specific beauty and fashion ideal. In *American Psycho*, that very condition of extreme resemblance and thus interchangeability provides for another motive that haunts one throughout the text: Bateman and his indistinctive peers constantly mistake themselves for one another. In almost every chapter Bateman is mistaken for somebody else – another circumstance that greatly helps him to escape any kind of prosecution for his bloody deeds. As Paul Owen continuously mistakes Bateman for Marcus Halberstam, the detective commissioned to investigate Owen’s disappearance is never able to convict Bateman as his murderer (Ellis 89, 215–217). To render things even more absurd, the detective – who also happens to resemble Bateman in many ways (267) – finally believes his case to be solved as Owen has allegedly been spotted twice in London; what at first sounds like a miraculous resurrection of Owen may be explained by the simple fact that somebody else was mistaken for him (301, 388). The very idea of Owen having moved to London itself is a creation of Bateman who changed the message on Owen’s answering machine accordingly after having murdered him. Yet, he is only able to do so because his “voice sounds similar to Owen’s and to someone hearing it over the phone probably identical” (218). The utter absurdity of the Owen

149 Harron neatly emphasizes Bateman’s automated narcissism in her movie by inserting mirroring effects in almost every second scene. The movie’s almost obsessive ubiquity of mirrors ranges from the knife on its cover picture, the bathroom cabinet, a framed poster of *Les Misérables* behind glass, steel surfaces in the kitchen, mirrors on bedroom closets, in public bathrooms, in Courtney’s bedroom up to the mirroring glass facades of skyscrapers.

murder case demonstrates that in *American Psycho*'s universe of undifferentiated characters and settings any kind of classical crime or investigation plot turns out to be a most futile business, if not a physical impossibility altogether (see Giles 172–173).

Bateman himself is well aware of the fact that he and most members of his yuppie entourage “look pretty much the same” (Ellis 250). And even though he is told that “there is a world of difference” (94) and that “no two snowflakes are ever alike” (378), he stays convinced that “a lot of people are alike” and that “everyone is interchangeable anyway” (378–379). This kind of extreme inter- and “exchangeability of persons [which] is achieved through the erasure of difference under the guise of individuality,” however, does not remain restricted to human actors in *American Psycho* but is also reflected in Manhattan's built space (Heise 149, see also Williams 412–413).

As a visual medium that is per se bound to depict more of the urban setting than any text would have to, Harron's movie version seems more instructive in this case: Apart from a few eccentric landmark high-rises, Manhattan appears here as a rather monotonous landscape of modernist (black) boxes. Mostly glass-surfaced and thus mirroring each other in a double sense, these towers seem just as indistinctive and interchangeable as the characters inhabiting and working in them. As does almost any movie or series set in Manhattan (or a similar high-rise environment), Mary Harron's movie also makes ample use of short flights over the skyscraper panorama in between two scenes or low angle shots of and pans up a specific high-rise as establishing shots for scenes supposed to be set in the very buildings focused on beforehand. Yet, as seems to be the case with most of the cuts in this movie, these ‘skyscraper bridges’ are not as random as they might appear at first sight but follow, as I would argue, a clear aesthetic concept: These shots and cuts clearly establish a connection between the interchangeable mirror-facade towers and the similarly indistinctive and surface-obsessed characters seen immediately before or after these cuts. This pattern seems obvious from the movie's very beginning. After one sees Bateman going through his excessive morning routine that ends with a close-up of his beauty-masked face in a mirror (also an early insinuation of his troubled sense of self which is added by parts from his bitter monologue taken from one of the novel's final chapters and a suspense-building sound) the movie abruptly cuts to a pan over a sunny Manhattan's skyscraper panorama with a special focus on the World Trade Center and its two towers mirroring each other while one listens to Katrina and the Waves' booming feel-good song “Walking On Sunshine.” After that, a low angle shot zooms up Bateman's office building – just another modernist glass box – in order to guide us over to a scene set in

his office. The duplicity or mirror motive of two similar towers commenting on Bateman's or his peers' indistinctive personalities recurs throughout the movie, most prominently by repeatedly focusing on the WTC's iconic twin towers that appear several times in such establishing shots or within the backdrop of certain scenes. Another striking example is a moment when the movie cuts from a scene that has Bateman and three of his elite friends seated around a table in Yale Club to a low angle pan up the full lengths of two modernist glass skyscrapers that are joined by the tips of two similar towers when the camera ultimately stops its upward pan in vertical skyward position, thus imitating the quartet of the four indistinctive men by a circular ensemble of four interchangeable high-rise tops. The two towers (one of them containing Bateman's office) the camera pans up at in this bridge cut, however, return at a later point in the movie. When a panicking Bateman runs through downtown Manhattan after being involved in a brutal shoot-out with the police, he intends to seek refuge in his office tower, only to realize from the artworks adorning the lobby and from being falsely addressed by the building's night watchman (another mistaking!) that he has accidentally entered the "*wrong fucking building*" (Ellis 351). Only after shooting the watchman and a janitor in all his confusion does he manage to cross the plaza between the two identical buildings and enter 'his' tower where he heads up "in the elevator, higher, toward the darkness of his floor" and finally senses himself "safe in the anonymity of [his] new office" (351–352). Manhattan's modernist built space may thus appear indistinctive in a similarly uncanny way as do the novel's and movie's human actors. As this scene proves, the similarity of space and people may, however, not only benefit Bateman on his endless killing spree but also seriously disturb and thereby render him vulnerable (at least in his own perception), although he is never caught or convicted.

Most people, objects, and buildings in *American Psycho* are identified solely in terms of their surface attributes that are in themselves limited to a small and absolutely interchangeable selection of brands and names-as-brands (such as Trump). It is thus that these people, places, and buildings (which are normally composed of a network of fixed things and names) are constantly confused and mistaken for someone and something else – by the characters just as much as by the reader. This leads to a paradoxical situation: For all their lengthy over-attribution with surface values, these people, places, and menus, nevertheless, remain undefined, even invisible, unknowable and thus black boxes revealing none of their inner life (if there is one; emptiness is often implied). Ellis creates a narrative universe that functions exclusively on surface attributes of a limited range while at the same time evading any traditional characterization

(e.g. physical features); he thus constantly invites confusion, alienation, and uncanny moments.¹⁵⁰

The nature and in fact horror of his inner “vacancy,” his intense “depersonalization” – a condition suffered by Bateman and his friends in which the illusion of a unique subjectivity is continually deferred through the substitution of signs” – is clearly registered and voiced by Bateman with growing frequency towards the end of the novel (Heise 150). In these almost metanarrative monologues Bateman delivers bitter commentaries on the horror of being a postmodern character or, in other words, to be nothing more than a code executed in a universe of total determination and control:

There wasn't a clear identifiable emotion within me [...]. I had all the characteristics of a human being – flesh, blood, skin, hair – but my depersonalization was so intense that the normal ability to feel compassion had been eradicated, the victim of a slow purposeful erasure. I was simply imitating reality, a rough resemblance of a human being [...]. (Ellis 282)

In statements like this, that cut up the text's monotonous flow of consumption and boredom, Bateman appears as a postmodern version of a Frankensteinian monster, or rather and more aptly transposed to the age of robotics and computing, a postmodern golem in the vein of Stanislaw Lem's *Golem XIV* who, enabled by an artificial intelligence, can reason about and thus eventually suffer from and mourn his nonhumanness. He can therefore think of himself as a “victim of a slow purposeful erasure,” as the toy and creation of a higher force, a program that has rendered him humanoid but not human, thereby only granting him the “rough resemblance of a human being.” In purely narratological terms, one might interpret these monologues as (self-)accusations against the literary creator, the author himself, who refused to design him as a classical character complete with a truly human personality and emotions for the sake of creating a mere robot executing the cultural code of the 1980s.

150 *American Psycho* is a text haunted by the uncanny on many levels. From the countless indistinctive characters and spaces providing for constant confusions, i.e. the abundance of doubles or doppelgänger Bateman encounters throughout the novel to space's miraculous collaboration in Bateman's violence or its cover-up, “the frightening element” in each instance, as Freud has argued in his famous essay on the uncanny, “can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*.” In Bateman's case that would be the fact that he is no more than a code-driven code executor and thus ultimately bereft of an own identity, an independent personality that would qualify him not only as a human being but also as a traditional prose character (quote see Freud 241, on the double see 234–236; on the many aspects of the uncanny in architecture see Vidler 17–68).

In his longest and most intense monologue, Ellis' postmodern golem even addresses the reader directly as if in bitter resignation, begging for his or her compassion:

...there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: *I simply am not there*. It is hard for me to make sense on any given level. Myself is fabricated, an aberration. I am a noncontingent human being. My personality is sketchy and unformed, my heartlessness goes deep and is persistent. My conscience, my pity, my hopes disappeared a long time ago (probably at Harvard) if they ever did exist. [...] My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape. But even after admitting this – [...] – and coming face-to-face with these truths, there is no catharsis. I gain no deeper knowledge about myself, no new understanding can be extracted from my telling. There has been no reason for me to tell you any of this. This confession has meant *nothing*.... (376–377)

It is here that Bateman reaches his most concise moment of self-awareness or, more precisely, self-alienation, that he comes closest to a definition of himself as a mere “abstraction,” a template and a code executed by a program, some higher force of the control age that has also designed a world for him and the other identical robots surrounding him and that offers neither humanity nor catharsis and exit to them. Regarding the fact that most of Bateman's thoughts and words are just cultural code and thus not of his own design, Heise has rightfully argued that

It is also true that Bateman is less flesh and blood than he is a discursively produced matrix of verbal utterances which have coagulated into the shape of a person, more a corpus of words than corporeal. [...] In fact, much of *American Psycho* is nothing more than a pastiche of discourses spoken without affect, a Barthesian tissue of quotations from advertising [...], music reviews [...], pornography [...], and even economic policy [...]. [...] There is no there *there*, only an empty vessel into which prefabricated ideas, rhetorics, and styles have been poured. (Heise 151–152)

After all, Bateman emerges as “an empty vessel” or rather another program, a robot that has been fed with tons of 1980s cultural codes and discourses, and programmed to think and act according to them. At times he and in some instances also his elite peers thus appear as “empty” bodies without organs through which an endless stream of information and data is constantly channeled.¹⁵¹

151 The concept of the “body without organs,” the term originally having been coined by Antonin Artaud, is introduced by Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* (101–102),

In particularly distressing situations this data flow seems to become visible in the text. Bateman's usually rather eloquent expert or advertisement talk then degenerates into a random stream of successive terms, images, and scenes that reads like a TV zap-through:

I make no comment, lost in my own private maze, thinking about other things: warrants, stock offerings, ESOPs, LBOs, IPOs, finances, refinances [...] hot executive gadgets, billionaires, Kenkichi Nakajima, infinity, Infinity, how fast a luxury car should go [...]. Inclusivity, envying someone's life, whether someone could survive a fractured skull, waiting in airports, stifling a scream [...] footage from the film in my head is endless shots of stone and any language heard is utterly foreign, the sound flickering away over new images: blood pouring from automated tellers [...] nuclear warheads, billions of dollars, the total destruction of the world, someone gets beaten up, someone else dies [...]. (Ellis 342–343, see also 116–117)

As this stream of images already exemplifies, Bateman's knowledge and perception is crucially shaped by the codes and contents of movies and television programs. Accordingly, Bateman not only feels that “[e]verything outside of [him] is like some movie [he] once saw” (345) but also admits that inside his mind he is “used to imagining everything happening the way it occurs in movies” (265). No wonder then that he senses his existence to be a “life played out as a sitcom, a blank canvas that reconfigures itself into a soap opera. [...] I am at its center, out of season, and no one ever asks me for any identification” (343).

In fact, the movie and TV image seems to inform and thus precede everything Bateman does, feels, and thinks. This is probably most obvious when it comes to his sexuality: Not only is Bateman convinced “that pornography is so much less complicated than actual sex, and because of this lack of complication, so much more pleasurable” (264) but also his dreams are “lit like pornography” (200) while, in one instance, he describes his sex act as a “hard-core montage” (303). Just like the fashion, records, and beauty products that Bateman rambles

yet is further developed by both Deleuze and Guattari in their collaborative work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze/Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 8–18, *A Thousand Plateaus* 149–166). On this view, one may, however, also conceive of the space and characters of *American Psycho*, in Castells' terms, as “spaces of flows” enacted by the continuous flow of data, a concept that is probably best visualized in a famous scene of *The Matrix* (1999) that reveals a hallway and the three agents facing the protagonist as space and creatures of ceaselessly flowing code, thus reminding the hero and with him the viewer of the programmed code nature of his environment and adversaries (see Castells, *The Informational City* 169–172, *The Rise* 453–459).

on endlessly with nauseating detail, sex acts are generally narrated in the same detailed and hyperrealist style typical of hardcore pornography (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 28–36, see also Storey 61, Giles 168, Findlay 83). And even Bateman's disturbingly creative methods of torturing and killing his victims as well as reusing their body parts thereafter¹⁵² are neither his nor, by proxy, Ellis' inventions but rather derived from lengthy FBI reports on the deeds of famous American serial killers that were studied by Ellis while working on the novel (J. Clarke 84–85, see also Storey 59–60, Williams 418). Opening the black box "Patrick Bateman" then reveals that he is made up of a network of culturally coded and prefabricated images and not of viscera, that he is indeed a pre-programmed matrix fed with and operating upon all kinds of media contents. Fully aware of his automated image- and code-based existence, Bateman may thus frankly ask (the reader?): "If I were an actual automaton what difference would there really be?" (Ellis 343).

And here is Bateman's dilemma: he cannot but act according to the code he is operating on, he cannot produce anything other than or independent of the code. No matter how exaggerated and disturbing his thoughts, sex acts, tortures, and murders may seem to the reader in the first place, they have always already been there before, derived from the American cultural landscape and are thus just another pre-existing code executed by the humanoid robot Bateman. Many reviewers have initially criticized *American Psycho* for not offering any traditional "psychological portrait of Bateman and a background that would explain his behavior"; rather "he escapes all categorization as a serial killer in the vein of Thomas Harris' Hannibal Lecter or Norman Bates of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*." (Messier 86). Yet by refusing to provide the reader with "the psychopathologized individualism of the stereotypical serial killer, [Ellis] offer[s] us instead an abstract and systemic figuration of violence" as one knows it from the media and in more general terms from the entire cultural landscape not only of the 1980s (Walter 133, see also Heise 145–146). It is precisely because all of Bateman's gruesome acts and behaviors cannot be traced back to an individual crazed mind but rather emerge as faithful executions and incorporations of the

152 Bateman translates the 'thingly' body parts and fluids of his victims into aestheticized and consumable objects such as when he produces videos of his torture and murder orgies (246, 304, 306), fabricates body parts into fashion accessories as well as fitments to adorn his apartment (291, 300–301, 327–328, 330, 395) or tries to cook and eat them (327–328, 329, 343–345); however, his "classy cannibalism" and "conspicuous consumption of human brains" are not able to provide him with any individual agency as they once more confirm him as a consumer and thus a docile executor of the (neo-liberal) code (Walter 139).

selfsame cultural code one knows exists but (when it comes to its violent effects) often chooses to repress, that *American Psycho* unfolds its uncanny and deeply disturbing effect on the reader. The more Bateman comes to realize that he is not free in his decisions and actions but rather operates as a robotic imitator and executor of the cultural code, the more he suffers from his predetermined, inhuman existence. As Williams has aptly noted, Bateman is “[f]ar from being an individual initiator of violence, [but appears as] just an insignificant cog [or rather chip] in a vast machine [or rather mega-computer] which controls him [...]” (Williams 410). When finding Owen’s apartment miraculously cleaned-up and emptied of all corpses, Bateman comes to understand that he is not a self-willed player in a game and that his individual agency might be nothing but a mere illusion:

All frontiers, if there had been any, seem suddenly detachable and have been removed, a feeling that others are creating my fate will not leave me for the rest of the day. This... is... not... a... game, I want to shout, but I can’t catch my breath [...]. (Ellis 370)

No matter what he does, he will always be operated, can never have a will of his own and thus be fully human. Therefore, he is also unable to claim any responsibility or guilt for his crimes – as he tries so desperately in the novel’s last chapters. He cannot be guilty, cannot be arrested or convicted for executing a code that the system itself operates on. As part and parcel of that very system, Bateman will always be backed, aided, and favored by it. His dilemma then is only predicated on his awareness of that state, of being nothing but a mere code-executor, a prisoner trapped in a world that is ‘without hope’ as Dante’s words tell us in the beginning and that has ‘no exit’, as the novel’s closing line informs us (3, 399). Just like a postmodern Sisyphus laboring in his 1980s Manhattan Hades, Bateman is bound to murder on without ever being acknowledged as a murderer, let alone punished for his deeds – there is no catharsis, no salvation waiting for him (see Williams 408).

In many ways, as demonstrated above, the code executed by Bateman is also embodied in and operative within the novel’s built environment, most obviously in its high-rise spaces that smoothly collaborate with Bateman as the system’s mobile agent in capturing and murdering every actor not strictly conforming to the code. Having gained consciousness about both his nature as a mere pastiche of cultural codes as well as his murderous role within that very system, Bateman may perceive of himself as an entrapped victim, a prisoner of a relentless regime of codes or, more broadly speaking, the postmodern condition. Never will he be able to establish a coherent individual identity, a fully independent human nature within a system of coded doubles and constantly deferred meaning.

Once more, it is the 2000 movie adaptation that emphasizes Bateman's post-modern dilemma in a most elegant way by playing on the symbolic and thus representative potential of certain landmark skyscrapers of the Manhattan skyline that the movie focuses on repeatedly and purposefully throughout its course. Time and again, theorists of the postmodern in both philosophy and architecture have addressed these Manhattan buildings as iconic and striking epitomes of their respective concepts. There is, first of all, the already mentioned World Trade Center (built 1968–73, destroyed 2001) that makes its appearance in the backdrop of many scenes as well as in several bridge cuts and is thus granted a prominence in the movie (released only a year and half before its destruction in the 9/11 terrorist attacks) that can hardly be rated unintentional. Not only does Michel de Certeau start his famous "Walking in the City" chapter from his influential 1980 oeuvre *The Practice of Everyday Life* with a meditation on the voyeuristic pleasure of a god-like view from the top of one of the WTC towers (Certeau 91) but the Twin Towers also serve as a recurring point of reference in the work of fellow French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, most prominently in *Simulations* (1983) and returning there with *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2002) in the immediate aftermath of their destruction. To Baudrillard the two almost identical towers (although fairly modernist in design) provided the perfect built embodiment of his concept of simulation and thus also the postmodern condition:

[...] the two W.T.C. towers, perfect parallelepipeds a quarter-mile high on a square base, perfectly balanced and blind communicating vessels. The fact that there are two of them signifies the end of all competition, the end of all original reference. Paradoxically, if there were only one, the monopoly would not be incarnated because we have seen how it stabilizes on a dual form. For the sign to be pure, it has to duplicate itself: it is the duplication of the sign that destroys its meaning. [...] The two towers of the W.T.C. are the visible sign of the closure of the system in a vertigo of duplication while the other skyscrapers are each of them the original moment of a system constantly transcending itself in a perpetual crisis and self-challenge. [...] They ignore the other buildings, they are not of the same race, they no longer challenge them, nor compare themselves to them, they look one into the other as into a mirror and culminate in this prestige of similitude. What they project is the idea of the model that they are one for the other, and their twin altitude presents no longer any value of transcendence. [...]. There remains only a series closed on the number two, just as if architecture, in the image of the system, proceeded only from an unchangeable genetic code, a definitive model. (Baudrillard, *Simulations* 136–138)

Following these thoughts on the WTC's two towers, it appears only consistent for Harron to repeatedly focus on them in her movie as a perfect architectural equivalent to Bateman and his yuppie peers who similarly "look one into the other as into a mirror" and thus also embody "the idea of the model that they are one for

the other.” Apart from this, the towers demonstrate how a built environment, the movie’s and novel’s collaborative high-rise spaces, just as much as Bateman and his elite friends seem to have been created “in the image of the system, proceeded from an unchangeable genetic code, a definitive model” incorporated by and operating the human and nonhuman actors at the center of novel and movie.

Then there is the AT&T Building (built 1981–84, from 2002 to 2016 known as Sony Building; since 2016 named after its address 550 Madison Avenue), Philip Johnson’s undisputed icon of postmodern architecture that he designed after the model of a Chippendale clock. It thus perfectly exemplified postmodern architecture’s search for inspiration and motives in the everyday and commercial (object) culture of the U.S., as was formulated programmatically in *Learning From Las Vegas*.¹⁵³ Conspicuously, in the movie, the AT&T seems to be positioned right across from Bateman’s office tower and is thus visible whenever a scene is set in his office. Most strikingly, one spots the lavishly illuminated building at night through the window when Bateman hides from the police in his office after his midnight killing spree in downtown Manhattan. As a devastated and completely hysterical Bateman crouches behind his office desk in order to evade a police helicopter’s searching lights and simultaneously confesses his murders while speaking on his lawyer’s answering machine, the AT&T is positioned right above his head, thereby literally hanging above him like an evil portent heralding his postmodern misery. Once more, one can hardly discount this positioning as purely coincidental, especially if one considers that the building’s actual location on 550 Madison Avenue is quite distant from Bateman’s supposed workplace on Wall Street (or at least in its proximity), as novel and movie repeatedly stress. Harron thus appears to have purposely decided on having this icon of postmodern architecture in direct view whenever Bateman sits at his office desk in order to make an artistic statement about Bateman’s uneasy postmodern condition. Of the two times the AT&T is mentioned in the novel, at least one also seems to imply the feeling of entrapment that Bateman comes

153 Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour distinguish two ideal models for an architecture inspired by commercial American designs: while the “duck” comes along as a building molded in the form of figure or object thus turning into a sign itself (such as in the case of the AT&T Building), the “decorated shed” describes an unspectacular “shed” covered or topped with fancy commercial signs and lights (at the immediate roadside also spatially detached from the shed); both types, however, can also serve as models for describing Bateman and his entourage as sign-embodying creatures perfectly emulating the code or hiding their inner ‘vacancy’ behind glossy styles and fashionable facades (Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour 88–89).

to be increasingly haunted by towards the end of the novel. Roaming the zoo in Central Park in search of new victims, he suddenly has the impression that “the tips of skyscrapers, apartment buildings on Fifth Avenue, the Trump Plaza, the AT&T building, surround the park which surrounds the zoo and heightens its unnaturalness.” (Ellis 297). Strongly reminiscent of similar scenes from *Manhattan Transfer* that have Ellen as well as Cassie and her boyfriend, respectively, feel trapped in Central Park’s urban panopticon, this small observation seems to underline the fact that Manhattan’s high-rise space is not only collaborating generously with Bateman when it comes to his bloody deeds by trapping his victims but also keeps Bateman himself trapped within Manhattan and thus in his role as unpunished code execu(tion)er in a city that is, according to Baudrillard, “first and foremost the site of the sign’s [or code’s] execution [...]” (Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange* 77).

Finally, there is the Guggenheim Museum (built 1956–59), just as famous for its art collection as it is for its iconic spiraling architecture designed by none other than Frank Lloyd Wright. The Guggenheim is visible in various establishing shots as immediately neighboring the building that Paul Owen’s apartment (the place where Bateman stores many of his victim’s corpses) is supposed to be situated in. While Wright and the museum’s design can hardly be labeled postmodern in the strict sense, the spiral or helix motive may nevertheless be read as a conceptual reference to postmodern theory, such as when Baudrillard considers the workings of the code, its embodiment, and its controlling effects in terms of the functioning of the helix-formed DNA (Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 32–33); but also in a more general sense, the spiral just as much as the museum are recurring topoi in Baudrillard’s theorizing (see e.g. Baudrillard 8–11, 16–19, 149–154).¹⁵⁴

By almost obsessively montaging these iconic buildings into her movie, Harron stresses Bateman’s inescapable fate as a postmodern character that can be and produce nothing but the code. He is damned to partake in a non-transparent network, in which he can only be the killer and the ‘others’ can only be his victims just like in an augmented reality version of an endless ego-shooter computer or video game. Unlike a game, however, there is no way out, there is no outside to *American Psycho*, “pas d’hors-texte,” no exit from the matrix

154 In analogy to Baudrillard’s reasoning on the spiral, one could say that in *American Psycho* the code acts as a modulator of space and people, its flexible DNA; the novel’s built space may then also appear as a Deleuzian “modulation” of control or a Latourian “moving modulator” that adapts to any kind of situation, flexibly closing or thwarting each victim’s possible line of flight as well as erasing all of Bateman’s traces such as in the miraculous apartment cleanup (Deleuze, “Postscript” 4–5, Latour/Yaneva 87).

for Bateman (Derrida 158–159). While the code's content appears obvious, its workings and higher sense, any higher force in control of it all seem completely opaque; therefore, just as the entire system, also the text of *American Psycho* itself remains a black box to the reader and its telling has, as Bateman himself bitterly states, "meant nothing," solved nothing with regard to that mystery (Ellis 377).¹⁵⁵

Though held in an undisputed elite position by the system and its architectural-spatial configurations, he can neither claim authority over space and things nor over the violence he commits by and with them, because they are always already and independently programmed to his advantage. His killings eventually turn into the system's murders, not his. Walter can thus conclude that "Bateman can't be Bateman when he kills; nor can he finally claim this killing as his own. Thus, he has only the most precarious authority over his own spectacular acts of violence" (Walter 143).

The reality of his hyperreal existence will forever be that of a nightmarish 1980s scenario: the poor get even poorer and will always be victims while the rich get richer and will always be predators chasing and killing the 'others', almost like in a twisted version of the Eloi and Morlocks from H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*. Yet here, the vertically capsularized high-space residents (Morlocks) constantly invade the ground realms in order to chase its people (Eloi) or lure them into their high-rise spaces in order to kill and eat them.

Within the absolutely black-boxed and thus non-transparent space of *American Psycho* that seems neither legible nor malleable in any way for Bateman and even less so for his victims, there appears to be no possibility for creating or rather enacting any third space, i.e. any space of resistance in the sense of Lefebvre. In a space so completely code-controlled and working on modulation, it seems, any chance for creating a heterotopia appears fairly obsolete. Firstly, the power and logic of coded control space goes far beyond that of the static urban panopticon or panacousticon (heterotopia of compensation) as seen e.g. in *Manhattan Transfer*, as it acts like a DNA from within human and material actors or may adapt smoothly and dynamically to any situation. Secondly, a space of resistance, of subverting the code as part of a heterotopia of illusion is

155 *American Psycho's* inescapable matrix tale is thus fundamentally different from an array of movies that deal with a man-made matrix of several virtual, simulated realities ranging from Fassbinder's *World On A Wire* (1973) to its remake in *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999) and *The Matrix* (1999), all of them originally based on D. F. Galouye's science fiction novel *Simulacron-3* (1964). In these movies, the alienated protagonists, initially trapped in a simulated matrix, are always able to finally return to an original reality 'outside'.

not only totally unachievable for the urban poor and marginalized but also not the right term to describe the world that Bateman and his companions inhabit that may only appear subversive at first sight and when compared to the moral mindset the reader may possibly hold. Bateman's murderous excesses in his high-rise refuge, in fact anything he does, cannot be regarded as the enactment of an illusion heterotopia as he does nothing more than faithfully executing the code that is also at work everywhere in the space around him – how could a code executor of the control age be able to subvert the code? As neither the urban poor nor the elites are thus able to resist, let alone escape the code/space of Manhattan, they are both bound to suffer from and within it, even though they suffer in very different ways. There is a very short scene, in fact only a cut, in the movie version that neatly encapsulates the impossibility of resistance within the code/space of *American Psycho*: Following Bateman and his fiancé Evelyn on their way to a dinner meeting in another fancy restaurant, the camera briefly focuses on a graffiti tag sprayed onto a wall, only to abruptly cut to the restaurant's name plate reading "espace" (French for space). One may well read that cut with Certeau as a rather violent replacement of graffiti as one quintessentially subversive "tactics of space" that may enact third space within a dominant order, by an immobilized space where the word espace/space (in fact, Certeau defines "space" as mobile, practiced place) not only designates a static "place" (to be) but has itself turned into a sign (see Certeau 117–118).

Some critics, however, have argued that Harron's movie adaptation does indeed suggest a space of resistance or at least the possibility of it. Abel and Findlay have convincingly shown how Harron was influenced by the critical outrage that the novel met after and even before its publication in 1991, primarily due to its excessive depiction of sexualized violence against women. In an attempt to evade such criticism being vented against the movie version once more as well as to circumvent censorship and X-rating, she decided to drastically cut and soften the violence shown in her adaptation of the notorious novel (see Abel 40–59, Findlay 82). Softening the effect of the remaining violence has mainly been achieved by highlighting the victims' dread and disturbance regarding Bateman (which is not present in the novel) as well as by almost permanently ridiculing the slasher protagonist via Christian Bale's rather clownish and affected performance (see Abel 43–44, Findlay 83, 86). While these alterations with regard to the literary template have certainly helped the viewer to distance him- or herself from Bateman and his violence, they neither change the bloody outcome of the violent scenes nor do they actually open up a space of resistance. In fact, Bateman appears to be completely unaware of his victims' dread regarding his behavior (it thus seems to be there for the viewer only!) as he simply goes on with preparing

his murderous program. Even in the scene where he gets abducted in a taxi and is robbed of his watch by the driver – the one and only scene where a subaltern character poses a danger to Bateman – the protagonist stays curiously cool as if knowing fully well that the coded system will protect him and that he, therefore, cannot be harmed by the man (Ellis 390–394).

But Harron's movie goes furthest in distancing us from Bateman – which is what the novel does not allow for as it is told exclusively from Bateman's point of view – when all of a sudden shifting its perspective from the protagonist to Christie, a young prostitute whom Bateman picks up twice in the meat-packing district, thus inviting direct identification with one of the victims instead of the narcissistic slasher. The viewer's identification with Christie culminates when she tries to escape from a chainsaw-brandishing Bateman on their second meeting. This chase scene already analyzed in detail above, during which Christie manages to free herself momentarily from Bateman's grip by kicking him in the face, has been read as a moment of female resistance or even empowerment within *American Psycho's* universe of sadistic male violence (see Findlay 85).

However, when closely considering both the gruesome outcome as well as Harron's specific staging of that scene, I would argue that one can hardly come to such a conclusion. Rather, I would suggest that this scene, precisely by way of the viewer's previously established identification with the victim, not only adds to the horror of the eventual murder but actually amounts to a most powerful manifestation of the inescapable violence exerted by the smooth collaboration between Bateman and the 'empty' architecture of Owen's apartment building: After escaping the confusing maze of the apartment (already an entrapment of sorts), Christie desperately tries to alert the neighbors by hammering onto their apartment doors. As no one seems to react, she runs down the staircase only to "meet[...] an unbelievable end" when slashed and killed by Bateman's falling chainsaw (Findlay 86).

One of the primary lessons from horror and more specifically slasher movies (maybe also the entire crime and thriller genre) is that the effect of terror on the audience is greatest when the victim is killed despite repeatedly escaping and outsmarting the hunting slasher. In this sense, Harron's insertion of the chase scene (not present in the novel) not only pays tribute to the classic slasher genre but also hugely intensifies the impression that Bateman and the high-rise architecture inhabited by him conspire in executing the (neoliberal/conservative) code by executing each and everyone not incorporating "the white heterosexual masculine template" (Findlay 85). This interpretation is corroborated when one pays close attention to the way Harron designed the set for the culminating staircase scene. The initial shot of Christie reaching the staircases leaves a shadow

of her together with the stair-rail, thus creating an image that seems to imitate the famous scene of the approaching vampire from F. W. Murnau's 1922 silent movie *Nosferatu*, an undisputed classic and pioneering work in the horror genre. The shadow of historic horror may thus already warn us that there might be no escape for Christie in this scene (as there is none either for the female victim in the *Nosferatu* scene). What is more, one should note that the staircase itself is staged like in an expressionist way with its heavy light and shadow effects that create the overall impression of prison bars and thereby also seem to communicate the idea of Christie's inescapable entrapment.¹⁵⁶ Apart from one highly aestheticized murder scene in Dario Argento's horror classic *Suspiria* (1977), another association provoked by this scene and its top-down shot into the staircase in particular may be that of M. C. Escher's well-known 1953 lithograph "Relativity" which features an 'impossible room' of staircases always leading its climbers to a space geometrically incongruent to the one they started from, thus also producing an effect of perpetual entrapment. By alluding to Escher's endlessly relative space in her design of this scene, Harron gives us a powerful idea of *American Psycho*'s code/spaces and their impossible or rather illogical modulations when it comes to trapping Bateman's victims, just as Ellis gives us a convincing experience of modulatory code/space and an android code/creature (Bateman) by way of his novel's postmodern narrative set-up and strategies.

3.2.3 **Blasting Black Boxes – *Fight Club* (1996/1999) as a Tale of Late-20th-Century Luddism**

Although its protagonist did not rely on smart technologies for his crimes, *American Psycho* has certainly radicalized the motive of a smoothly operating agential partnership of 'endangered' men, high-rise spaces, and control technology that had already been at work in *Scissors* and *Sliver*. At the same time, however, it has shown that the male protagonist's most intricate association with that violent network of actors and its misogynist code has entailed a disturbing consequence: The more he relied on space for his bloody deeds, the more did

156 Similar shots down expressionistically lit staircases may be found in Lang's *M* (1931) and Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), both of them similarly prefiguring imminent danger or nearing catastrophe. Another source of inspiration for Christie's futile escape from the murderously complicit building may be found in the Argento-produced bloxploitation-horror classic *Demons 2* (1986), which also seems to have inspired Harron's opening scene: both movies play with the audience's expectation when the initially seen blood drips are ultimately revealed to be nothing but strawberry sauce used to garnish elaborate dishes in a kitchen.

not only his individual agency but also his free will in general came into doubt, culminating in the vision of Patrick Bateman as “some kind of abstraction,” as a mere automatic code executor ultimately bereft of any humanity (Ellis 376). With the progression of the 1990s and the onset of the new millennium, the dangers of possible self-effacement within increasingly smart high-rise spaces as well as an increasingly virtual and consumerist cultural set-up became a recurring topos while simultaneously the reasons for entering the techno-architectural network not only had to be rooted in misogynist impulses. In the two texts to be analyzed in the following, the male protagonists face extreme states of alienation within their smart high-rise milieus; in both instances, they see no other solution to their situations than to destroy that set-up in most radical ways for the sake of returning to an allegedly more original and possibly subversive frontier space, a motive already well familiar from the earliest examples of literary engagements with the skyscraper.

Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 debut novel *Fight Club* received merely marginal attention. It was only after it was turned into a movie by David Fincher in 1999 that its story about a split personality-protagonist transforming from an unsatisfied insomniac clerk addicted to consumerism into a heroic anti-capitalist guru famed for his founding of a network of clubs for violent fist fights turned terrorist cell became known to a mass audience. As the movie attained cult status over the years to follow – and thus also turned Palahniuk into a cult author – the topics addressed by both novel and movie obviously resonated much with its reader- and much greater viewership. Websites and online fora were set up that served users to discuss and speculate about *Fight Club*'s complex plot as well as the teachings put forward by the protagonist's rebellious alter ego Tyler Durden. Yet what was and in many ways still is it that garnered *Fight Club* with its particularly experimental style and demanding plot structure such wide reception and significant cultural influence?

During the last two decades much critical writing has looked at both the novel and the movie so as to clarify the text's vast array of topics as well as their specific cultural context and relevancy. A large part of critical literature on the novel and movie has very rightfully and convincingly read them in the light of gender questions: With its myriad of alienated, seemingly emasculated men in search of a way out of their castrated misery, *Fight Club* has fictionalized a widely felt crisis of masculinity in postindustrial Western societies, such as diagnosed by, for example, Susan Faludi in *Stiffed. The Betrayal of the American Man*, published in 1999 – the year of the movie's release (Clark 66–70; Ta 266–268; Schreiber 7).

Some of these critics have also linked questions of gender to the text's political issues. Most notably, they have explored its eloquent critique of Western

capitalist-consumerist culture but also stressed the limits of this very critique (Clark 71–74; Robinson 12–13). Some critics have also suggested a reading of *Fight Club*, especially its movie version, through the lens of a neo noir aesthetics, thus linking it to some of the movies already addressed in this chapter (see Wager 101–114, Vint/Bould 223–228).

In the context of my work, I would like to consider the novel-movie couple by looking at a hitherto poorly dealt-with aspect that, nevertheless, seems to tie the very fields of masculinity (in crisis) and capitalist-consumer culture (and its critique) together. I am thinking here of the realm of technology and the degree of either alienation it causes or emancipation it offers to the novel's characters.¹⁵⁷

Technical and technological objects as well as other cultural artifacts but also their respective components down to their chemical composition are frequently elaborated on – especially in the novel – and therefore invite an ANT-informed reading. I would like to demonstrate here how it is the characters' very relation to and association with these nonhuman actors – technological gadgets just as much as their built environment – that turn them either into alienated consumers or capable activists. Despite Tyler Durden's radical aim of a "complete and right-away destruction of civilization" the question in *Fight Club* is not to be either enslaved by or to be free from technology (Palahniuk 125). Rather, one should take for granted that the novel's characters are always already embedded into that object world. However, what changes in the course of the story is their very relation towards and agency within these material-technological milieus. Apart from that, also the high-rise as a particularly complex and large assemblage of technical and technological actors makes a recurring appearance in *Fight Club*, most notably as a site for the story's final showdown (involving skyscraper's imminent destruction) that narratively frames both novel and film.

Outwardly, *Fight Club*'s unnamed protagonist lives the carefree life of a well-paid clerk at a major car company and inhabits an expensive condominium filled with high-end furniture and facilities. The novel's and movie's biting first-person narration, however, reveals that the protagonist is, in fact, a deeply unsatisfied person disillusioned and alienated from almost everything in his life, most notably his blunt consumerist lifestyle enslaving himself to "the IKEA nesting instinct" as well as his job as a "recall campaign manager" which involves

157 With the growing prominence of thing or rather object-oriented theories within the cultural studies during recent years some critics have started to address the aspect and specific role of materiality and technology in *Fight Club*. The works of Raymond Malewitz (2012, 2014) and to a lesser extent also Schreiber (2016) should be regarded as pioneering in this respect.

“sending people to their deaths when his calculations reveal that the company he works for will save money if it does not recall the potentially deadly time bombs masquerading as the company’s vehicles” (Schultz 593). The nature of his alienation is ultimately described in gendered terms when the protagonist identifies himself as a member of “a generation of men raised by women” (Palahniuk 50) and thus as a man fundamentally emasculated for the lack of a father model. As a consequence, many critics have argued that *Fight Club* is basically about a generation of men emasculated by a feminized culture. Only by indulging in brutal rites of fist fighting (Fight club) are they able to reinvigorate their manhood in order to ultimately join forces in a great effort to destroy that very culture and its “damaging effects on an American masculinity gone soft” (Ta 256, see also Clark 66–70).

While such metaphors of emasculation have pervaded critiques of modernity from the outset, I would like to look behind the veil of gender ascriptions here and rather focus on what is arguably even more centrally at stake in *Fight Club*, namely the human actors’ complex and shifting relations and agency within the actor-networks that make up their world.¹⁵⁸ In that way, *Fight Club*’s protagonist as well as all the other male characters appear not so much ‘castrated’ by empowered women or a generalized ‘effeminate’ culture (whatever that would entail) but rather by their lack of agency and knowledge with regard to the materiality of their technological and architectural environment within a culture “where the experience of individual agency has become elusive” (Crawford 8). Their alienation just as much as their eventual return to power and agency is overwhelmingly grounded in the way they relate to the objects, gadgets, and buildings that populate their life world.¹⁵⁹

But let me first consider the source and structure of the unnamed protagonist’s initial alienation from his material environment – a state that is already graspable from his contemptuous introduction of his apartment (which is so different from Patrick Bateman’s lengthy and enthusiastic description of his apartment (Ellis 24–25)):

Home was a condominium on the fifteenth floor of a high-rise, a sort of filing cabinet for widows and young professionals. The marketing brochure promised a foot of concrete floor, ceiling, and wall between me and any adjacent stereo or turned-up television.

158 For a profound elaboration on these discourses see Bederman 170–216 and Lears 117–140.

159 Crawford champions “meaningful work” and “self-reliance” as ideals central to “a struggle for individual agency” that he finds “to be at the very center of modern life” (7–8).

A foot of concrete and air conditioning, you couldn't open the windows so even with maple flooring and dimmer switches, all seventeen hundred airtight feet would smell like the last meal you cooked or your last trip to the bathroom. (Palahniuk 41)

Hermetically sealed off from its surroundings, the narrator's condominium is one perfectly autonomized cell defying all challenges of the residential high-rise panacousticon.¹⁶⁰ The price to be paid for that kind of noiseless luxury, however, is an extreme closure that easily turns the whole space into an entropic panofactorium threatening to bother, if not suffocate its resident. Thus cut off from the outside world and despite all its technological alleviations, the narrator's condo takes the shape of an agonizing heterotopia of compensation leaving its resident to struggle with an over-complex and therefore vexing technology. It is thus that his private place of rest and comfort appears strikingly similar to the protagonist's later description of his office workplace:

It's not that I have a window at work. All the outside walls are floor-to-ceiling glass. Everything where I work is floor-to-ceiling glass. Everything is vertical blinds. Everything is industrial low-pile gray carpet spotted with little tombstone monuments where the PCs plug into the network. Everything is a maze of cubicles boxed in with fences of upholstered plywood. (137–138)

With its floor-to-ceiling window walls and cube farm interior design, his office offers the image of a perfectly transparent, panoptic, and panacoustic heterotopia of compensation. The similarly coercive set-up of these two main spheres of the narrator's everyday life should give us a first hint at the material, in this case architectural and technological causes for his state of extreme passivity.

Yet there is another crucial component of his life and private space that appears absolutely fundamental to his deeply felt alienation, namely the vast stock of furniture and accessories he piles up in his condo. In fact, the narrator seems addicted to ordering items of IKEA furniture that he senses might fit his personality. The very essence of his relation towards these inanimate co-actors within his home ensemble is brilliantly captured in a CGI-based scene from Fincher's movie version (see Schreiber 9). As the camera slowly pans through the narrator's empty condominium, the sterily illuminated space is filled with pieces of IKEA furniture that one by one are cut into the scenery. Yet each item is accompanied by its specific Swedish product names, a short description, and a

160 Once more, one is confronted with another instance where sound absorption, first applied in the office high-rises of the 1920s and 30s, is implemented in a residential high-rise context. For the development and application of such technologies see in detail E. A. Thompson 169–176.

price, thus turning the protagonist's condo into an augmented reality version of an IKEA catalogue. Eventually, the protagonist himself appears walking through the virtual consumer space of his apartment while talking on the phone and presumably ordering even more furniture. Whereas the CGI animation in this scene seems to hint at a digital future of smart homes where pieces of furniture may be virtually placed into one's private spaces before actually buying them, the mesh of product information popping up all over the place and all around the protagonist leaves the impression of an imprisoning grid and thus of yet another coercive dimension in the protagonist's private refuge. Another impression that this very scene from the movie may evoke is that the condominium has turned into some kind of museum or gallery space, in which objects of plain everyday use turn into auratic artworks complete with fancy titles (the Swedish product names), short art-historic descriptions, and price tags.

Within this fully musealized home space it seems obvious that the protagonist's relation towards the objects surrounding him is not a practical but rather an entirely abstracted one. These items are appreciated not for their usefulness in a practical everyday context but for their aesthetic value or maybe only their specific brand. The very essence of that abstracted relation between human and material actors is best elucidated by Karl Marx in his famous elaboration on commodity fetishism:

As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (Marx 165)

Marx's important distinction between the use value of a commodity and its value form – the transition from the first to the second state describing the act of commodity fetishization – has been extended by Bill Brown in his *Thing Theory*, which argues for an additional distinction between things and objects (B. Brown, "Thing Theory" 1–4).¹⁶¹ With respect to *Fight Club's* protagonist one may thus

161 Borrowing from Heidegger, Brown defines objects as gadgets and devices of daily use that turn into things as soon as they fail or break down, thus revealing their essentially

conclude that he is living in a realm of complete commodity fetishism, where the objects of everyday life, all his furniture, dishes, gadgets, and even his food and spices exist only in their value form, i.e. as fetishized, branded artifacts with a quasi-religious aura. The object's actual use value is secondary, if not entirely obsolete; its materiality as well as the process of manufacturing and production behind it is superseded, black-boxed by the smartly designed surface of an abstracted commodity that exists only as value form in the market or inside the consumer's refined sense of aesthetics.

It is interesting in this respect that at least in one case the protagonist seems to be aware of the objects' material structure and production process: Among the many objects stuffed in his condo, he particularly cherishes a "set of hand-blown green glass dishes with the tiny bubbles and imperfections, little bits of sand, proof they were crafted by the honest, simple, hard-working indigenous aboriginal peoples of wherever" (Palahniuk 41). Yet this production knowledge does in no way de-auraticize or open the black box of his venerated dishes but rather – to the contrary – seems to add aura and thus also market value to them, therefore turning the commodity box even blacker.

And even Marx's analogy to "the misty realm of religion" in order to capture the commodity's quasi-spiritual aura endowing it "with a life of its own" is reflected head-on in one of the narrator's dearest pieces of furniture that even carries a spiritual concept in its design, namely his "clever Njurunda coffee tables in the shape of a lime green yin and an orange yang that fit together to make a circle" (43).

Hermetically black-boxed as these consumer objects may be, they still have agency and therefore the power to shape his identity. In a later statement the protagonist reveals 'his' objects' significance to a police detective investigating the condo explosion:

I loved my life. I loved that condo. I loved every stick of furniture. That was my whole life. Everything, the lamps, the chairs, the rugs were me. The dishes in the cabinets were me. The plants were me. It was me that blew up. (110–111)

Much as the narrator treats these objects as well as his condominium and the exclusive residential high-rise he resides in as fetishized commodities only, they themselves define him as a dull consumer. The very reciprocity of this abstracted,

materiality and constructedness. In a strict sense then, objects and things, in much the same way as Marx's use value and value form, describe not so much objects in a strict sense but a rather specific relation between subject and object (see B. Brown, *A Sense of Things* 26).

market-based relation describes the narrator's unsatisfied, alienated state that he comes to realize and ultimately despise. Yet such wholesale identification with the hermetic black boxes of his consumer world runs the constant risk of a destabilization, if not annihilation of his similarly hermetic and thus fragile self in the case of their failure or destruction (violent opening of black boxes). The novel's fifth chapter thus takes the shape of the narrator's long lament over his condo's explosion and thus also the destruction of his consumerized self so much entangled with the former.

But even before the turning point of the condo explosion one may well register a good number of (technological) objects exerting their agency and thus power over the protagonist's life. For example, one learns that his job at a major car cooperation consists of nothing more than traveling the country in order "to apply the formula" for recall campaigns which is "simple arithmetic," thereby turning him into a mere operator of calculations that might easily be done by a computer in the near future calculating the profitability of recall campaigns and even initiating them automatically (30).¹⁶² The danger of computer-induced automation in business is stressed by Fincher's staging of the Microsoft meeting in the movie. While one does not learn a thing about the content of that meeting in the novel, the movie has a Microsoft representative lecturing the narrator and his boss about the possibilities of cyber-networked business and the efficiency gained through it. As the clerk provocatively addresses the narrator at the end of this scene, the latter answered by a disturbingly blood-filled smile from his badly injured mouth. But unemployment via technological progress (in this case, however, via mechanization, not digitalization) is also haunting the narrator's rampant alter ego Tyler Durden, when the chapter president of the projectionist union tells him that "with more self-threading and rewinding projectors, the union didn't need Tyler anymore" (113).

The objects' greatest agency, however, is revealed in an almost uncanny manner, when they either fail (Perrow's "normal accidents") or seem to act out independently from the narrator's will, thereby exposing their otherwise black-boxed 'thingness,' i.e. their repressed inner materiality. In fact, the protagonist's life seems full of technical objects acting out erratically: cars burst into flames,

162 One particular movie scene has the narrator inspecting a burned-out car wreck with disgust; After a short glimpse inside, he quickly turns away from it and notes down something on his pad obviously struggling hard to translate this brutally raw and material side of the consumer object into aseptic statistical data (see also Malewitz, "Regeneration" 529). Yet, the scene does also imply that the narrator's task may easily be translated into a computer algorithm, thus making his job redundant altogether.

planes waver, suitcases vibrate because electric razors go off, gas leaks, a refrigerator's compressor goes off and initiates an explosion.¹⁶³ There is hardly an object during the early parts of novel and movie that does not cause the protagonist agony. The very objects he tries to order so pedantically by arranging them according to an IKEA catalogue or by reducing them to variables in formulas constantly seem to evade his inscription by acting out independently thus uncannily evoking the impression of having a life of their own. The movie adaptation appears to stress the objects' agency repeatedly such as when zooming in on them or focusing them in close-up (e.g. the ringing telephone) as well as by inserting fast CGI-based 'flights' through and around gadgets (most impressively in the reconstruction of the explosion inside the protagonist's kitchen). When immediately shot in reverse with the protagonist's face in close-up such as in the case of the self help group schedule or the ringing box phone they even seem to attain the status of subjects 'in conversation' with a helpless and disturbed protagonist. He himself, by contrast, does realize his increasing object status with regard to the acting subject-objects surrounding him. Consequently, he may summarize – not only with respect to the pieces of furniture in his the condo: “the things you used to own, now they own you” (44).

However well repressed by the narrator, the material thingness of objects and technology does in fact already infiltrate his unconscious such as when at “[e]very takeoff and landing, when the plane banked too much to one side, [he] pray[s] for a crash” (25) – a scenario that is realized in the movie with another CGI effect that has the plane's black-boxed body disintegrate thus laying bare its technological interiors. The narrator's strangely suicidal wish for such a moment that also “cures [his] insomnia” (25) by bringing about a total disintegration of the black boxes of both the plane and his own body, however, reveals his otherwise repressed desire for (a more immediate association with) the material turmoil beyond the objects' value form in a most radical way.

No wonder then that it is on such a plane, one of the prime examples of a modern black box run by an extremely complex technological assemblage comfortably hidden away from the passengers' views, that the narrator meets his alter

163 The explosion of the protagonist's condominium is, of course, as is later insinuated, a masterpiece in “anarchistic weaponization of object failure” performed by his rebel alter ego Tyler Durden (Malewitz, “Regeneration” 530). Novel and movie thus retrospectively hint at the fact that even during this period of extreme object alienation, the narrator or rather his other self holds an intimate knowledge and familiarity with the materiality of these selfsame objects, so as to prepare various kitchen facilities for a retarded detonation.

ego Tyler Durden for the very first time – at least in the movie.¹⁶⁴ Fascinated by Durden's excessively exhibited agency and knowledge regarding the material world that is so unfamiliar to himself, the protagonist is able to mark the difference between himself and Durden (his actual split self) with biting honesty:

I am nothing in the world compared to Tyler. I am helpless. I am stupid, and all I do is want and need things. My tiny life. My little shit job. My Swedish furniture. [...] This is how bad your life can get. (146)

Indeed, *Fight Club* is a compendium of all kinds of practical instructions for DIY-producing explosives, soap etc. that a hyperactive Tyler shares with the helplessly passive protagonist.¹⁶⁵ By constantly listing various chemical ingredients but also such consumer goods as coke or orange juice that may be used to fabricate these otherwise fetishized, i.e. black-boxed products, Tyler and by his virtue also the protagonist reveal them as open composite materialities malleable at human will.¹⁶⁶ Tyler disenchant the sacred unity of the body when he reveals not only the pure materiality but also the use value of human body parts such as when he steals liposuctioned fat from medical waste dumps in order to use it for the production of soap (92, 150) or when he tells the story of how “in ancient history” lye and fat washed out of rotting corpses served as soap by way of “accidental misuse” (76–77, Malewitz, “Regeneration” 530). They thus also highlight human agency and creativity with regard to these objects that may as yet have

164 The novel less straightforwardly stages their first meeting on a nude beach during the protagonist's vacation (Palahniuk 32–33).

165 The fact that Tyler is simply the narrator's split (dream) self suggests that besides to every ego succumbing to closed, black-boxed objects there exists an alter ego versed in manipulating, remodeling and opening up these objects and thus the potential for a very different, more active and connective relation to the object world. Hence, the narrator's ever-repeated mantra “I know this because Tyler knows this” in connection with any kind of practical DIY-instruction in *Fight Club*.

166 With regard to that kind of “rugged consumerism” Malewitz points out that people are “clearly divide(d) [...] into two categories based on their understanding of object function. On the one hand are people such as the hapless narrator, who cannot think beyond the dematerialized realm of commodity fetishism. On the other hand are rugged consumers such as Durden, who see through the socially encoded object to its material substance - to [...] its essential thingness” (“Regeneration” 530). The rugged consumer thus echoes Certeau's counter-disciplinary and “productive” consumption that he describes as “devious, [and] dispersed, but insinuat[ing] itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order” (Certeau xiii-xiv).

appeared as quasi-sacred, opaque entities only to be bought and aestheticized. There is hardly an object that Tyler does not seem to be capable of deforming: In his night job as a movie projectionist he has fun splicing pornographic pictures into the sacred unities of movie reels thereby letting disturbing images appear for split seconds when projecting the movies (Palahniuk 29–31). In his day job as a waiter in the Pressman Hotel he ‘injects’ various of his body fluids into the meals he then serves to the rich and famous attending gala dinners (79–81). Everywhere he seems to hack into otherwise black-boxed entities and processes fetishized or abstracted in the world of value forms, thus rendering visible their use value-materiality and -malleability in a most striking, if not violent way to the narrator and via him to the reader- and viewership. Henderson can thus conclude that “Tyler is in fact in steady, constant contact with the world’s manifold and re-moldable materiality, playing with it, extending it, intensifying it and foisting it on the populace,” a practice that turns him into “a juggler and reorganizer of things and the state of things, par excellence, a compressor of time and space [...]” (150). It is precisely this agency permanently seized and eloquently declared by Tyler that turns him into a prophet-like figure much venerated by the massive flock of passive consumers that also the narrator belongs to:

I love everything about Tyler Durden, his courage and his smarts. His nerve. Tyler is funny and charming and forceful and independent, and men look up to him and expect him to change the world. Tyler is capable and free and I am not. (Palahniuk 174)

That same open source-bricolage ideology represented by Tyler is also reflected in the house he (temporarily) lives in and that the protagonist moves into after his condominium and together with it his whole passive consumer existence blew up. Located in the run-down, largely deserted “toxic waste part of town,” Tyler’s house on Paper Street is quite the opposite of the narrator’s hermetically black-boxed condominium (64):

The shingles on the roof blister, buckle, curl, and the rain comes through and collects on top of the ceiling plaster and drips through the light fixtures. When it’s raining we have to pull the fuses. You don’t dare turn on the lights. The house that Tyler rents, it has three stories and a basement. We carry around candles. [...] Stacks of magazines are about the only furniture. (57–58)

Tyler’s house, which is staged as a particularly gloomy place within the particularly gloomy Fincher movie, is dark and shady, where the protagonist’s apartment is sterily lit and it is open (the door cannot be closed!) and resonant (panacousticon!), where the condo is hermetically sealed off and soundproof. It seems the perfect heterotopia of illusion where the condo was a coercive heterotopia of compensation not unlike the narrator’s workplace and thus the

perfect place for him to learn his lessons in black boxing and laying bare the material network-structure of things and ultimately himself. Later, when the house is filled with Tyler's disciples of Project Mayhem, the narrator perceives it as "a living thing wet on the inside from so many people sweating and breathing" and because "[s]o many people are moving inside, the house moves" (133). Whether full of human actors or not, the house is felt to be a living organism cast in a permanent movement that is reminiscent of Latour and Yaneva's "building-on-the-move" proposed as an ANT-inspired model for the analysis of architecture (Latour/Yaneva 87).

Yet long before the narrator learns these ANT-lessons and strategies with regard to the material-technological black boxes surrounding him, Tyler literally makes him experience his 'network philosophy' within a much more immediate medium: the narrator's own body. Tyler's initially strange request to the narrator to hit him as hard as he can and the scuffle resulting from it is the starting point for a self-therapy in overcoming the passive state of alienation from one's own body and the world while at the same time evolving into an active agent aware of and able to mold body and world. That kind of 'pain cure' based on controlled self-destruction is capable of re-familiarizing the narrator with the complex and fluid materiality of his own body repressed since the mirror stage in infant's age – a stage of development Lacan has describes as a sort of primal alienation from the body's inherently composite structure for the sake of forming a unified, stable ego based on one's mirror image of a closed, black-boxed body. Already after his first fight, the narrator appears enlightened: he has taken the first step in a process of self-transformation. Only after partly destructing himself, only after physically experiencing his injured, bruised body, that is no more than a complicated network of different organs and cells, can he realize that in fact nothing in the world is solid, clean, and static:¹⁶⁷

Nothing is static. Even the *Mona Lisa* is falling apart. Since fight club, I can wiggle half the teeth in my jaw. Maybe self-improvement isn't the answer. [...] Maybe self-destruction is the answer. (Palahniuk 49)

[...] Tyler explained it all, about not wanting to die without scars, about being tired of watching only professionals fight, and wanting to know more about himself. About

167 Palahniuk stresses that shift within the narrator with the motive of talking and embodied organs inspired by a *Reader's Digest* article read by the narrator (Palahniuk 58–62); the movie adaption, however, visually enacts the organic network within at its very beginning when it has the opening credits roll by while one seems to fly through CGI-generated cell clusters and tissues only to finally zoom out of a body that one can then identify as the narrator's one.

self-destruction. At the time, my life just seemed too complete, and maybe we have to break everything to make something better of ourselves. (52)

The very idea of self-improvement via partial self-destruction expressed here by the narrator and Tyler and its massively therapeutic effect then prompts the two men to set up Fight club as an institutionalized meeting for beating oneself up that promises each participant to get “to know more about himself,” i.e. gaining awareness of and agency over one’s own black-boxed body and life:

You see a guy come to fight club for the first time, and his ass is a loaf of white bread. You see this same guy here six months later, and he looks carved out of wood. This guy trusts himself to handle anything. (51)

The control and freedom the protagonist just as much as any other character in *Fight Club* seems to lack up in the massive black boxes of airplanes and high-rises, they find down in the dark and shady basements of Fight club where they take apart the black boxes of each others’ bodies. (“It’s nothing anymore to have a beautiful stock body,” 48). Fight club then emerges as the ultimate self-help group; a self-help gathering that really cures the narrator’s woes and eventually also takes up the flock of miserable men from all the other self-help groups initially attended by the narrator.¹⁶⁸

Revealingly, the excessive bodily presence experienced by *Fight Club*’s characters may also be felt by the reader in an unusually direct way when considering Palahniuk’s extremely detailed and engaging accounts of the body’s materiality and its deformation in often spectacularly violent and absurd ways. Indeed, Palahniuk’s fiction is notorious for its almost visceral effect on the reader. Similar to and often inspired by urban legends, his stories are frequently “invested in the theme of bodily abjection, told in the register of real-life experience yet distanced by narrative perspective, and building toward a shocking climax.” (Hantke 204). From the violent scuffles at Fight club over liposuctioned fat used for making soap, Tyler burning a kiss onto the back of the narrator’s

168 In a recent article, Jason J. Dodge has sought to interpret both the self-help groups and the Fight clubs by drawing on Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. He tries to frame them as “transgressional heterotopias” which he defines as “self-imposed [...] space(s) for behavior that is neither entirely crisis nor deviation” with regard to the male norm (Dodge 321). While clearly relying on Foucault’s “first principle” distinction of heterotopias of crisis and deviation, I have rather based my analysis on his “sixth principle” distinction of heterotopias of compensation and illusion while at the same time aiming at fleshing out these concepts instead of introducing a another formulation of heterotopia (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, 4–5, 8–9).

lye-bathed hand up to the narrator's final self-deformation of his face, *Fight Club* is full of shocking scenarios aimed at "going on the reader's body" and not so much the intellect, of stirring affective responses in his or her viscera, such as revulsion, nausea, terror, or shock. In this sense, Palahniuk's gut-turning, colloquial, in-your-face style and topics really make palpable the affects set free when bodily black boxes are opened up in a most immediate way for the reader. In fact, the guts he describes are felt by the reader turning around in his or her own body, thus making him or her aware of the black box known as his or her body in a most striking way.¹⁶⁹

It is only when *Fight Club's* narrator is busy beating open the bodily black box of an opponent at Fight club in an excessively violent way that Tyler "knew he had to take fight club up a notch or shut it down," that he realizes that there is way enough power and agency in each Fight club attendee to blast much larger black boxes apart than just their own little bodies (122). He then launches Project Mayhem as a paramilitary terrorist-guerilla network that aims at teaching "each man in the project that he had the power to control history" and that "each of us can take control of the world" (122). In order to arrive there, however, it is not enough to destroy single objects and bodies. Rather, it means to target the world at large:

We wanted to blast the world free of history. [...] It's Project Mayhem that's going to save the world. A cultural ice age. A permanently induced dark age. Project Mayhem will force humanity to go dormant or into remission long enough for the Earth to recover. [...] Like fight club does with clerks and box boys, Project Mayhem will break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world. [...] This was the goal of Project Mayhem, Tyler said, the complete and right-away destruction of civilization. (124–125)

What may have started as a self-therapeutic rebellion against the fetishization of individual black-boxed consumer objects as well as the own body has now evolved into a wholesale hatred for human civilization seen as a gigantically complex black box in itself forcing humanity into a permanent state of passive non-agency. Tyler's and thus also the narrator's long and eloquent moral defense of Project Mayhem reveals a deep longing for a quasi-natural state blasted free from all modern human-technological entanglements and black-boxing, a utopian

169 Hantke has engaged in greater detail with readers' affective responses to Palahniuk's fiction, such as the media myth of a large number of people fainting at the author's readings. However, he also reveals how Palahniuk is strongly influenced by such classic horror writers as Stephen King, Ira Levin, and Shirley Jackson as well as their often programmatically stated "affective aesthetics" (Hantke 204–207).

world free of technological patronizing and of regained control over a 'purified' material world. While this dream of a clear-cut split of humans and things seems as illusory as the extremely vague vision of an ecologically recovered thereafter – some sort of ultimate illusion heterotopia no longer set apart from its coercive surrounding but from the oppressive state before – these opaque ideas still exert enough power on the (two) protagonist(s) in order to set a chain of destructive acts in motion – all performed by eager Fight club disciplines joining Project Mayhem one after another.

These acts involve plain demolitions of all kinds of black-boxed technologies in the vein of a modern-day Luddism such as randomly slamming cars with baseball bats or melting down their tires with fire (132) or simply blocking their basic function with more creative pranks like filing pay telephones and bank machines with pudding and axle grease (133).¹⁷⁰ One more symbolically charged act of demolition consists in carefully transforming computer screens into napalm bombs by filling their tubes with kerosene or other fuels set to detonate upon booting (185–186). One of the key modules and black boxes of the smart age is thus willfully misused and reduced to its use value materiality and thereby turned into what it is perceived to be by the Project Mayhem luddites: a dangerously 'self'-destructive modulator of the smart control age. With their ever-increased frequency and spectacularity these destructive acts mainly serve to stir up the public in order to produce a climate of terror and upheaval apt for catalyzing the intended breakdown of civilization.

On yet other occasions Project Mayhem reverts to plain and brutal acts of intimidation against key state or police officials willing to battle the subculture of the Fight clubs and Project Mayhem. The financial sources necessary for planning and staging such turmoil, however, not only come from the sale of soap but also from blackmailing large corporations and institutions. Only now does one fully understand the actual intention of Tyler's earlier acts of subversion, such as mixing in his body fluids with the food he served at the Pressman Hotel or splicing pornographic material into all kinds of movie reels. By hacking himself more or less literally into each of these chains of production and thereby

170 The Luddite or "Machine Breaker" movement active in early industrial England between 1811 and 1816 consisted of workers in the textile industry that willfully destroyed the machines of their employers as a protest against the increasing mechanization of their craft and the socioeconomic problems ensuing from that. E. P. Thompson still provides the most concise account of the movement's history (see E. P. Thompson 472–602). Somewhat falsely with respect to the movement's original intentions, the term Luddism came to be synonymous with a technophobic attitude.

clandestinely marrying them, he has enough power to pinch large sums of money from the Hotel or the projectionist union for not going public with these shocking contaminations (112–117). Once more, the ANT model of an actor becoming more powerful by associating with as many other actors, human or nonhuman, as possible proves true. Tyler's thus forged networks turn into a powerful agent in itself that allows him or rather Project Mayhem as his organizational arm to stay financially independent.

It is at least at this point that Project Mayhem's will to destruction is not only directed against the nonhuman actors of their material-technological surrounding but also against humans – either because they are considered central to or too much entangled with the oppressive system targeted or because they are no more than collateral damage (which also involves Project members themselves). Tyler may thus disclose to his eager collaborators in forthright terms: “And just so you don't worry about it, yes, you're going to have to kill someone” (125).

Yet apart from these attacks on individual human or nonhuman actors, Project Mayhem's luddite aggression seems to have centered on one particularly complex and iconic black box: the skyscraper. Conspicuously, already in Tyler's post-apocalyptic visions of a world bombed free from civilization do iconic American skyscrapers and towers feature prominently:

You'll hunt elk through the damp canyon forests around the ruins of Rockefeller Center, and dig clams next to the skeleton of the Space Needle leaning at a forty-five degree angle. We'll paint the skyscrapers with huge totem faces and goblin tikis [...]. [...] and you'll climb the wrist-thick kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower. (124–125)

These visions of a ruined Rockefeller Center (New York City), Space Needle (Seattle), and Sears Tower (Chicago) on the backdrop of the jungle worlds of a new American wilderness symbolically capture Project Mayhem's ultimate goal of “a permanently induced dark age” (124). Strongly reminiscent of the (post-) apocalyptic visions of New York in early 20th-century science fiction writings, there is, however, a striking difference in the implication of these ruinous scenarios¹⁷¹: In Tyler's post-apocalypse the severely damaged towers of American cities no longer offer the sublime, yet ultimately terrible and nostalgic vision of a cherished civilization lost to war and destruction by evil invaders but a sublimely

171 Especially George Allan England devotes much space to the detailed description of a ruined New York and its iconic towers wrecked by a mysterious cataclysm in his 1914 fantastic fiction epic *Darkness and Dawn*. For a detailed discussion of these scenes see M. Davis 292–293, Yablon, “Metropolitan Life” 324–327 and A. Brown, “Between” 181–184.

cleansing and triumphant sight heralding the victory over a black-boxing and thus oppressive and patronizing civilization that these tall black boxes stood for. As a text of the late 20th century and thus of the smart age of control, *Fight Club* can no longer imagine these (by now technologically smartened-up) high-rises as sites of a positive illusion heterotopia that may appear grievable when destroyed. Rather, they can only be perceived as places of coercion and surveillance and thus as ultimate compensation heterotopias, iconic epitomes of the control age towering high above the smart city, whose demolition is no less than a cathartic act of liberation. Well aware that “the violence of [digital] globalization also involves architecture” Project Mayhem’s “violent protest against it also involves the destruction of that architecture” (Baudrillard, *The Spirit* 45).¹⁷²

What is more, *Fight Club*’s final showdown between the narrator and his split self Tyler which narratively frames both novel and movie is set (like so many other narrative showdowns) on top of a skyscraper, namely the fictional Parker-Morris Building – with its 191 stories the highest one in the world (Palahniuk 12).¹⁷³ While Tyler threatens to shoot the protagonist on its top, which would objectively amount to suicide, the countdown for the detonation of a massive load of self-produced explosives wrapped around the tower’s foundation columns is running down (11–15). The final blasting-apart of the protagonist’s black-boxing body is thus mirrored by the impending destruction of the giant black box he stands on. Yet, whereas the movie ends with the image of the city’s CBD leveled by a chain of explosions in front of the protagonist’s and his friend Marla’s eyes while at the same time awaiting the collapse of the very building they are standing in, the novel rather suggests that the explosion failed, thus offering a

172 As Quiney (2007) and Malewitz (2014) have convincingly argued, Tyler Durden’s crusade against an oppressive and passivizing civilization bears strong resemblance to the acts and writings of one of the most notorious luddites of recent American history, Ted Kaczynski. In his 1995 manifesto “Industrial Society and Its Future” he opposes an autonomous frontier life similar to Tyler’s visions to an alienated existence within the “industrial technological system.” Kaczynski may thus have been an immediate inspiration for the character of Tyler Durden, whereas the militia movement and acts of domestic terrorism, such as, most notably, the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, which targeted a federal government high-rise building, prefigure the aims and radical Luddism represented by Project Mayhem (Quiney 335–337, Malewitz, *The Practice of Misuse* 130–132).

173 With its 191 stories, the fictional Parker-Morris Building is markedly higher than the real highest building at the time of *Fight Club*’s publication in 1996, namely the Sears (since 2009 Willis) Tower with 108 stories and even higher than the world’s currently highest tower, Dubai’s Burj Khalifa, with 163 stories.

very different interpretation of these final events. By making the protagonist shoot Tyler and thus probably overcoming his personality split as well as the still impending explosion of the building Fincher's movie adaptation seems to invite the conclusion that this final moment marks the protagonist's cure and thus also the end of his destructive actions (Project Mayhem) which is also stressed by the narrator's last words to Marla: "You have met me at a very strange time in my life" suggesting that this (self-) destructive episode of his life has now ended – also because he will probably not survive the tower's collapse. The novel, by contrast, has the narrator submitted to a mental institution in its last chapter, which suggests that both the explosion failed and that he is not cured from his personality split. Consequently, the Tyler Durden part of himself is not dead and may thus again join the ranks of an ongoing Project Mayhem as soon as he leaves the institution. This is alluded to in the novel's last words spoken to the narrator by a man working in the institution, but obviously also being a member of Project Mayhem:

We miss you Mr. Durden. [...] Everything's going according to plan. [...] We're going to break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world. [...] We look forward to getting you back. (208)

Project Mayhem's obsession with attacking and toppling the mega black boxes of skyscrapers is once more stressed by the movie adaptation when it has the protagonist walk into the Project's control room at Tyler's house only to find dozens of folders pinned to the walls all bearing the names of important high-rise complexes. Upon closer inspection he discovers that these information packages contain construction and floor plans as well as other architectural details carefully compiled for the sake of bombing these buildings most effectively. Project Mayhem had to reduce these often-iconic buildings to their bare material-technological hard facts and thus open these massive black boxes before literally breaking them up in spectacular acts of demolition.¹⁷⁴ Because of their very iconicity, skyscrapers represent preferred targets for the Project promising highly symbolic effects when set on fire or toppled – a fact whose truth was terribly proven in the 2001 terrorist attacks on New York's World

174 Also Tyler himself seems to have significant knowledge about statics and on how to best topple buildings, such as when he teaches the narrator that when "(y)ou take enough blasting gelatin and wrap the foundation columns of anything, you can topple any building in the world. You have to tamp it good and tight with sandbags so the blast goes against the column and not out into the parking garage around the column. This know-how stuff isn't in any history book" (Palahniuk 13).

Trade Center. In the same vein, the narrator recalls another of Project Mayhem's coups that played on the symbolic potential of the skyscraper rather than simply destroying it:

It's in the newspaper today how somebody broke into offices between the tenth and fifteenth floors of the Hein Tower, and climbed out the office windows, and painted the south side of the building with a grinning five-story mask, and set fires so the window at the center of each huge eye blazed huge and alive and inescapable over the city at dawn. In the picture on the front page of the newspaper, the face is an angry pumpkin, Japanese demon, dragon of avarice hanging in the sky, and the smoke is a witch's eyebrow or devil's horns. And people cried with their heads thrown back. [...] And even after the fires were out, the face was still there, and it was worse. The empty eyes seemed to watch everyone in the street but at the same time were dead. (118)

This symbolic seizure of an office tower proves more powerful than its plain toppling in the age of control, as it transforms the building into the ugly face of smart power and surveillance (Big Brother) that seems "to watch everyone in the streets" thus rendering obvious the panoptic-coercive powers of the smart skyscraper.¹⁷⁵ The shock and terror induced in the public by such an act may possibly lead to a climate of rebellion not against the perpetrators of that act of 'urban hacking' (Project Mayhem) but rather against an entire culture obsessed with control and its built watchtowers that the Project aims to attack.

Ironically enough, the whole effort of toppling skyscrapers or, more broadly speaking, of blasting the whole world into a permanent state of illusion heterotopia with everything turned upside-down requires Project Mayhem to structure itself as a highly coercive, even fascist organization under Tyler's strict lead and command (see Schultz 597–600). This also involves the rapid transformation of Tyler's once so 'illusory' house on Paper Street into a paramilitary boot camp subjected to rigorous drill and exercise. Complete with a busy soap factory and an adjacent garden Project Mayhem's base camp has turned into a mega- heterotopia of compensation populated with an army

175 The panoptic power of (not only) smart skyscrapers is not alone directed outward and thus towards their urban environment but also inward – especially with the implementation of sophisticated surveillance technologies such as CCTV monitoring. While amiss in the novel, Fincher's movie adaption features such smart technologies prominently in the scene that has the narrator and Tyler fighting each other in the explosive-filled basement of the Parker-Morris high-rise. The viewer can variously follow their violent scuffle directly and via CCTV screens inside the building's control room, the latter images, as compared to the former, revealing that the narrator is actually fighting with himself and thus 'objectively' testifying Tyler's illusory nature.

of docile “space monkeys”.¹⁷⁶ At least in Fincher’s movie version this shift from illusion to compensation, from subversion to control is further intensified by the implementation of smart technologies such as the computer, which is also contradictorily attacked and blasted as part of many of Project Mayhem’s missions. Accordingly, the narrator does not press money from his boss in the movie but leaves his job satisfied with the computer equipment from his workplace. Shortly thereafter, one sees that (90s) high-end technology installed in the narrator’s otherwise raw and dirty room at Tyler’s house. In yet another sequence one hears the obligatory internet dial-in noise creaking in Project Mayhem’s control room thus suggesting that the internet and other up-to-date black-boxed and black-boxing smart technologies are an integral tool in Project Mayhem’s effort to blast the giant black box of civilization apart. Another paradox of Project Mayhem’s rapid evolution into a black-boxing, fascist organization (black clothes!) that at the same time attacks all kinds of cultural black boxes emerges with regard to its personnel, namely the “space monkeys” recruited from the expanding network of Fight clubs. These men have seemingly traded their newly won agency (gained through Fight club) for the almost robotic existence of a Project Mayhem member subjected to unquestioned obedience towards the great leader in command Tyler Durden who in turn can control and manipulate them at will. The narrator quickly understands that this is hardly the kind of personality he and Tyler wanted to train in Fight club:

[...] the feeling you get is that you’re one of these space monkeys. You do the little job you’re trained to do. Pull a lever. Push a button. You don’t understand any of it, and then you just die. (12)

Under his “Fordist industrial labor practices” Tyler’s space monkeys have become faceless cogwheels within the great opaque machinery of Project Mayhem trained to perform stupid mechanic tasks without understanding them; their individuality and agency just regained in Fight club is black-boxed under their black Project Mayhem uniforms while being reduced to a simple tool in Tyler’s destructive master plan (Malewitz, *The Practice of Misuse* 132).

176 One should not forget that Foucault listed both the garden as well as the factory and military barrack as perfect examples of heterotopic spaces (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 6, 8); the latter two ones are even counted among the panoptic spaces of coercion and may thus rightfully be labeled heterotopias of compensation, when Foucault asks: “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” (*Discipline and Punish* 228).

Step by step the narrator learns that the deeds commanded by his very own split self Tyler Durden have gotten completely out of hand. As he himself tries to get the situation back under control by trying to stop individual attacks or by eventually shutting down Fight club and Project Mayhem altogether, he is immediately regarded as an enemy of the organization and hence abducted. Waking up once more in “the exploded shell of (his) burned-out condo” he seems to have one final epiphanic insight into both the malice and futility of the destructive crusade against civilization initiated by his megalomaniac alter ego (Palahniuk 192):

Up here, in the miles of night between the stars and the Earth, I feel just like one of those space animals. Dogs. Monkeys. Men. You just do your little job. Pull a lever. Push a button. You don't really understand any of it. The world is going crazy. My boss is dead. My home is gone. My job is gone. And I'm responsible for it all. There's nothing left. [...] Step over the edge. (192–193)

Back in his condo he feels the circularity of his fate: Just like in the times of his miserable clerk-consumer existence before ‘meeting’ Tyler, he has once more arrived in a state of complete disempowerment, pulling levers and pushing buttons to initiate possibly horrible actions that are outside of his knowledge and understanding, black-boxed behind simple grips and handles. His ultimate mission to destroy an oppressive civilization in order to start all over again has directly led him back into a new oppressive system that he is now unable to topple. And the dilemma goes further: Is a coercive, fascistic underground organization using bare violence the only and smartest form of resistance against a digitally smartened, permanently shape-shifting system in the control age? Is every means justified to arrive at the ultimate end of eradicating that system? Are there no smarter ways of resistance such as the symbolic hacking of a skyscraper mentioned earlier? Is Project Mayhem not a futile undertaking? How many condos and buildings and computers have to be blown apart in order to arrive at the great utopian thereafter? Is such material struggle not a Sisyphean challenge in a digital age? Is material destruction really a threat to a digitally enhanced empire? With both their different but equally open endings, novel and movie leave it to the reader and viewer to answer these pressing questions.

In the following, I will shortly address the question whether the processes of resistance and empowerment regarding the material-technological world are in any sense part of a (hyper)masculine emancipation from an emasculating culture, as many critics and commentators have argued with regard to the novel and movie. Considering my findings above, it should have become clear that *Fight Club* does not stage a channeling of male violence against empowered women but rather against the larger mechanisms of consumer capitalism and

its logic of disempowerment and alienation via object and body fetishization. Its male characters do not find re-empowerment by using high-end technologies or smart architectures in order to capture and control independent women, such as in the movies and novels of the early 1990s analyzed in the preceding subchapters. Rather, they regard these black-boxed and black-boxing technologies as the very source of their own misery and disenfranchisement and thus join forces to destroy not only them but the entire culture that brought them about. Their rage is directed against a broader cultural framework, especially the alienating human-object relations which seem to lie at the root of a strongly felt emasculation with the male characters of *Fight Club*. Even though that problem is by no means a male one only, it is specifically masculinized in the novel and movie, such as when Tyler and the narrator repeatedly identify themselves and their fellow Fight clubbers as members of a fatherless “generation raised by women” (50).¹⁷⁷ Yet, *Fight Club* is only in so far a cultural text on masculinity as the specific problem of disempowerment via technological progress (or broadly speaking modern civilization) is identified as a problem of men as well as its remedies (brutal violence and destructive aggression) are considered specifically male. The very argument of emasculation through modern technologized culture is one of the oldest topoi of a popular critique of modernity voiced as early as the late 19th century. At the time, many critics, most eloquently and prominently probably President Theodore Roosevelt, voiced their concern that with end of the American frontier men lost a designated zone for physically hard work and a familiarity with elementary materials believed to be essential to the formation of a truly manly selfhood. Being employed as clerks in the vertical office spaces on the urban “frontier in the sky” (together with many women) would, however, deprive men of these essential skills and lead to an ongoing emasculation, if not effeminacy (see Bederman 184, A. Brown,

177 In fact, Fincher explores the (dis)empowering potential of smart security technology and architecture in his follow-up movie *Panic Room* (2002) with two female protagonists! Similar to them, *Fight Club*'s male characters are not alienated from their masculinity but from a direct and creative relation towards their increasingly smart and black-boxed technological environment – a condition that is ultimately gender-unspecific. The very equation of masculinity and an affinity to or rather control over the material-technological world is a stereotypical simplification that underlies Faludi's argument in *Stiffed* just as much as that of many readings of *Fight Club* that have followed her. What is overseen in these interpretations is that there may well exist powerful male (but not only male) roles in the age of smart technologies, as Fincher proves once more in *The Social Network* (see Schreiber 12–17).

“Between” 179, Malewitz, “Regeneration” 527). With its various post-apocalyptic images of a renewed frontier on the backdrop of ruined skyscrapers with men hunting deer and climbing trees, *Fight Club* clearly invokes these late 19th- and early 20th-century frontier vs. urban modernity discourses and transposes them directly into the 1990s, where (male) problems appear to be the same as a hundred years before.

3.2.4 “There Is No Outside”? – Mapping the Smart Spaces of Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* (2003)¹⁷⁸

An insomniac man standing in his apartment high up inside a New York skyscraper, pondering his alienated existence – the beginning of Don DeLillo’s 2003 novel *Cosmopolis* reads like a scene taken from either Ellis’ *American Psycho* or Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*. Yet one quickly learns that Eric Packer, DeLillo’s protagonist, is neither a wealthy Wall Street yuppie blending into the crowd nor a dissatisfied clerk among others: In fact, Packer’s character is an exceptional one, a character who is anything but a generic everyman that both Patrick Bateman and *Fight Club*’s unnamed narrator certainly represent – at least at the beginning of these narratives. At only twenty-eight, Eric Packer is a self-made billionaire whiz kid cybercapitalist inhabiting a 48-room, multi-story apartment complex atop the world’s highest residential skyscraper, dwarfing both Bateman’s lavish apartment and the condominium of *Fight Club*’s narrator (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 7–8). But apart from these differences in the scale of their professional and financial potency, Eric Packer seems to live in another reality – even though the action of *Cosmopolis* is set in the year 2000 and thus only about five to ten years into the future compared to the plots of *American Psycho* (late 1980s) and *Fight Club* (mid-1990s). While the latter’s characters only marginally encounter the digital and for the most part struggle with firmly material-technological objects and architectures, *Cosmopolis* is set in a world where the smart age has fully arrived – at least for its protagonist obsessed with a future that can be nothing but entirely virtual. As a consequence, almost every technical object, every building, and ultimately even every human being in DeLillo’s novel is haunted by an always-impending obsolescence. In *Cosmopolis*, these objects, buildings, and people are

178 I will exclude David Cronenberg’s 2012 screen adaptation of *Cosmopolis* from my analysis as it follows its literary template – apart from a few minor changes and omissions – rather faithfully and does not add substantially different perspectives both content-wise and formally such as the movie versions of *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* do with regard to the novels they are based on.

not only ever more invaded by and composed of black-boxed smart technologies but rather seem to leave the material network of reality in order to merge into the digital realm and thus into a purely metaphysical network altogether. Due to the omnipresence of such digital conversion experiences as well as the overall science fiction-like cyber-realism of the novel, Peter Boxall has called *Cosmopolis* a permanent “premonitory encounter with an as yet un-lived future” (224).¹⁷⁹

Although mostly staging its plot inside Packer’s hyper-sophisticated limousine and not inside traditional architectures, *Cosmopolis*, nevertheless, is not only marked by constant references to and musings on Manhattan’s high-rise environment but also presents itself as the work most openly inspired by the biblical Tower of Babel episode among all of the novels and movies discussed in this chapter. The biblical subtext most directly surfaces in Vija Kinski’s stinging comment on Packer’s home atop a skyscraper: “You live in a tower that soars to heaven and goes unpunished by God” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 103). Yet apart from that direct reference, there is a much deeper interconnection between the novel and the Babel episode if one reads Packer’s fate as parallel to the Babylonians’ fate in the Book of Genesis. Just as the latter ones seek to make a name for themselves by building a tower that soars to heaven, Packer is characterized by a similarly borderless Promethean hubris regarding the power and expansion of his corporate and private wealth together with his disdain for all things not yet smart, i.e. linked to or entirely transferred into the digital sphere. More straightforwardly, one may, of course, read Packer’s inhabitation of the top floors of the world’s highest residential high-rise (which may be identified as the Trump World Tower built between 1999 and 2001 and briefly being the tallest residential tower of the world (see Merola 835)) or newly erected skyscrapers such as “the granite tower being raised [...], named for a huge investment firm” (39) as direct references to the Babel narrative.¹⁸⁰

But unlike Kinski suggests in her comment quoted above, Packer seems to be already struggling with his very own Babylonian punishment. Similar to those

179 In their analyses of *Cosmopolis* many critics have focused on the aspect of a universal obsolescence of the material world in the wake of its relentlessly progressing invasion by and ultimate conversion into the digital; see for example Cowart, Boyagoda, Valentino, Laist and Merola.

180 Mark the striking similarities of this vision of a Babylonian Manhattan constantly destroying the old structures (such as the condemned building Benno Levin squats (58) or the half torn-down Biltmore theater (122–123)) and building ever-new and ever-higher towers to the observations made by Henry James and John Dos Passos in *The American Scene* (1907) and *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), respectively.

who were punished by God with a confusion of their tongues, making the completion of their tower impossible, Packer, himself a modern-day Mithridates, a veritable polyglot capable of speaking, reading or understanding a host of different languages, is constantly confronted with the relentless polyglossia, indeed the cultural kaleidoscope of the global cosmopolis which is rendered most obvious in an instance where he fails to recognize the language a beggar woman is speaking (65).¹⁸¹ The multitude of languages may be the most obvious parallel to the biblical punishment of Babylonian hubris, yet certainly not the only confusion or twist of fate that Packer has to struggle with in *Cosmopolis*. Packer's crosstown journey – stirred by a rather profane quest (“I want a haircut” (11)) – to the barbershop of his childhood located in the Hell's Kitchen district of Manhattan's West Side is constantly obstructed by a whole cascade of extraordinary events such as a visit of the U.S. President, a rap star's opulent funeral procession, flooded streets after a water main break as well as a violent anti-capitalist riot all clogging the streets of Manhattan on that fateful day. Ultimately, however, Packer reaches his goal late at night only to run right into the arms of his assassin – a seemingly predetermined scenario not unlike a biblical story or an ancient myth.¹⁸²

A still greater punishment, however, may be found in the sudden failure of Packer's financial genius, his very familiarity with the ‘language’ of global markets that his wealth and reputation is built on. In fact, neither Packer himself nor any of his top analysts are capable of “charting,” of making sense of a confused and confusing market situation: against all odds, the yen refuses to fall on this very day, thus threatening to ruin Packer's astronomic fortune that is bound to a bet on the yen's drop.

But what exactly is Packer's sin, his fateful transgression, apart from residing “in a tower that soars to heaven” within the framework of DeLillo's Babel tale of the future present? This question leads directly into the center of what is at stake in *Cosmopolis*. Eric Packer is not only a savant-like genius who ‘packs’ any kind of information and knowledge into himself but also looms as the central node of a powerful global network of financial and economic entanglements. Packer himself is a ‘pack,’ a one-man black box of a million things, ideas, assets

181 In his voluminous *Natural History* Pliny the Elder tells that “Mithridates [VI of Pontus], who was king of twenty-two nations, administered their laws in as many languages, and could harangue each of them, without employing an interpreter” (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VII, 24).

182 Critics such as Randy Laist have pointed out the utter artificiality of the novel's plot structure to which I will return further below (see Laist 272).

and networks – a true ‘master of the universe’ shaping and packing the whole cosmos into himself or – by extension – into his smart apartment and limousine as well as his multi-leveraged corporation Packer Capital. From this point of view, Packer also emerges as the embodiment of the new Babel, the true cosmopolis and world capital New York City, home to so many cultures and languages, center of global finance, metronome of the world economy assembling and black-boxing so many global actors and networks inside the countless black boxes of its towers.¹⁸³

Packer’s powers of packing as much world and money into himself and his firm are, however crucially based on the rise of smart technology, of the universal digitalization of global financial networks and information streams. Only by converting ever more relations and transactions into the digital realm, only by compressing and thus packing ever larger amounts of data onto ever smaller microchips in smart devices and mega-computers is Packer able to process, assemble, and connect with so many global information and power streams to his own advantage and that of his customers. Thus, it seems to be clear that Packer, himself one of the prophets of cybercapital during the 1990s dot-com boom, has turned into a globally entangled, dynamic one-man network black box, a true ‘pack’ of the world as a result of an ever-increased data packing as well as the wholesale digital conversion of global financial markets. He is thus the proponent of an age where the intensified interconnection of the world’s actor-networks via universal digitalization has led to an ever-intensified concentration of power and capital in ever fewer hands (such as Packer’s), eventually creating a deeply unjust but also immensely fragile market system.

No wonder then that he incurs divine rage when considering his quasi god-like position that culminates in his hubristic insight early on in the novel: “When he died he would not end. The world would end” (6). This statement, if assessed in its full scope of meaning and not taken as self-evident idealist truism in the sense of Schopenhauer’s famous “The world is my idea,” may already provide a fundamental analytic key to DeLillo’s Babel tale of the smart age (Schopenhauer 3).

Packer is so entangled with the world, has packed so much of the world, the bio-technological cosmos (created by an ever-intensified digitalization) into himself, that he is in the place of a pantheist god (i.e. he is the world); a true master

183 The smart skyscrapers black boxing so many global information streams and data thus emerge as radicalized versions of the Foucauldian heterotopia of place “juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 6). Also compare Koolhaas’ proposal for a “The City of the Captive Globe” (Koolhaas 294–296).

of the universe “whose thoughts and acts affect everybody, people, everywhere” and that will make the world end when he will fail (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 202). In that sense, it is true for Packer what was and still is true for many banks during financial crises: he is too big to fail. He may be already so much immaterialized, digitalized that his own material death is almost of no interest to himself. But the failure of his business cannot meet the indifference of the world because of all its complex financial entanglements – a fact that he is reminded of as his financial transactions turn increasingly self-destructive during the course of the novel:

His actions regarding the yen were causing storms of disorder. He was so leveraged, his firm's portfolio large and sprawling, linked crucially to the affairs of so many key institutions, all reciprocally vulnerable, that the whole system was in danger. (116)

Rather than awaiting his divine punishment like the Babylonians, Packer, so it seems, takes things into his own hands as of the end of the novel's second part by not only seeking to confront his assassin but also by strategically losing all his fortune in a financial downward spiral caused by his own transactions, thereby fastening the collapse of the global financial system. In his own self-destruction he ultimately comes to resemble a self-annihilating pantheist god. Packer's actions are based on the crucial insight that for all the connections and global entanglements of everything with everything in an eventually fully relational world system – all the more so in the digital age – there is no longer an outside to that system, and thus also no possible heterotopia – everything is always already digitalized, integrated, and thus interconnected. No god, no protest, no movement, no outside force exists that is not always already part of that very system and that may thus be capable of bringing about its demise than the system itself or rather one of its most powerful masters of the universe. Whereas the bible and therefore also the Babel episode may rely on a metaphysical model with a punishing God as a powerful outside force to what ever happens in the world he created, DeLillo's smart-age Babel story is set within a fundamentally immanent, networked, and interconnected world that does no longer have an outside to itself.¹⁸⁴

I will now retrace Packer's fundamental dilemma as well as his descent into ultimate self-annihilation in more detail by taking a close look at the various spaces he inhabits in the novel: first his residential skyscraper, then his limousine,

184 Of course, the divide between the material, analogue world and the digital sphere of virtuality remains a vital scheme of contrast within the novel but is eventually – at least for Packer – revealed as an illusion for both spheres have already been irreversibly merged within his lived hyperreality.

and ultimately his own body. Packer's whole dilemma with the digital nature of his life as well as the entire world he lives in may be grasped already within the very relation to the high-rise space he inhabits, a relation DeLillo spells out on the novel's first pages. Plagued by intense insomnia, Packer stands at the windows of a rotating room at the top of his apartment triplex, itself situated at the top of the world's tallest residential tower and enjoys an incomparable early morning view onto the awakening city below as well as into "the deep distance" (6). While Packer objectively takes up Certeau's famous top-down god's eye position – that is even turned panoramic via the room's rotation – his physical and mental state is anything but god-like and powerful (Certeau 93–96). Unable to find his wife inside the 48 rooms of the apartment complex, he appears lonesome and restless, feeling "wary, drowsy and insubstantial" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 9). All the amenities of his sky palace – the panoramic view, the smart technology, the shark tank, the artworks, and the private elevators playing his favorite music – only seem to offer momentary relief from, brief moments of thrill within his overall fatigue that comes along as some sort of intense *tristesse royale*. There appears to be only one action promising solace to him in this situation: confronting the tower he lives in at ground level:

He went outside and crossed the avenue, then turned and faced the building where he lived. He felt contiguous with it. It was eighty-nine stories, a prime number, in an undistinguished sheath of hazy bronze glass. They shared an edge or boundary, skyscraper and man. It was nine hundred feet high, the tallest residential tower in the world, a commonplace oblong whose only statement was its size. It had the kind of banality that reveals itself over time as being truly brutal. He liked it for this reason. He liked to stand and look at it when he felt this way. He felt wary, drowsy and insubstantial. (8–9)

Staring at the ultra-tall building, Packer experiences a thrilling moment of contiguousness, even of identity with it. Identifying himself with that extraordinary tower not only makes Packer a true Babylonian who will have to fall just as the tower of Babel had to fall, but also allows him to revitalize his brutally powerful, phallic, and quasi god-like subject position which happens to be the source of much of the narcissistic and megalomaniac actions Packer will indulge in during the course of the narrative. But reveling in both his own and the tower's superlatives in that joyful moment of a human-architectural mirror stage is once more only a fleeting pleasure, one that is drawn into ambivalence the longer he scrutinizes the massive structure and its astonishing qualities:

The tower gave him strength and depth. He knew what he wanted, a haircut, but stood a while longer in the soaring noise of the street and studied the mass and scale of the tower. The one virtue of its surface was to skim and bend the river light and mime the

tides of open sky. There was an aura of texture and reflection. He scanned its length and felt connected to it, sharing the surface and the environment that came into contact with the surface, from both sides. A surface separates inside from out and belongs no less to the one than the other. (9)

Packer's 'awful' fascination with the skyscraper that ultimately emerges as a sublime vision and remains so well into the smart age is in many ways congruent with his almost libidinous relation towards the digital and its soulful glow of data. While the tower seems to thrill Packer and newly strengthens his ego, thereby giving him definition and reminding him of his powerful, quasi-omnipotent subject position, its immensity and seamless weaving into its natural (and also digital) environment also fundamentally destabilizes Packer's ego by reminding him of the possibility of being sucked up and thus eventually annihilated in the great borderless bio-technosphere.¹⁸⁵ In fact, the tower Packer scans so meticulously is a smart one regarding the way it absorbs and reflects (or rather is made capable to do so via ultra sensitive smart technology) the color, light, and fabric of its natural environment (the towers later described in the novel will do so with digitalized information); a process that appears so organic and auratic that the building's actual surface, the border between its inside space and its outside environment is seemingly obliterated.¹⁸⁶ Packer realizes that he is not only "connected to" the structure in terms of its length and extreme size but also shares the same liquid receptivity with regard to his environment – be it material or informational –, that he is a permeable membrane between two no longer separable spheres and may thus ultimately dissolve in the great relational everything that the world has turned into, thanks to hyper-sensitive information units newly animating both buildings and people. It is this very digital immanence emerging here within the early confrontation of man and building that should return as one of the novel's central motives and also describes the source of Packer's initial and aggravating malaise with the agony of and conversion of the material into the digital.

185 The motive of a mystic union between individual and the great everything (atman in brahman) is taken up throughout the novel by reference to Rothko and color field painting, famed for its possibility of meditative immersion (8, 27–30), the Sufi-inspired music of Brutha Fez as well as the dancing dervishes at his funeral (136–139) and, of course, the omnipresent mysticism of the all-absorbing cyberspace.

186 Baudriallard makes similar observations with regard to the towers of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles: "No interior/exterior interface. The glass facades merely reflect the environment, sending back its own image" (*America* 62).

Considering this, it is no wonder that Packer's sublime vision of the skyscraper is interrupted by another crucial realization:

The wind came cutting off the river. He took out his hand organizer and poked a note to himself about the anachronistic quality of the word skyscraper. No recent structure ought to bear this word. It belonged to the olden soul of awe, to the arrowed towers that were a narrative long before he was born.

The hand device itself was an object whose original culture had just about disappeared. He knew he'd have to junk it. (9)

Confronted with the smart liquidity of its surface, Packer comes to understand that this skyscraper is neither of the kind of its iconic early 20th century forebears, nor of the kind of the sophisticated modernist boxes of the mid to late 20th century. These buildings – regardless of all the technologies, mechanics, and computerized elements embedded into their walls and ceilings – were still material structures to be molded and operated manually. Packer's skyscraper, by contrast, is an informational structure in itself, so packed with smart, mostly wireless technologies, so many “regulating sensors and software” that it seems to create its very own invisible techno-biosphere which, for instance, consists of a “computerized bed” and a “bathroom mirror [with] a readout telling him his temperature and blood pressure at that moment, his height, weight, heart rate, pulse, pending medication, whole health history from looking at his face” (153) but also allows Packer to operate most functions such as the lighting via speaking code words or waving his hand (6). Similar to its invisible, wireless inside network, it is so seamlessly linked to the outside – both to the actors in immediate proximity (via e.g. automatic air and temperature control) and to actors in possibly far distance (via information streams from all around the world) – that it may ultimately suspend the traditional inside/outside division fundamental to the logic of any building (also high-rises) in analogue space and still deemed crucial for the analysis of DeLillo's novel by some critics (see e.g. Zindziuvieni 112–113). Packer's unease with regard to the anachronistic feel of the word “skyscraper”, however, is only the first in a great many of instances that show him annoyed by things and/or their names due to their perceived obsolescence and anachronism as material-palpable objects within the almost fully immaterial smart age he fancies the world has already entered.¹⁸⁷

187 There is a long list of everyday objects that Packer despises for their sheer material existence or their antiquated names ranging from ATMs (54), cash registers (71), hand devices (9), computers and screens (104) up to phones (88) and walkie-talkies (102). In the case of the latter, Packer is so disturbed that he “wanted to ask the man why he was still using such a contraption, still calling it what he called it, carrying

The ultimately immaterial existence of a smart Manhattan's high-rise architecture is further elucidated when Packer encounters a number of bank towers on his arduous way crosstown:

The bank towers loomed just beyond the avenue. They were covert structures for all their size, hard to see, so common and monotonic, tall, sheer, abstract, with standard setbacks, and block-long, and interchangeable, and he had to concentrate hard to see them.

They looked empty from here. He liked that idea. They were made to be the last tall things, made empty, designed to hasten the future. They were the end of the outside world. They weren't here, exactly. They were in the future, a time beyond geography and touchable money and the people who stack and count it. (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 36)

Within the digital hyperreality of Packer buildings, regardless of their monumental size, effectively turn into invisible structures, all the more when they are connected to the almost fully digitized realm of global finance, which is in fact already "beyond geography and touchable money." The impression of their emptiness may of course reflect the latent vacancies in many American CBDs (which was already noted with regard to the strangely unoccupied architectures in *American Psycho*) but also seems to invite an interpretation in the vein of Baudrillard: The bank towers of the hyperreal city exist only as empty shells within an all-facade Potemkin village in order to deter people from the possibly disquieting thought that money together with the entire financial sector have long lost their material existence as well as any relation to real economic transactions. Manhattan's high-rise topography has ultimately – at least in Packer's futurist reality – ceased to be a human-material actor-network but has instead transformed into one of abstract algorithms and data streams continuously interacting, talking to themselves such as "money is talking to itself" as Packer's chief of theory remarks later on (77).¹⁸⁸

the nitwit rhyme out of the age of industrial glut into the smart spaces built on beams of light" (102; see Cowart 181–182, Boyagoda 23–25, Laist 262–265, Gourley 48–49, Malewitz, *The Practice of Misuse* 135–136).

188 With regard to the increased corrosion of the material existence of crucial institutions such as money Baudrillard notes that it is met with an excessive "resurrection of the figurative (lavish bank buildings) where the object and substance (money in its material form) have disappeared," a "[p]anic-stricken production of the real and of the referential, [...] that everywhere is the double of a strategy of deterrence" (*Simulacra* 7). In *America* he may even argue sarcastically that "banks fulfill a crucial social function" in "saving" people from money in its material "dirty" form and thus senses it "quite logical that these buildings should form the monumental heart of every town and city" (64–65).

Still later, the reader discovers that there are in fact skyscrapers that outwardly represent what they seem to be made of in the smart age: pure information:

He led her out of the car and onto the sidewalk, where they were able to get a partial view of the electronic display of market information, the moving message units that streaked across the face of an office tower on the other side of Broadway. [...] This was very different from the relaxed news reports that wrapped around the old Times Tower a few blocks south of here. These were three tiers of data running concurrently and swiftly about a hundred feet above the street. Financial news, stock prices, currency markets. The action was unflagging. The hellbent sprint of numbers and symbols, the fractions, decimals, stylized dollar signs, the streaming release of words, of multinational news, all too fleet to be absorbed. (79–80)

Similar to his early view of the reflective smart surface of his residential tower, Packer experiences another sublime sight when gazing at the dazzling surfaces of skyscrapers enveloped in continuously running data tiers, thus surfacing the enormous floods of data and information that are ceaselessly channeled through them. Effectively “too fleet to be absorbed” and thus of no real use for human processing, these informational towers practically turn into artworks, sculptures and columns visualizing data streams that have long outpaced human senses. At the end of the day, they display a communication of networked algorithms and high performance computers among themselves – information talking to itself. At the heart of Times Square and thus at the heart of Manhattan, then, Packer spots the Nasdaq Center, America’s largest electronic stock market, a quasi-immaterial all screen-structure whose galleries seem “surfaced in information” (87) and thus the most transparent black box within the hyperreality of the smart cosmopolis.

These smart towers of pure information stand at the end of the evolutionary chain of skyscrapers I have traced in this study. It is they who truly live up to the global claim in so many of their names (World Trade Center, Trump World Tower etc.) as they are the ones that are digitally connected to the whole world and thus may be said to black-box the world inside themselves, or rather having the world and its information stream through them seamlessly, thereby turning into architectural “bodies without organs” as Deleuze and Guattari have described them. The smart towers of Manhattan emerge as the focal points of a largely invisible, immaterial realm of black-boxed computer brains and algorithms that seem to have emancipated themselves entirely from human or any other physical regulation, thus claiming an independent agency for themselves. Human actors are relegated to the role of awed observers within this scenario, overwhelmed by and effectively unable to follow or even to discern their “hellbent sprint of numbers and symbols [...] too fleet to be absorbed” (80). Only the most gifted analysts,

such as Packer and his staff, may still be capable of tracking these rapidly changing data masses when trying to chart market movements and to detect therein an “order at some deep level” (86). It is again Packer’s chief theoretician who describes this eventually futile enterprise most convincingly:

[Y]ou [want] to believe there are foreseeable trends and forces. When in fact it’s all random phenomena. You apply mathematics and other disciplines, yes. But in the end you’re dealing with a system that’s out of control. Hysteria at high speed, day to day, minute to minute. [...] We create our own frenzy, our own mass convulsions, driven by thinking machines that we have no final authority over. (85)

Given his financial powers and his vigorous ego, Packer appears to be the last person to yield to that kind of digital apocalypse or at least submission. On the very day described in the novel, however, Packer’s “horribly and sadistically precise” analyses seem incapable of proving their authority over market movements, making him unable to detect any kind of viable pattern in the yen’s unrelenting rise and even begins “to doubt that [he]’ll ever find it” (200, 86). Within a system of highly opaque, highly black-boxed, independently acting smart machines and buildings existing within their own technosphere (that is about to invade and encompass human and all other material life), human actors are hardly able to track, understand, let alone re-associate to these hardly palpable smart actors so as to create spaces of difference or, with respect to this study’s context, any kind of (illusion) heterotopia. Any kind of outside, margin, or frontier ultimately seems illusory within the great digital immanence of *Cosmopolis*.

DeLillo inserts another powerful scene into the novel that should convince the reader of the impossibility of any kind of resistance, any heterotopic outside to the cybercapitalist regime. And once more, Manhattan’s high-rise cityscape is more than a mere spectacular setting when Packer’s limousine is halted by a violent protest riot hitting the streets around Times Square.¹⁸⁹ Not unlike the anarchist luddites of *Fight Club*’s Project Mayhem, DeLillo’s protesters apply two strategies with regard to their attack on the center of global cybercapital. On the one hand, they try to ‘rematerialize’ the abstracted high-rise black boxes glowing of data (but also cars such as Packer’s lavish limousine) via pure demolition and thus aim at returning Manhattan’s increasing value form or digital existence back into the plain use value of its material components: They shake,

189 Critics such as Merola have argued that this scene draws its basic inspiration from the anti-WTO and G8 protests around 2000, yet DeLillo’s anti-capitalist riot also in many ways seems to prefigure the Occupy Wall Street protest actions in late 2011 (see Merola 838–839).

maul, and aerosol Packer's limousine, bomb or break their way into high-rise buildings such as the Nasdaq Center where they "break into control rooms" and "attack the video wall and logo tickers" (87). At the same time they release rats in all kinds of public buildings as well as into the streets in an attempt to enact Zbigniew Herbert's verse "a rat became the unit of currency" (which is also the novel's motto), and thus to startle an entirely inorganic regime with a good load of organic being (74–75, 89).¹⁹⁰ On the other hand, however, the protesters seem to adapt to their object of attack when hacking into the myriad of screens and tickers and thus into the buildings' digital technosphere in order to insert their own subversive messages:

The bomb had been set off just outside the investment bank. He saw shadowy footage on another screen, figures running at digital speed down a corridor, stutter-running, with readouts of tenths of seconds. It was surveillance coverage from cameras in the tower. The protesters were storming the building, busting through the crumpled entrance and commanding the elevators and hallways. [...] The tickers went dark on the face of the tower under assault. [...] The top tier of the electronic display across the avenue showed this message now: A specter is haunting the world – the specter of capitalism. [...] He was watching the second ticker beginning to operate, words racing north to south. A rat became the unit of currency. (94–96)

Just like the angry men of Project Mayhem, these anti-capitalist rioters attack skyscrapers because of their symbolic visibility – both in terms of their monumental size and their status as epitomes of a black-boxing control age, which has already transformed these towers into screen-surfaced informational structures in *Cosmopolis*. As the former turn the facade of a skyscraper into the evil face of surveillance with paint and fire, the latter feed Manhattan's screen-facades with political slogans derived from theory and literature. But unlike Project Mayhem's and most of the other protesters' demolishing of cars and buildings at street level, these symbolic seizures prove to be veritable coups of a radical hacktivism that has learnt a crucial lesson: A system based on digital and therefore immaterial algorithms cannot be assaulted effectively by way of violent acts of material demolition but can only be fought on its very own turf and with its own units: codes. As one could already see with movies such as *Die Hard*, *Scissors*,

190 Several critics have identified the novel's motto as introducing one of its core motives, namely the ever-intensified conversion of material 'things' (the rat) into abstract, immaterial units within the global digital network or market (currency). Some have also marked the symbolic use of rats as animals, albeit largely invisible, that commonly outnumber the human population of any city – an idea that also echoes in the Occupy movement's famous slogan "We are the 99 percent" (see Valentino 151, Merola 828).

and *Sliver* it takes hackers and technological specialists to (re)gain control of and agency within the computerized and thus largely automated skyscrapers of the smart age.¹⁹¹

But the thrill of reprogramming the tickers and screens on Times Square with subversive slogans is only fleeting and the whole riot ultimately a tame event that expires almost as fast as it hits the streets of Manhattan and Packer's limousine. In the end, the protesters cannot harm Packer and thus the cybercapitalist system he stands for. This is made clear through the fact that the rioters may rock, demolish, and aerosol the armored shell of the limousine but not its two passengers who are able to continue their theoretical pas de deux by and large undisturbed. Not only the luddites in the streets seem to be of any danger to Packer and the system, even the protesters hacking into the tickers and screens of the bank towers are always already under Packer's control: As the passage quoted above shows, he is able to follow "the surveillance coverage from cameras in the tower" on the screens installed in his limousine. Describing the rioters as "figures running at digital speed" on the surveillance screens, DeLillo leaves no doubt that these disturbers or at least their images have already been fed back into the system and are thus firmly under the control of the cybercapitalist regime. The smart and thus also ultra-monitored skyscrapers the activists try to break and hack into are thereby revealed as absolutely perfected heterotopias of compensation that make every (material) panoptic architecture look like a mild kind of coercive set-up.¹⁹² No wonder then that Packer and his chief theoretician can calmly muse about the anti-capitalist protest raging outside their protective shell and theoretically debunk it as system-immanent "market fantasy":

191 The possibilities of hacking smart structures or even the smart city at large are only but implied by feeding subversive messages into news tickers. The forms and range of hackivism within the smart megacity are by far larger when considering, for example, the possible bugging and thus paralyzing of software that runs crucial urban infrastructures (see Townsend 253–281).

192 Cyberspace and the internet or more precisely social networks, such as Facebook (which was still about to be invented in 2003, the year the novel was released), may well function as media of protest and political upheaval but they – in combination with large-scale urban CCTV monitoring – can also easily be used to prosecute rioters such as in the case of the London riots in 2011. Townsend may thus ask: "In our rush to build smart cities on a foundation of technologies for sensing and control of the world around us, should we be at all surprised when they are turned around to control us?" (Townsend 276).

But these are not the grave-diggers [of capitalism]. This is the free market itself. These people are a fantasy generated by the market. They don't exist outside the market. There is nowhere they can go to be on the outside. There is no outside. (90)

The protest was a form of systemic hygiene, purging and lubricating. It attested again, for the market culture's innovative brilliance, its ability to shape itself to its own flexible ends, absorbing everything around it. (99)

Accelerated and immaterialized by its total digitalization, financial capitalism has become as universal, as global and as all-absorbing as cyberspace itself. A cybercapitalist hyperreality has emerged, so disembodied and universal that there is no outside position, no place outside from which to resist or transform it. Any upheaval, any negation such as the riot Packer encounters on his way cross-town can only take its origin within that cybercapitalist immanence and can thus only be of its very own making. Randy Laist is therefore right to conclude that Packer is fascinated by the protesters "not because he is secretly one of them, but because they are secretly a mob of him" and the very cybercapitalist order he embodies or has black-boxed within himself (Laist 270).¹⁹³

However harmless to Packer himself, the protest and its theorization by and with Kinski, nevertheless, convince him of the practical implication of that fateful thought he had earlier that day: "When he died he would not end. The world would end." (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 6). If anybody could truly harm or attack the cybercapitalist world order then it would be the man who is so much invested in it both financially and personally that he has come to be identical with it and has thus turned into its pantheist god. His desire for destroying "the world" thus enflamed, he is at the same time also inspired to physically annihilate himself by one of the protesters incinerating himself in great calmness on the sidewalk (97–99). Witnessing this radical act of suicide Packer is changed forever:

193 Baudrillard makes the point that capital or capitalism in general in many ways prefigured and thus paved the way for the hyperreal configuration of the world as discussed in the novel: "[...] throughout its history it was capital that first fed on the deconstruction of every referential, of every human objective, that shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power. Capital was the first to play at deterrence, abstraction, disconnection, deterritorialization, etc., and if it is the one that fostered reality, the reality principle, it was also the first to liquidate it by exterminating all use value, all real equivalence of production and wealth [...]" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 23–24).

What did this change? Everything, he thought. Kinski had been wrong. The market was not total. It could not claim this man or assimilate his act. Not such starkness and horror. This was a thing outside its reach. (99–100)

Packer is convinced that such an act of negation enacted as a total rematerialization of the human being can indeed claim a position outside the cybercapitalist totality.¹⁹⁴ The very experience of the riot culminating in the burning of the anonymous man together with the credible threat to his life of which Packer is informed shortly thereafter – all confronting him with the imminence and radical power of death – probably mark the most crucial turning point of the entire novel: From that very moment at the end of the novel's second part onwards, Packer is willing to walk the path of self-destruction down to its end. The very prospect of self- and world-annihilation unfolds a great liberating power within the billionaire. Plagued by a drowsy numbness for weeks, Packer seems almost instantly cured:

He felt defined, etched sharply. He felt a burst of self-realization that heightened and clarified. [...] He didn't know how long it was since he'd felt so good. [...] He watched the major issues breeze by and felt purified in nameless ways to see prices spiral into lubricious plunge. Yes, the effect on him was sexual, cunnilingual in particular, and he let his head fall back and opened his mouth to the sky and rain. [...] Now he could begin the business of living. (106–107)

His extreme decision for death and destruction, however, cannot be understood in its full scope if one does not take into account Packer's existential struggle based on his intense alienation from all things material including his own body within his fully digitized environment. Apart from his smart sky palace, Packer spends most of his time within his excessively equipped limousine bearing an "array of visual display units" (13) used variably for showing financial data, news coverage, Packer's mirror image (some seconds into the future!) and medical hard facts, thus turning the car into a "lavishly complete traveling cybermodule"; a smart, touchless space to be operated without ever touching an interface (Merola 831, see also Davidson 474–475). Given the fact that all the key personnel of his staff come to visit him in the limousine, the car has not only turned into the actual office and headquarters of Packer Capital but does indeed represent the nodal point of Packer's global business network – a smart office

194 Baudrillard argues similarly with regard to the terrorist act and the regime of simulation – a line of reasoning first elaborated in *The Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976) and later applied to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in *The Spirit of Terrorism: Requiem for the Twin Towers* (2002).

skyscraper horizontalized and made mobile, a true heterotopia of space and a ‘frontier on the road.’¹⁹⁵ It is here in his smart-spaced limousine, vibrant financial data and charts in view, that Packer can fully revel in the ongoing merger of the digital and the organic:

He studied the figural diagrams that brought organic patterns into play, birdwing and chambered shell. [...] In fact data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet’s living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole. (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 24)

These words are not mere futuristic musings of a smart-age visionary but the real-life experience of a human being already intimately associated with and transformed by digital technologies, thus being translated into a human-technological-informational actant in ANT terminology. As a consequence, Packer’s extreme identification with and actual integration of the digital regime into his life reality has by and by turned him into a high-performance processor himself.¹⁹⁶ Just as in the case of the smart buildings described above

[c]utting-edge technologies have eliminated the interface itself, so that Eric [Packer] is continuous with the global informatics that his screens display. [...] Eric doesn’t read, study, or interpret data; he steeps in it; it flows into his nervous system without any conscious participation, as if his own consciousness were a neutral informatics storage and display unit. Eric’s awareness of the data is described as merely another point in the transmission of the data, implying that his consciousness is itself not different in kind from the “consciousness” of global networks of thinking machines. [...] Eric’s limousine dissevers Eric from the human world even as it facilitates and emblemizes his molecular fusion with a cybernetic world that is at the same time more real and more abstract than the world outside the window. (Laist 266)

195 Just like museums or gardens which have been described by Foucault as heterotopias of space and time (third and fourth principle) for assembling objects, artworks, animals, and plants from all times and parts of the world, Packer does not only bundle the world’s capital and information streams in his smart car but also has most precious artworks and materials worked into it, such as the late tenth-century “ornamental Kufic script on parchment” built into the partition (90) or the Italian Carrara marble on the floor (22, see Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 6–7; see also Gourley 48–50).

196 Also mark the similarities between Packer and the characters of *Manhattan Transfer* whose success but also alienation is frequently predicated on their intimate association with and thus their ultimate hybridization with materials and/or technologies of the industrial age.

Seamlessly “steeped in” the cybernetics of his smart limousine space, Packer emerges as yet another “body without organs,” absorbing and channeling tons of data through himself. No wonder then that he experiences his own organic body as just another one of the obsolete (because not yet smart) objects that he constantly encounters on his crosstown journey:

He was here in his body, the structure he wanted to dismiss in theory even when he was shaping it under the measured effect of barbells and weights. He wanted to judge it redundant and transferable. It was convertible to wave arrays of information. It was the thing he watched on the oval screen [...]. (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 48)

Such extreme alienation from his own body is further intensified when Packer observes himself or parts of his body on his array of screens. During his medical examination, he “wasn’t sure whether he was watching a computerized mapping of his heart or a picture of the thing itself [...] hammering on outside him” (44). On countless other occasions Packer is disturbed by the video feedback of the car’s spy camera that shows his own image several seconds into the future, thus forcing him to wait for his own body to catch up to “the independent image” (22, 52, 93–95). As a result, Packer’s body as well as his entire spatio-temporal existence no longer feels real within the smart touchless hyperreality of his limousine always leaking seconds into the future. It is once more Vija Kinski who outlines the posthumanist horizon that such smooth integration of humans and smart space, of the real and the digital invokes:

People will not die. Isn’t this the creed of the new culture? People will be absorbed in streams of information. [...] Computers will die. They’re dying in their present form. They’re just about dead as distinct units. A box, a screen, a keyboard. They’re melting into the texture of everyday life. [...] Even the word computer sounds backward and dumb. [...] Microchips so small and powerful. Humans and computers merge. [...] And never ending life begins. (104–105)

But whereas Packer may intellectually revel in such visions of digital immortality, he is similarly (and not unlike *American Psycho*’s Patrick Bateman) obsessed by a constant and almost excessive desire to actualize the waning materiality of his body as if to counter his ever-intensifying digital alienation. In fact, “Packer tests his body’s reality throughout the work” (Valentino 147). Time and again he seems to break free from the smart space of his limousine in search of real bodily experiences, thus provoking “moments where (his) alienation from himself, from others, and from the city diminishes, and the depth of his engagement with socioecological materiality expands” (Merola 838). His desire for the material and bodily experience manifests itself in his almost insatiable hunger for food, sex, and pain as well as his heightened aggressiveness leading to a number of violent

confrontations on the streets that are in themselves “an offense to the truth of the future” of the smart spaces Packer normally lives in (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 65).¹⁹⁷

As if attempting to plug himself out of the digital networks of his sky palace and limousine with all their screens and smart devices, he appears almost obsessed with reassociating himself with the material-bodily reality of the city that seems to lie in agony beneath the hyperreal varnish of the smart city. Realizing that only he can shatter the cybercapitalist realm both in its global and private-bodily dimension his actions turn ever more destructive and self-harming within the novel’s second half. While annihilating his own and his wife’s vast fortunes (by hacking into her bank accounts) within the financial plunge caused by his own multi-leveraged speculations, he, at the same time, works hard to dismantle the protective smart shield that secures his life: Sending home, losing, or killing his bodyguards on the way, he eventually leaves the protective shell of his limousine altogether in order to confront his alleged assassin one on one.¹⁹⁸

When Packer finally and miraculously jumps out of the limousine just in front of the condemned building in which Benno Levin, his half-hearted assassin who issued the “credible threat” against Packer’s life earlier that day although not really believing in it himself (56), squats, he should be more than surprised that his former billionaire boss and object of his mental obsessions walks right into his arms. While Levin seems hesitant and obviously overwhelmed by his role as assassin, Packer, willing to take the last step into self-annihilation, has to literally force him into realizing his own threat.

Levin, however, is not unknown to the reader, when Packer finally confronts him. Two rather short text passages entitled “The Confessions of Benno Levin”

197 During the course of the novel, Packer eats enormous amounts (“There were days when he wanted to eat all the time, talk to people’s faces, live in meat space” (63–64, 114)), has sex with his art dealer (25–32), his chief of finance (although “touchless”, 48–52), one of his bodyguards (111–114), and his estranged wife of only twenty-two days (177–178). He experiences intense grief at the funeral of a befriendd rap star (139), and revels in the pain (self-)inflicted by a medical examination of his rectum (48–52), a stunt gun (114–115), and after shooting a hole in his own hand (196–197).

198 Breaking loose from both the smart shell of his limousine and the physical force of his bodyguards Packer is able to act increasingly aggressively by himself. Similar to the disillusioned men in *Fight Club* he perceives of the violence he inflicts on himself and others as a catalyst for overcoming a deeply felt emasculation amid the touchless, disembodied spaces of the smart age. Accordingly, he feels “brass-balled again” after beating up the “pastry assassin” André Petrescu (144) and sees himself forced to shoot his chief bodyguard Torval, whom he conceives of as “his enemy, a threat to his self-regard” (147).

are inserted in chronologically reversed order into the main narration of Packer's crosstown journey. From his autobiographic account one learns that Benno Levin, or by his actual name Richard Sheets, is a deeply neurotic person who has worked as a lecturer in computer applications at a community college before joining Packer's firm to "make his million" as currency analyst. First downgraded and then laid off, he retreats to the life of a vagabond and squats in a deserted and condemned tenement building carving out an utterly simplistic existence at "the bottom of the capitalist social order" (Merola 829). Similar to *Fight Club's* narrator/Tyler Durden, he boasts living an "open life," disconnected from both consumer capitalism and digital cyberspace ("I am living offline now" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 149)), squatting in a derelict building which in many ways resembles Tyler's house on Paper Street. As compared to the lavishly equipped smart spaces of Packer's high-rise apartment and limousine seamlessly connected to cyberspace, Levin's house represents a veritable heterotopia of illusion, a last sanctuary of material use values within the all-absorbing, largely immaterialized realm of the smartly networked metropolis. Living from a basic minimum of food, stealing energy from a light post nearby, collecting discarded things on the streets ("What people discard could make a nation" (57)), and tearing down the partition walls of his house in order to live in an "open space," he emerges as a creative tinkerer within a completely material sphere. Whereas Levin deals freely with the use value of things, thus gaining a formerly unknown agency, Packer instead puts up with their most abstracted, informationalized value form. Fully disconnected from the cybernetic streams of data and control as well as the urban infrastructural networks, he can open black boxes (houses, gadgets, power grid etc.) and freely associate with the open networks of the material realm that has been deemed obsolete or even dead in the digital utopia of Packer's self-contained existence. It is thus that Levin can reveal himself as a truly relational thinker of the material world: "World is supposed to mean something that's self-contained. But nothing's self-contained. Everything enters something else" (60). Levin appears as a second Tyler Durden (only not as radical and aggressive) whose analogue existence inside a fully material and "offline" universe may first be despised but is later craved by a Packer (black-)boxed in his smart prison (see Merola 841–846).

Levin's confessions would be hard to connect to the main narration, was it not for his constant references to an anonymous "him" that may however easily be identified as Packer. Only after having read the end of the main narration do they seem to make more sense as, for example, the first passage entitled "Night" is set immediately after Levin has killed Packer and thus continues the story after its actual ending from the assassin's perspective. These two interpolations just as

much as the moment when Packer actually sees Levin in front of an ATM but can only recognize “something familiar about him” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 54), represent narrative markers within the main narration (although only identifiable after having finished or rereading the novel) that seem to hint at the fact that Packer is not the only character the novel focuses on. Thus, these initially puzzling moments and passages involving Levin prefigure the eventual meeting of Packer and Levin that turns out so crucial to the closure of the whole story. One could argue that Packer and through him the reader was unable to see and understand Levin in these interpolations within the context of the smart spaces of cybercapital that the main narration is taking place in. Only at the end, when Packer comes to resemble Levin more and more after having lost all his fortune and protection, willing to become the gravedigger of the world system via self-destruction, is he capable of finding, seeing, and interacting with him inside the shabby all-material space of Levin’s run-down home. Given the unrealistic and utterly artificial meeting of these two characters at the end of the narration, some critics have rightfully argued that the entire novel follows a dream-like, “condensed” structure and that Levin just as much as the entire story might be “a mental projection of Eric’s own fantasy of self-extinction” or vice versa, Packer and his fateful journey crosstown being a hallucination born out of Levin’s obsessive hatred towards his former boss (Laist 271, see also Valentino 152–154).

In fact, they both seem generic figures in their initial contrast as super-rich and super-powerful billionaire and powerless have-not squatting in condemned buildings just as much as in their eventual parallelism as crashed men having lost the million/billions they made in and with cybercapital and now retreating into a purely material life in the shadows – a development that is ultimately highlighted by the spaces Packer finds himself in at the beginning and end of the novel: On the one hand, his super tall and smart sky palace linked to global cybernetworks, for all its amenities a smart age heterotopia of compensation; on the other hand, the low-rise derelict building on Manhattan’s dirty West Side, an “offline” space disconnected from the smart city around it while at the same time deeply connected to the network of pure materialities, a rare heterotopia of illusion within the control spaces of the smart age.

In the end, both characters come along as doubles or doppelgänger that stand for an existence disconnected from the smart and ultimately black-boxed and coercive spaces of the global city and thus support DeLillo’s premonitory and deeply humanist position in *Cosmopolis*, which then emerges as “a cautionary fable about the violence [...] which crouches at the heart of the techno-scientific aspiration” (Laist 274; see also Valentino 151–155). Already delirious from the pain of his self-inflicted gunshot injury, Packer accordingly begins to doubt

his transhumanist fantasies of an immortal existence “absorbed into streams of information” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 104). His raving thought stream finally culminates in a flaming plea for a complex network reality of bodies and things that is after all untranslatable to the digital universe:¹⁹⁹

But his pain interfered with his immortality. It was crucial to his distinctiveness, too vital to be bypassed and not susceptible, he didn't think, to computer emulation. The things that made him who he was could hardly be identified much less converted to data, the things that lived and milled in his body, everywhere, random, riotous, billions of trillions, in the neurons and peptides, the throbbing temple vein, in the veer of his libidinous intellect. [...] He'd come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain. [...] untransferable [...] and so much else that's not convertible to some high sublime, the technology of mind-without-end. (207–208)

Disturbingly, however, Packer has to realize that his smart watch, the only smart device he has not been able to leave behind (almost like a handcuff), already premediates his death by showing a clear image of his corpse on its crystal display. One may well interpret this as manifestation of the digital universe's eventual supremacy and determinism over the material sphere of bodies and things by sucking them up into an informational bio-technosphere.²⁰⁰ In the end, however, I would argue that the outcome of this conflict remains open. While I think that Packer has indeed come to doubt the capacities of digital translation and immortalization in the end, one can only speculate whether the digital realm and the cybercapitalist cosmos will compensate for Packer's death and the annihilation of his leveraged capital or whether it will in fact tumble together with its pantheist god. And once more, one of Vija Kinski's musings rings true: “[Smart] [t]echnology is crucial to civilization why? Because it helps us make our fate. [...] But it is also crouched and undecidable. It can go either way” – salvation or destruction (95).

199 Packer's doubt in a full and accurate translation of life into informational units is mirrored by Levin's doubt in the ability of his ten thousand-page confessions to capture the sounds and feelings of life into words finally concluding that life and literature are “two separate systems that we miserably try to link” and that “all the thinking and writing in the world will not describe what [he] felt when [he] fired the gun and saw him fall” (55, 61).

200 Critics are undecided regarding the interpretation of the end of *Cosmopolis* and Packer's attitude towards the digital in particular. While Laist argues that Packer is willing and happy to sacrifice his bodily existence “for the more compelling promise of the cybernetic apotheosis” (272–274, quote 274), Merola, for instance, is convinced that he “repudiates his earlier belief in the overwhelming importance of digital data and reroots him[self] firmly in his body” (846).

Finally, one should not stay oblivious to DeLillo's language in this respect. Famous and celebrated for his continual engagement with a wide range of visual media, DeLillo is known for often slowing down his narration for the sake of zooming in on individual objects or media in order to deliver extremely dense and close, even philosophical meditations on both the materiality and iconicity of these images and media throughout his entire literary oeuvre. *Cosmopolis* is no exception from this rule. In fact, it is not so much visual media but the highly spatialized medium of cyberspace/cybercapital that he recurrently attempts to capture in ever-new metaphors and dense meditations throughout the novel. Aiming to make cyberspace's strangely immaterial materiality as well as its infiltration of the human body (indeed a bio-technosphere) palpable, he continually marries terms from the material-bodily realm and that of (information) technology, such as in phrases like "data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process, [...] the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions" (24). He thus follows the path of Dos Passos and the Modernists in their effort to capture the increasing hybridity of human life and mechanics in the modern metropolis by way of bold metaphors in their literary productions. When continually switching between and synthesizing the analogue and the digital realm by ever-new metaphors, DeLillo also demonstrates how human language – just like the many technologies discarded by Packer – has become anachronistic and strangely inapt for capturing the new realities of hyperreality. Levin's frustration regarding the inability of language to capture the intensity of life is therefore also shared by its creator DeLillo in his effort to capture the workings and nature of an emerging bio-cyberspace, thus prompting us to read Levin's view of life and literature as "two separate systems that we miserably try to link" as a metanarrative commentary on the author's struggle with a (however brilliantly conducted) mimesis of the digital everyday (55).

Conclusion: Open and Closed Systems

When Manhattan's highest buildings, the twin towers of the World Trade Center, were destroyed in a terrorist attack on September 11th, 2001, many shocked observers felt that they had witnessed this very scenario before. In fact, from the early 20th century onwards, Manhattan had not only looked onto countless disasters and minor attacks in and around its high-rise cityscape but had also inspired a long strand of literary, filmic, and artistic visions that centered around the city being violently attacked and/or destroyed by natural, monstrous, alien, or armed forces. But there were far more direct experiences and premediations in people's minds that resonated terribly with the events of 9/11. Not only had America witnessed a first terrorist attack on the WTC in 1993 and a much more disastrous one on a government building in Oklahoma City in 1995, also prominent contemporary cultural productions – from *Die Hard* (1988) to *Fight Club* (1996/1999) – abounded in spectacular terrorist attacks on, or complete destruction of skyscrapers.

Strikingly, much of this aggression, whether real or fictional, was based on an anti-modern or luddite thrust, targeting skyscrapers as the epitomes of either an imperialist global/Western capitalist regime and/or of a cyber age of increasingly smart and thus also increasingly impenetrable black boxes. And after all, what buildings would have been more emblematic of these two regimes than the WTC's twin towers? Already in the 1980s, theorists like Certeau and Baudrillard had interpreted its pair of monumental columns as both the idealized site of modernist urban planning and expressive of a new hyperreal order of binary simulation and cybernetics (Certeau 91, Baudrillard 136–138). And it was Don DeLillo who, in his influential article “In the Ruins of the Future” published in reaction to the 9/11 events, stated that

[t]he World Trade towers were not only an emblem of advanced technology but a justification, in a sense, for technology's irresistible will to realize in solid form whatever becomes theoretically allowable. [...]. The tactful sheathing of the towers was intended to reduce the direct threat of such straight-edge enormity, a giantism [...]. (DeLillo, “In the Ruins” 38)

In this article, whose ideas and argument strongly informed his two following novels *Cosmopolis* (2003) and *Falling Man* (2007), DeLillo characterizes the past decades as an age fundamentally transformed by the very smart technologies that he and other critics saw expressed in the WTC, developments that “summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital” (33),

triggered by “devices that pace our lives [and] operate from the smart quantum spaces of pure information” (40).

For DeLillo, this unhalted and fundamentally modern rush towards a digital Eden as well as the smart future-present already inhabited in 2001 was thrown back or at least seriously put into question by the 9/11 attacks: “But whatever great skeins of technology lie ahead, ever more complex, connective, precise, micro-fractional, the future has yielded, for now, to medieval expedience, to the old slow furies of cutthroat religion” and thus ultimately also to the post-technological world desired by modern-day luddites like Ted Kaczynski and his literary alter ego Tyler Durden (37). But it is also “their technology that marks our moments,” these not yet-smart and thus still freely malleable and openable black boxes, “the small lethal devices, the remote-control detonators they fashion out of radios, or the larger technology they borrow from us, passenger jets that become manned missiles” and thus the tactics of walkers and climbers, of creative tinkerers mis- and reusing technology for their own purposes (38).

In post-9/11-times, skyscrapers have thus more than ever borne the portent of catastrophe and destruction, regardless of whether induced externally (by nature, terrorists, war) or endemically (failures, ‘normal accidents’):

We may find that the ruin of the towers is implicit in other things. The new PalmPilot at fingertip’s reach, the stretch limousine parked outside the hotel, the midtown skyscraper under construction, carrying the name of a major investment bank – all haunted in a way by what has happened, less assured in their authority, in the prerogatives they offer. (39)²⁰¹

Narratives featuring destruction and thus violent openings of the all-too opaque black boxes that our increasingly smart and automated buildings and cities are transforming into have not lost their acuteness. Apocalyptic disaster and post-apocalyptic scenarios (*The Day After Tomorrow*, *I Am Legend*, 2012) just as much as tales of individuals in resistance to an all-consuming smart system, often culminating in the latter’s abolition or violent destruction (*Minority Report*, *I, Robot*, *Oblivion*), have defined a powerful current of cinematic productions during the last fifteen years. Similar to the latter strand of narratives, also DeLillo’s protagonist in *Cosmopolis*, Eric Packer, comes to desire such a violent shattering of the

201 DeLillo’s mentioning of a “PalmPilot at fingertip’s reach, the stretch limousine parked outside the hotel, the midtown skyscraper under construction” directly link his 2001 article to specific passages and motives of *Cosmopolis* and thus demonstrate how his reflections on 9/11 had an immediate impact on the fictional text then under production or vice versa.

cybercapitalist order and his super-smart environment in order to reconnect with the fading materiality of things and his body, thus ominously anticipating some sort of destructive event that 9/11 then in many ways constituted. It was after all the terrorist attack on the WTC that brought about a violent rematerialization of at least two of those smart, almost immaterial towers of Manhattan, as they are described in *Cosmopolis*, thereby opening these black boxes and releasing a swarm of material(ized) actors into Manhattan which violently (re)associated with its inhabitants. This process is powerfully captured in the opening passage of DeLillo's 9/11-novel *Falling Man*, narrating its protagonist's flight from the struck and then collapsing WTC:

This was the world now. Smoke and ash came rolling down streets and turning corners, busting around corners, seismic tides of smoke, with office paper flashing past, standard sheets with cutting edge, skimming, whipping past, otherworldly things in the morning pall.

He wore a suit and a briefcase. There was glass in his hair and face, marbled bolls of blood and light. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 3, see also "In the Ruins" 35)

Within this almost otherworldly, completely defamiliarized cityscape, the swarm of material let loose by the planes' impact and subsequent collapse of the towers associates with the people and buildings nearby, by spreading out into the entire city (dust, rubble, papers), covering them ("a man scaled in ash, pulverized matter" (6)) or even infiltrating their bodies on an almost microscopic level in the case of shrapnel (see 15–16). And just as in the beginning of *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo associates his protagonist on both a physical and psychical and thus on a far more than metaphorical level with the building he used to work in: "He heard the sound of the second fall, or felt it in the trembling air, the north tower coming down, a soft awe of voices in the distance. That was him coming down, the north tower" (5).

Yet it is not only in its material diffusion through the entire city and its penetration into people's bodies that the violently opened black boxes of the WTC reassociate with the city; that they become palpable on a direct material, yet ultimately gruesome level. After all, it is also "that howling space" of the empty sky left by the fallen towers that strikingly rendered visible the complex network of actors that the towers were embedded into, its intricate material, human, psychic, and informational entanglements with each New Yorker, the entire city, and even the world at large (DeLillo, "In the Ruins" 39). With every single actor broken out of both the stabilized network of the WTC and the myriad of human, professional, and spatial networks it also belonged to and was violently removed from on 9/11, aching wounds were inflicted on the world, the city, families, and

also on individual psyches, thus leaving them all traumatized. In doing so, 9/11 violently revealed the very networked nature, the very concrete rootedness of these abstracted, seemingly already immaterial black boxes of the WTC within the lives of so many people as well as in the collective consciousness of both America and the world at large. It is only thus that these two rather impersonal modernist giants of global business could turn into grievable materialities, into emotional spaces of personal belonging and thus also into strangely familiar things to be missed and mourned for. This is clearly attested to by such memorial installments as the light installation “Tribute in Light” (on each anniversary of the attack) and the National September 11 Memorial and Museum (opened in 2014), each of which staging the emptiness left by the toppled towers in the sky and on the ground.

More than ever, the events of 9/11 seemed to imply that only these violent events of attacking and toppling symbolically-charged high-tech skyscrapers were able to counter cybercapitalist regimes and to reintroduce a palpable experience of ‘analogue’ material within an increasingly ‘digital’ matrix constituted by all kinds of smart devices, homes, buildings, or even entire cities. Any desire to reconnect with smart structures (from single devices to an entire civilization), to reclaim the ability to freely associate with and inscribe buildings and their various actors with one’s very own (anti)programs on a material-mechanical level must inevitably culminate in an outright destruction of this structure or even the entire civilization, such as desired by *Fight Club*’s Project Mayhem. Only lately, during the 2010s, did narratives of a creative subversion ‘from within’, a literal hacking of such smart structures and their most-perfected regimes of coercive surveillance and control come to prominence. As opposed to both the helpless computer scientists of the 1950s to 1970s (*Desk Set*, *The Trial*, *Alphaville*, 2001, *Westworld*, *Rollerball*) and the shady criminal hackers and IT-specialists of the 1980s and 1990s (*Neuromancer* and other cyberpunk narratives, *Die Hard*, *Jurassic Park*, *Hackers*), these more recent scenarios center around highly moral protagonists of the whistleblower and hacktivist type (already suggested by DeLillo’s protesters hacking the tickers in *Cosmopolis*) that boldly associate with and translate (‘hack’) smart systems and structures from within the digital matrix (*The Fifth Estate*, *Who Am I*, *Mr. Robot*, *Snowden*), thus emerging as creative ‘walkers’ and ‘climbers’ of cyberspace (only without the physical effort needed by their analogue counterparts). In these narratives, the digital networking and smartening of gadgets, apartments, buildings, and entire cities is accepted as an inevitably given process and is thus not per se defined as negative. The essential quest for these hackers, these new cyber-walkers

and -climbers is no longer to blast humanity free from (smart) civilization (as *Fight Club's* Project Mayhem aims at doing) but to subvert and break up its coercive tendencies in order to realize its liberating, democratic, and beneficial ('illusory-heterotopic') potentials.

In his contribution to the 2012 London School of Economics Cities conference, sociologist Richard Sennett sketched two possible scenarios for a smart urbanism as it is already in the process of being implemented in cities around the world. He warns of "[t]he risk [...] that new technologies might repress the inductive and deductive processes people use to make sense, for themselves, of the complex conditions in which they live" and may thereby produce a "stupefying smart city" (Sennett 2). Such determinative and prescriptive use of smart technologies, which also allow authorities to act "more coercive more effectively" in the urban just as much as in any other context, would be typical of a closed, 'black-boxed' system in which any "unforeseen activity is either integrated into the existing rules – the algorithms – of the system, or expelled as irrelevant 'noise'" in order to help the system "maintain its equilibrium" (16). Only a coordinative, responsive and responsible use of smart technologies in the urban arena would evade the coercive compensation heterotopia constituted by a stupefying smart city and rather bring about a truly "smart smart city" which effectively represents an open system that is "programmed to evolve, being open to the unforeseen, changing its very structure as it absorbs new data" (16). Only a smart system – whether a home, building, or an entire city – that still remains a box to be opened, to be responsive and malleable by its user-inhabitants may result in a stimulating and enjoyable and not in a coercive and stupefying setting, one in which "technology might aid informal social relations rather than repress informality in the name of coherent control" (18). As long as technical, architectonic, or urban systems, whether mechanical or smart, analogue or digital, stay transparent and open for creative (mis/re)use and thus inscribable for individual action programs, they will never turn into grim dystopias of coercion or simple boredom.

In this sense, this study has sought to retrace the skyscraper as a complex and more or less stabilized network of human and nonhuman actors from its initial assemblage during the late 19th century down to its slow but steady evolution into a smart structure from the mid-20th century onwards. At each of the building's evolutionary stages, I have looked at cultural productions that sought to make sense of this structure (novels, poems, films, photos, paintings) in order to assess its heterotopic potentials, either compensatory (coercive) or illusory (subversive), and thus its openness for individual actors to associate with and translate it according to their individual programs.

Surely, fears of coercion have always accompanied the skyscraper or even the high-rise city at large (as one could see with *Manhattan Transfer*), but due to the growing implementation of smart technologies into the material-mechanic network of the skyscraper they have greatly enhanced with the progression of the 20th century (*The Big Clock*, *Die Hard*, *Gremlins 2*, *Sliver*, *Gridiron*). The greater the thrust of smart technologies to turn spaces into algorithm-driven code/spaces and thus into black boxes inaccessible to any analogue interaction or inscription and the less their practical affordance, the more apocalyptic contortions have fictional scenarios set in modern cities and buildings taken on. As seen in the case of *Die Hard*, *Fight Club*, and *Cosmopolis*, the only possibility for reconnecting with these structures as well as for (re)claiming (human) agency within these smart spaces has often comprised violent and spectacular acts of destruction or at least the fantasy of such acts. Only lately has the hacker or hacktivist been championed as a new clever walker and climber in cyberspace, able to once more associate with and translate these code/spaces according to his or her own subversive programs.

Whereas the skyscraper seemed as much a space of coercion as it seemed one of subversive opportunity in its early decades of existence, this balance appears to have shifted towards coercion the more it developed into a smoothly operable code/space. While *Manhattan Transfer*'s tricky walkers and climbers were still able to escape the disciplinary grip of the urban panopticon as well as to manipulate it on behalf of their own interests, to inscribe their private programs into buildings, technologies, and other people, the protagonists of mid-to-late-20th century scenarios had a significantly harder time resisting or escaping the almost total control powers of their urban or architectural code/space environment (*THX 1138*, *Die Hard*, *Scissors*, *Sliver*), some even having been forced to surrender to them altogether (*1984*, *The Trial*).

Regarding both its coercive and subversive potentials the skyscraper has also truly and recurrently proved itself as a vertical frontier in the sense of F. J. Turner. Yet, whenever the skyscraper appeared as a subversive, even emancipatory space with regard to entrenched dichotomies and hierarchies of race, class, and gender (such as, for instance, by housing sizable amounts of young female employees who were thus able to carve out some financial independence and social freedom through their work), a male, heteronormative dominance was usually reinstalled in two ways: either the towers or entire cities were struck by disaster or even literally transformed back into a natural frontier which subsequently prompted normative codes of gender and race to become reactivated in the group of people involved (*Darkness and Dawn*, "The Runaway Skyscraper", *The Towering Inferno*, *Die Hard*, *Fight Club*) or a hideous agential partnership (actant) of allegedly

'castrated' male individuals, high-rise architecture, and smart technologies has sought to entrap, manipulate, or kill usually female transgressors of conservative gender norms (*American Psycho*, *Scissors*, *Sliver*), the latter scenario being particularly typical of the neo-noir gender thriller of the late 1980s and early 1990s 'backlash' era.

Actor-Network Theory has proven a most useful tool in making sense of the skyscraper beyond common symbolic readings. Above all, it is able to elucidate how an architectural structure like the skyscraper constitutes an intricate assemblage of most diverse actors and actants as well as how their constant associations among and translations of each other turn it into a constantly changing "building-on-the-move." As a consequence, the skyscraper just as much as any other building never appears as a static entity belonging to some abstracted material realm of its own (separate from a supposed social realm) but always as a dynamically volatile network of actors that all form part of an extended social whole which comprises as much of humans as it does of materials, objects, and technologies. But ANT's usefulness has also revealed itself to the extent that its method and concepts may be fruitfully married with a wide range of spatial theories from Foucault's heterotopias and dispositives over Lefebvre's production of space and Certeau's walkers in the city down to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes, assemblages, and the BwO.

Due to its initial openness and vagueness, the same may be said on behalf of Foucault's concept of heterotopias, which proved extremely useful and compatible with other theoretical approaches just as much as in the context of so many thematic fields, as I have demonstrated, for instance, with regard to the value of the distinction between heterotopias of compensation and illusion (Foucault's sixth principle of heterotopias) in analyzing the power relations within a wide range of cultural productions set in the (vertical) city. Just as in the case of buildings and any other entity, theories like ANT and concepts like that of heterotopia have been of such great use to this study as they do not represent hermetically closed theoretical and conceptual black boxes but rather appear open and 'affordable' enough to be associated with and translated by a great many other theories, concepts, and thematic contexts in which they may prove extremely fruitful by generating further new insight and perspectives. Admittedly, this study has only been able to look at certain aspects of the skyscraper and the cultural productions it inspired and has thus only provided a limited field of application for these theories and concepts that may well be applied to many other contexts in a similarly fruitful way. In this sense, my study has sought to chart sizeable territory, both with regard to its topic of the skyscraper and its theoretical eclecticism, while at the same time being fully aware of the fact that there still remains a great deal of that selfsame territory to be tilled by prospective academic endeavors.

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERARY STUDIES (CEALS)

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- Band 1 Otilie P. Klein: Lethal Performances. Women Who Kill in Modern American Drama. 2017.
- Band 2 Antje Kley / Kai Merten (eds.): What Literature Knows. Forays into Literary Knowledge Production. 2018.
- Band 3 Florian Zappe / Andrew S. Gross (eds.): Surveillance | Society | Culture. 2020.
- Band 4 Sascha Klein. Skyscraping Frontiers. 2020.

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