Devrim F. Kilicer

Tower Power:
The US on a Freudian Couch after 9/11

A Socio-Psychoanalytic Study of New York Towers

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For My Fathers Halil İbrahim and Yusuf,
and My Island, My Son Ada

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[f]or here there is no place
that doesn't see you. You
must change your life.

Rainer Maria Rilke "Archaic Torso of Apollo"

INTRODUCTION

This study of the American skyscraper offers a critical inspection of the ways in which "the center of the center," the vertical *temenos* of The United States, New York City is comprehended as *the* place for the American Dream of material success with its overwhelming bundle of skyscrapers. Theory used here explains the skyscraper phenomenon and provides a framework for understanding the circumstances and the people who created this phenomenon. The purpose of this study is to provide a socio-psychoanalytic lens through the works of psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) together with social theorists Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) in understanding why New York City has been expanding vertically and what this architectonic verticality tells us about the American. The study focuses on Manhattan because it is the very place where the skyscraper form was fully exploited. Manhattan also housed the "Twin Towers" of the World Trade Center before their fall in September 11, 2001.

The concept of architecture covers all types of construction: housing, temples, museums, skyscrapers and so on. In its more inclusive sense, an understanding and engagement with architecture is fundamental to any comprehensive understanding of culture. Buildings express the human capacity to organize and control the environment within which they live and thus to articulate their cultural world. Then one can argue that it is through architecture that particular cultures, also humanity, express and understand themselves and others. When one visits a foreign country, it is always either the natural environment; or the buildings, constructions that s/he first gets a glimpse of what that culture has produced. Take the Blue Mosque (Sultanahmet Camii) or Hagia Sophia (Aya Sofya; a church, a mosque, now a museum) out of Istanbul, you will not just lose two great architectural constructions, but the city itself. It is the buildings that make a city a city and it is through confrontation with the buildings of another culture that one can recognize both her/his and also their otherness.

Equally important is the fact that the built environment is the product of power relations within the community that created it: "Architecture is not the autonomous art it is often held out to be. Buildings are designed and constructed within a complex web of social and political concerns. To ignore the conditions under which architecture is practiced is to fail to understand the full social import of architecture" (Leach 14). Indeed it is often hard to find architectural texts that do not represent buildings as merely technical objects or art objects. Architectural discourse needs to see buildings in their social form, as social, political, and psychological objects in so far as they are invested with social meaning and shape social relations. Considering the fact that the skyscraper is mainly an American invention; the full social import of skyscrapers then will reflect social, political, and also symbolic and psychological concerns of Americans. Skyscrapers as architectural forms are the products of a way of seeing and envisioning the American way.

It is significant to acknowledge the fact that architecture reflects the mind of the society. Further, an individual's perception of buildings or the built environment is mediated through his/her consciousness. In attempting to expose the forces by which the built environment is generated and perceived, psychoanalysis provides a necessary lens to address the whole question of the social import that skyscrapers have and it becomes an indispensable tool in getting to understand a certain form of architecture and the mind frame of a society that invented it. Moreover, psychoanalysis deconstructs unconscious controlling mechanisms both in the human mind and in society. Accordingly, skyscrapers as modern images of towers function as a metaphor for social guardians, and in their essential phallomorphic form they stand as antitheses to the psychoanalytic metaphor that house is a womb, where all human beings belong. Moreover skyscrapers fuse the idea of power with masculinity in their essentially erect form. The effects of this type of architecturally symbolic guardianship go unnoticed for the most part. It is the main interest of this dissertation to unveil this dominance assisted through architecture, which is best exemplified in New York City, through a psychoanalytic lens engaged in a dialogue with Michel Foucault's rendering of the "panopticon" and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic violence."

Architectural space is a medium through which to understand society. As German cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer argues in "On Employment Agencies: The Construction of Space:" "Spatial images are the dreams of society. Wherever the hieroglyphics of any spatial image are deciphered, there the basis of social reality presents itself" (60). Obviously space is mediated by consciousness, and architecture is the product of a way of thinking. Space is never empty, as Foucault observes in "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," it is always "saturated with qualities" (349).

Architecture, the art of creating spaces, develops hand in hand with powers of civilization. In building the first house people began to create, and equally important, began to control their own environment. In this light, architecture has arisen from the primitive hut in the humans' need and desire to have a say in their surroundings. Also in this way people have been able to communicate their needs and desires in their dwelling places and architectural products. Further, "the place" as one of the three common elements that every community has –others being the work and the people- leaves a significant mark in the history of their civilizations: "the characteristic buildings of each period are the memorials to their greatest institutions" (Mumford, 1934a 193). Each community then communicates its needs through the environment they built.

If architecture is a form of communication, then the city is a contingent web of discourses. Roland Barthes sees architecture as communication and in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975) insists that "the city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language" (92). Barthes' semiotic understanding of the city is one among hundreds of ways of looking at a city. Further, studying a city is a never-ending process; there is always more to learn and more to write. Indeed modern cities are as old as civilization itself, as the common root of the "city" and "civilization" in the Latin *civitas* implies (Kasinitz 8). When one attempts to study a "cosmetropolis" like New York City, the problem of the never-ending process comes with a deeper agony. Because the city is a system of representation, a complex cultural entity, with cities like New York complexity in the urban context reaches its zenith. "Cities are civilization and the

study of cities involves the study of humankind. No one can master all there is to know about cities" (LeGates 18).

On the other hand, the embedded symbolism in urban context has proved to be a rich area of interest for scholars. Specifically Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974) was a groundbreaking text that established hitherto taken for granted links between the mental and physical spaces, including a range of spaces produced within a framework from the ideological, philosophical, and psychological aspects of spatial constructions to the "real" space that people inhabit in their everyday lives. Also Siegfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* (1967) offered an invaluable understanding for the vertical symbolism in the city. Kevin Lynch's *Image of the City* (1960), one of the earliest examples of study on urban imagery, for example, underlined the importance of the urban inhabitants' "ideas" for an understanding of the built environment.

On the literary side perhaps the most fruitful of renderings of the city came from the modernists who were both fascinated and repelled by the city. F. Scott Fitzgerald observes in *The Great Gatsby* (1926) when Nick and Gatsby are on their way to Manhattan:

> Over the great bridge, with sunlight through the girders making a constant flicker upon the moving cars, with the city rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps all built with a wish out of nonolfactory money. The city seen from Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world (67).

It was this combination of mystery and promise of New York or precisely its very core Manhattan that enchanted the modernists. Fitzgerald writes in "My Lost City" (1936) that he knew "New York was home" in spite of "all that glamour and loneliness" (607-608). This ambivalent attitude towards the city is most explicit in John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925). The fragmented narrative of *Manhattan Transfer* fuses the lost, but searching characters with skyscrapers towering necessarily above them transferring their per-

plexed emotions onto the built environment, specifically filling it with their lost ability to speak or even to think. The controlling metaphor of the oppressive towers of Manhattan makes the novel a perfect locus for the purposes of the study at hand.

Cities have always been an interest for scholars since the earliest times. There is a long tradition of writing about the cities, from Plato, who in *The Republic* wrote what an ideal polis should be like, to Aristotle, who in *The Politics* called man "zoon politikon" (the "political animal" or "the animal that belongs to a polis") to Shakespeare who wrote "the people are the city," (LeGates 22) to a twentieth century postmodern analysis of Bonaventure Hotel's lobby in Los Angeles by Fredric Jameson. Among archeologists, geographers, political scientists, economists, architects, urban planners, sociologists, literary writers, and other scholars, perhaps historians made the greatest contribution to understanding the evolution of cities.

Historians point that cities are as old as civilization itself. Humankind's rise to urban civilization took tens of thousands of years, but ever since the first true cities arose in Mesopotamia around 4000-3000 BCE, the influence of city-based cultures and the steady spread and increase of urban populations around the world have been the central facts of human history. The first stage of urban history is a shift from simple tribal communities and village-based agricultural production to the complex social, political, and economic systems exemplified by ancient cities like Ur and Babylon on the Euphrates. Further, in certain important respects, all the ancient cities are remarkably similar since most of them are walled (except in Egypt, where the surrounding desert may have been assumed to be a sufficient defense) and all contain a distinct stronghold area, separately walled, including a temple, a palace, and the central grain storage. Almost all of them were located along major rivers, and also, most of them featured some sort of pyramid or ziggurat (LeGates 21). New York, with its core borough Manhattan, then shares the qualities of an ancient city: Manhattan is built around Hudson River; it does not sport walls since it is an island where the surrounding ocean and rivers might be able to defend it; the cluster of downtown and midtown skyscrapers may function as

the stronghold areas and each and every individual skyscraper is like a ziggurat totaling into one strong symbol in the skyline.

On the other hand, the cities of ancient Greece developed on a very different model probably because they were located on narrow mountain valleys rather than broad plains. The Greek city was small, economically self-sufficient and almost village-like in its social and political institutions. Greeks contributed to the evolution of the urban civilization with the concept of urban citizenship and democratic self-government, and at the core of this contribution was the concept of the "polis," which is sometimes translated as "city-state" and at other times is identified as the collective citizenry of a Greek city (LeGates 22). New York is also like a "city-state" in that it is economically more than self-sufficient, but in no way small.

Rome marks another sharp break in the history of urban life which began as a collection of villages in central Italy, emerged as a powerful republic similar to the earlier Greek cities but then exploded into a giant metropolis and a city of world empire that extended from Persia to the borders of Scotland. With the expansion of the empire, Roman literature, philosophy, and art were also spread establishing the basis for a widespread cultural dominance. Unlike the Greek polis, in Rome a citizenship of imperial privilege established a strict hierarchy of patricians, clients, and plebeians. However, Rome's contributions to civilization like its roads, elevated water pipes and sewers set new standards (LeGates 22). Rome's symbolic name "Babylon the Great" stands both as an antithesis to the Heavenly Jerusalem and as *the city* on earth. New York, too, is *the* city in its glamorous chaos.

In the early Middle Ages most of Europe went back to rural conditions, and serfdom became widespread under a system of warlord feudalism, because of the raids by Vikings from the North and invasion by North African Arabs on the South. During this period cities of Islam like Samara and Baghdad were the real centers of power that surpassed European cities in wealth and power. But the conditions changed in the late middle ages, and cities became true centers of commerce, culture, and community again with great trading towns that inevitably gave way to their growing power and political independence.

The defensive walls of medieval cities clearly separated the urban where industry and commerce led the life and the rural where agricultural pursuits gave shape to living conditions. Within the town walls economic and social life were organized by guilds, while the church was responsible for taking care of citizens' spiritual needs and established a framework for social ritual and communal unity. What characterized medieval cities were the cathedrals, guildhouses, charitable institutions, universities, and marketplaces (LeGates 22-23). What characterizes New York City is its skyscrapers that have dwarfed the cathedrals.

In Europe the slow decay of medieval urban unity began with the Renaissance and the rise of monarchies. The new national rulers built their royal palaces outside the traditional urban centers, like Louis XIV's Versailles. They intervened into the existing urban fabric by building large boulevards and squares which they saw fit for the display of power. The Enlightenment and the Age of Revolutions shattered the divine right of kings and reestablished the political power of the urban commercial interests. The capitalist city of the Industrial Revolution created an entirely new urban condition and established the physical, social, economic, and political preconditions of all that was to come after. The modern city emerges with the Industrial Revolution. Modern capitalist city also created a social hierarchy -like that of the Romans- between the property-owning bourgeoisie and the proletariat who had no property to own. Middle-class employed strategies to protect themselves from the poverty of the proletariat and fled to the suburbs. Suburbanization resulted in segregation by social class and it is still one of the features of the modern city. Especially after World War II, with the popular usage of the automobile suburbs became more like segregated sanctuaries of class privilege. Suburbanization reaches its heights in Los Angeles where all the existing rules and natural boundaries of urban development break. Sometimes dismissed as a mere network of suburbs in search of a city, Los Angeles emerges as a city not with a single downtown but multiple "downtowns" heavily relying on automobile, a radically decentralized urban paradigm poised on the edge of postmodernity (LeGates 23-24).

The historical overview of the city, though roughly given, shows that the physical organization of the city has tremendous effects on its citizens, since "how a city looks and how its spaces are organized forms a material base upon which a range of possible sensations and social practices can be thought about, evaluated, and achieved" (Harvey 67). However, how physical environment shapes and is shaped by social life is still a big question.

One architectural historian, one of the greatest public intellectuals of the twentieth century America, Lewis Mumford, like Shakespeare, always kept the human dimension of cities in his works. His masterpiece *The City in History* (1961) and an earlier rendering of the same topic *The Culture of Cities* (1938) have left an inerasable mark on future urban planners.

For Mumford cities are expressions of the human spirit and cities exist to contribute to the ever-evolving human personality. He forwards his main propositions about city planning, and the individual and social human potential of urban life in "What is a City?" (1937). The central question for Mumford in the essay is: "what is the city as a social institution?" (93). He then goes on to lay out the sociological concept of the city around two primary groups which are common to all communities: the family and the neighborhood which are "all housed in permanent structures, within a relatively limited area" (93). The permanent structures are ever changing buildings and clusters of buildings that "house" communities together. For Mumford the city in its complete sense is "a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, *a theater of social action*, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity" (1937 94) [emphasis mine].

Mumford takes "the social drama" as the core ingredient of the city, and this proved to be a topic that he returned again and again: "The city fosters art and is art; the city creates theater, that man's more purposive activities are focused, and work out, through conflicting and cooperating personalities, events, groups, into more significant culminations" (1937 94). Significantly, the built environment, or physical organization of the city has the power to "deflate" or "frustrate" this collective drama (94). For example, Mumford criticizes the new plan for Bryant Park in downtown Manhattan in his "Mod-

ern Design and The New Bryant Park" (1934) because it does not "encourage circulation," hence frustrating the collective drama: "The worst [weakness] probably is the fact that the park is planned on a false axis, with a grand entrance up a flight of steps from Sixth Avenue, and with a fountain on the terrace. [...] The plan does not encourage circulation" (123).

Mumford believed that the skyscraper period was coming to an end, and it had reached the peak of its development. His never changing humanist attitude holds true for his proposal instead of skyscrapers to begin all over again on a new line, which means:

> [p]lanning long, shallow buildings—under ten stories— in multiple rows; eliminating the partly unused and therefore extravagant express elevator shafts; providing daylight and natural ventilation for every worker and as much direct sunlight as is tolerable; turning roofs into noon-hour recreation spaces and providing for pedestrian movement and for shops at the street level on the inner sides of the buildings (1933 101).

Jane Jacobs, too, echoes Mumford's notion of the "social drama" in her notion of the "street ballet" in her groundbreaking *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) which she dedicated to New York City. Until her death in 2006, Jacobs fiercely fought for her and others' right to "ballet on the street." To her, life in the neighborhood, on the sidewalk was essentially a ballet that engenders urban vitality, which in turn comes from residents' participation in an urban human activity (Jacobs, 1961 50-54). Although she derided Mumford's *The Culture of Cities* as "largely a morbid and biased catalog of ills" (1961 20), she shared with Mumford a great love for New York. As self-taught New Yorkers, Jacobs and Mumford did not receive any professional training in urban planning or architecture, yet they looked for ways to increase human contact in the city. Called by *The New York Times Book Review* "perhaps the most influential single work in the history of town planning" *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* is like a love song written to Hudson Street, where Jacobs lived, and its residents in Greenwich Village. In the book Jacobs lays out her basic notions of what makes a city livable and

her desire for contact in a community, attacking "the principles and aims that have shaped modern, orthodox city planning and rebuilding" (4).

Mumford's and Jacobs's keen interest in the spatial organization of the city comes from the very fact that cities among anything else are physical artifacts made by people. And the ways in which people make these artifacts show how they envision a future for themselves, how they envision themselves. Exemplified in William Cooper's 1783 couplet, "God made the Country, Man Made the Town" (Kasinitz 3), the dichotomy between nature and the man-made city, also points to another dichotomy between "God the Creator" and human beings as creators. As Raymond Williams writes in his *The Country and the City* (1973):

> On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved center: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation (1).

It is in this dichotomy between the urban and rural areas that the evolution of the big city, the metropolis, took the sides further away. Especially with New York, with its "determination to remove its territory as far from the natural as humanly possible" (11) as Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas points in his *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (1978), the separation becomes grand. French architect and urban theorist Le Corbusier (Charles Edouard Jeanneret) sees Manhattan as "inhuman" too. In his article "The Fairy Catastrophe" from the 1936 book *When the Cathedrals Were White*, he calls New York City "a catastrophe" but "it is a beautiful catastrophe" (617) devised by humans.

Indeed, New York is one of the most elaborate artifacts of the human imagination. Today, it is one of the greatest cultural and financial centers of the world, which is known for its alluring beauty and its influence. Although for many people the history of New York begins in 1524 when Giovanni da Ver-

razano, an Italian working for France, entered today's New York Harbor, New York is yet *the oldest* major city in the United States with its eleven-thousand-year of human history that began through the end of the Ice Ages, when the first pioneering "Indians" arrived (Cantwell and Wall 3-4). It is maybe because New York looks larger than life with its immense collection of skyscrapers turning their faces into the future that eleven-thousand-year of human history sounds like an oxymoron. As the most important element of New York's built environment, the skyscrapers with their ambitious thrust into the heavens give a feeling of fantasy that one is accustomed to see on the screen. Film-makers, writers, and everyone who had been exposed to New York through mediated or unmediated ways cannot escape its profound influence.

But what is it that makes New York so special, so different from other places? Editors of *Empire City: New York Through the Centuries* (2002) Kenneth T. Jackson and David S. Dunbar list ten significant factors:

1) Tempo. New Yorkers walk faster, work longer, eat later, and compete harder than most Americans do. If you can "talk that talk and walk that walk" you are a New Yorker.

2) Diversity. New York has always been multicultural, multiracial, multireligious, and multilingual. As early as the 1640s eighteen different languages were already being spoken in New Amsterdam. In 1880 it had the world's largest immigrant labor force; it still does. In 1999, more than eleven of every twenty New Yorkers are immigrants or the children of immigrants, and the metropolitan region has more Jews than Tel Aviv, more Italians than Florence, more Dominicans than Santo Domingo, and more Irish than Dublin.

3) Tolerance. Diversity has led to a reluctant acceptance of difference. The city's circumstances force residents to control and even to repress their prejudices. The standard was set four hundred years ago by the Dutch. In the early seventeenth century, when Puritan Boston was banishing Anne Hutchinson from the city because of doctrinal disagreements, the West India Company, out of commercial worries that bigotry might threaten trade and discourage immigration was welcoming all.

4) Density. Relative to other American cities, New York has been overcrowded ever since the Dutch settlers came together below Wall Street for protection. Many flooded the city, as many fled from it, but there have always been others ready to take their place.

5) Orientation toward public transportation. A century ago, the United States had the best and most extensive public transportation in the world, but since that time Americans built superhighways and became dependent on automobiles. But not New Yorkers.

6) Domination of the central business district primacy. Since 1945, the vitality of big cities shifted to suburbs, and once bustling department stores, the signatures of cities are only memories now. Not in New York. Macy's is still "the world's largest" department store. New York did not lose its city center and downtown.

7) Keeping a substantial middle and upper class. North American residential pattern is for the rich to live in the suburbs and the poor to live in the middle. New York is no exception, but still, though comparatively, the middle class has not abandoned New York. Nor did the upper class; Manhattan is the richest county in the nation on a per capita basis, the wealthiest zip code in America is 10021, and the highest real estate values in the country are along Fifth Avenue, Park Avenue, and Central Park West.

8) Environmental sustenance. New Yorkers' energy consumption is low by American standards because of their reliance on public transportation, and because of the fact that many of them live in apartments which use fewer fossil fuels to be heated and to be cooled.

9) Success in public housing. In 1937 United States Housing Act made it possible for the federal government to build decent, low-cost houses, the so-called "projects" for the needy. By the end of 1962 more than two million people were living in the projects. But in 2002 the projects are considered a failure because many of them are crime ridden. As a result, cities across the

nation tore down the complexes. Not New York. Still thousands of families are on the waiting list, and the projects themselves are in remarkably good shape.

10) Safe environment. In contrast to the city's notorious image fed by movies and television, New York has never statistically been among the nation's most dangerous cities. Homicide rate in the city is so low that New York is not even in the top hundred most violent American cities. Also automobile fatality rate is low because New Yorkers walk or take the train to many destinations. In other words, New York is safe because of its density and its subways, not in spite of them (1-6).

These elements have placed New York to a unique position, contributing to its almost mythical existence in people's minds.

As William Dean Howells writes in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1889), New York is the only city that belongs to the entire country (153). In the course of the nineteenth century New York's centrality was reflected in the symbolically identifying points in its landscape: Wall Street supplied the country with capital; Ellis Island channeled its labor; Fifth Avenue set its social trends; Madison Avenue advertised its products; Broadway entertained it. Further, it was the nation's major source for news and opinion; it attracted those seeking cosmopolitan freedom; and as the biggest city of the biggest state it exercised extraordinary influence in national politics (Burrows and Wallace 18). Nothing much changed since then.

New York had also served as the seat of the national government for a brief time between 1785 and 1790. Though no longer the capital by law it remained as the spiritual capital of the United States. During the Cold War, New York and the country's de jure capital Washington emerged as partners: "the city on the Hudson the multinational empire's commercial center, the city on the Potomac its military core" (Burrows and Wallace 19). But again, New York is also a city that belongs to "the entire world," with its population of immigrants from all over the world, and as the seat of the United Nations. Under-

lying the point the veteran *New Yorker* essayist E. B. White, in his wonderfully poetic rendering of New York City, *Here is New York* (1949), writes:

> Along the East River, from the razed slaughterhouses of Turtle Bay [...] men are carving out the permanent headquarters of the United Nations—the greatest housing projects of them all. In its stride, New York takes on one more interior city, to shelter, this time, all governments, and to clear the slum called war. New York is not a capital city—it is not a national capital or a state capital. But it is by way of becoming the capital of the world (54-55).

Walt Whitman, the poet laureate of New York City, was perhaps the first poet to capture the spirit of his great city. He calls New York "the great place of the Western continent, the heart, the rain, the focus, the main spring, the pinnacle, the extremity, the no more beyond of the western world" (Jackson and Dunbar 247). Whitman's poetry essentially expresses the energy and diversity of New York City that was to become the capital of the modern world. He writes in "Manhatta" (1860): "I see that the word of my city is that word from of old, / Because I see that word nested in nests of water-bays, superb, / Rich, hemm'd thick all around with sailships, an island / sixteen miles long, solid-founded, / Numberless crowded streets, high growths of iron, slender, strong, light, / splendidly uprising toward clear skies, / ... / City of hurried and sparkling waters! city of spires and masts! / City nested in bays! my city! (253) The name Manhattan is derived from an Algonquian term "Manhatta" meaning "island of hills" foreshadowing what was to become an island of manmade hills of skyscrapers and it is this "aboriginal name" that comes to Whitman essentially as vertical in shape and that shares with him the energy of being one big whole with the past of the city. In the nineteenth century and today, New York has been a city of extremes and excess that looked skyward. Historian Edward Spann clarifies the point:

> Although it included a wide range of human existence, New York was best known in its extremes, as a city capable of shedding the most brilliant light and casting the deepest shadows. Perhaps no place in the world evoked such extremes of love and hate, often in the same person. In its slums, dirt, materialism, violence, congestion, rush, politics and

> municipal mismanagement, it could depress, degrade and offend, the human spirit. In its wealth, intelligence, power, opportunities, and in the seemingly endless wonders of its streets, it could exalt, exhilarate and, occasionally, even charm strangers and citizens alike. The new metropolis was radically imperfect, but its imperfections were those of a masterwork of collective human spirit and masterful presence in the world (426).

Before Whitman though, Washington Irving was at pains to "create" a myth for New York City. In *Knickerbocker's History of New York* (1809) Irving set out to portray his native city as "having an antiquity thus extending back into the regions of doubt and fable" (7) without ever knowing that his beloved "Gotham" had an eleven-thousand-year of human history. Irving's *History of New York* is a mock-epic, a collection of fact and fiction that consciously plays with myth and history, with its narrow minded and showy narrator Diedrich Knickerbocker who is jealous of his predecessors "Dan Homer and Dan Virgil" for being able to summon up "waggish deities" to descend to earth and "play their pranks, upon its wondering inhabitants" (Burrows and Wallace 12). Knickerbocker thinks that the new world lacks the mythic past and its imaginative charms that Homer and Virgil made use of so well, so he invents one.

Irving had begun his efforts at devising a line of descent for New York in the *Salmagundi* papers (1807) in which he gave the name "Gotham" to his city: "Repeatedly *Salmagundi* referred to Manhattan as the 'antient city of Gotham,' or 'the wonder loving city of Gotham.' In the context of the pieces—mocking commentaries on the mores of fashionable New Yorkers—the well-known name of Gotham served to underscore their depiction of Manhattan as a city of self-important and foolish people" (Burrows 12). Gotham is a real village in Nottinghamshire, England, and its inhabitants are known for their follies told in jokes (like the Turkish Laz jokes) or "merry tales" since the twelfth century. But Gothamites are not mere fools; they are wise enough to play fools. Since Irving New York's nickname is Gotham.

Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, the editors of by far the best narrative history written on New York City, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (1999), write that although Irving's creation story never passed into popular lore, a simpler version did, that the Dutch bought Manhattan from the natives for twenty-four dollars. This myth too, like Irving's, is centered around the notion of New York as a city of tricksters: "What gives the story its legendary quality is the host of meanings attached to the event, starting with the notion—smuggled in via the word 'purchased'—that the 'Island Manhattes' was a piece of property that could be owned and transferred" (14). What is more important, this tale is always recounted with a malicious satisfaction; tellers are tickled by their understanding that the Dutch tricked the Indians with only twenty-four dollars (or a handful of beads, buttons, and other trinkets in some versions) into handing over what became the most valuable piece of land in the world. Racial patronage is clear in this, with primitive savages dazzled by the cheap showy trinkets of civilization. But more telling is that the people who made the agreement with the Dutch did not live in Manhattan, therefore did not have any property rights to "sell" the island, as it appears from a later repurchase agreement (Burrows and Wallace 14-15). After all, maybe it was the "civilized" Europeans who got tricked.

Further, Burrows and Wallace point out that this purchase story lays a "genetic" foundation of deal driving, sharp practice, moneymaking, and real estate in New Yorkers. Also "it proclaims a city whose acquisition was based not on conquest but on contract," and the notion that New York is rooted in a commercial transaction suggests New York would become a city of deal makers, a city of commerce, a City of Capital:

> New York would not become a warrior city, living by raids on its hinterland. Even when centuries later it emerged as an imperial center, it was never a military stronghold. [...] Nor would New York become an urban theocracy, a citadel of priests. No shrines or temples were erected to which swarms of pilgrims flocked to pay religious tribute or receive inspiration. Despite the formidable number of churches established here, Mammon ruled, not God. Nor would New York become a great governmental hub, with grand baroque avenues radiating out from imposing seats of state power. There was no regal court to dis-

> pense largesse to all comers or lure peasants to bask in its splendors. No monarch founded seats of learning so preeminent as to attract truth-seekers from the ends of the earth. Its civic chieftains would be merchants, bankers, landlords, lawyers; its mightiest buildings, office towers (Burrows and Wallace 15-16).

Indeed "Mammon" rules in New York as Ambrose Bierce ironically gives the gist in his *The Devil's Dictionary* (1906) with the entry "Mammon": "The god of the world's leading religion. His chief temple is the holy city of New York" (85). In the New Testament Mammon is a personification of wealth and greed as an evil spirit. In New York (and else where) people worship money in churches disguised as skyscrapers that reach onto heavens.

Burrows and Wallace chart the ways New York's development has been crucially shaped by its shifting position in an evolving economy: From its beginnings as a constellation of Indian communities encamped around the mouth of the Hudson River, the area was pulled into the imperial world system Europeans had begun fashioning after Columbus's voyages. Founded in 1624 as a *trading* post on the periphery of a Dutch mercantile empire, New Amsterdam lay at the outermost edge of a new born web of international relationships. It remained a relatively insignificant backwater, to which its Dutch masters paid minimal attention, as they had far greater interest in harvesting the profits available in Asia (spices), Africa (slaves), and South America (sugar). However, once forcibly appended to the rising British Empire in 1664 New York assumed a more prominent role. Charles II granted his brother the Duke of York (later James II) a large area including Manhattan. The British seized the city in the same year and the settlement was renamed New York in honor of the duke. It became a vital seaport supplying agricultural products to England's star colonies (the Caribbean sugar islands) while also serving the English as a strategic base for hemispheric military operations against the French, the latest entrants in the imperial race for dominance. After the American Revolution, New York emerged as the young nation's premier linkage point between industrializing Europe and its North American agricultural hinterland. The city skillfully positioned itself with respect to three of the most dynamic regions of the nineteenth century global

economy—England's manufacturing midlands, the cotton producing slave South, and the agricultural Midwest—and it prospered by shipping cotton and wheat east while transferring labor, capital, manufactured and cultural goods west. After the Civil War, the metropolis became the principal facilitator of America's own industrialization and imperial westward expansion. Capital flowed through and from its great banks and stock exchanges to western rails, mines, land, and factories; it became the major portal for immigrant workers; and it exported the country's industrial and agricultural commodities. By the end of the nineteenth century New York gained the ability to direct, not just channel America's industrialization. Financiers like J. P. Morgan established nationwide corporations and housed them in the city, making Manhattan the country's corporate headquarters. When World War I ended European dominance, and the United States became a creditor nation, New York began to compete with London as the focus of global economy. It finally captured that position after World War II when the United States emerged as a superpower. In the following decades, when American corporations and banks expanded overseas, New York became headquarters for the new multinational economy; and the arrival of the United Nations made New York a global political capital as well as a financial one. However, New York was more than simply a point of merger; it was a place of ever increasing potency in global affairs, and as the United States evolved from colony to empire, the city migrated from the edge to the center of the world (15-19).

New York's rise to dominance in the world is inscribed in its skyline. As the city's economy moved from commercial to industrial to corporate only the styles of its piercing skyscrapers changed. New York kept its towers in an unashamed display of economic power, function, and poetic creativity, serving a strong symbolism. As German philosopher Theodor Adorno argues in "Functionalism Today", even the functional may attract the symbolic. Symbols are born out of the need to identify with one's surroundings, and humans attach symbolic significance to even technical objects like the skyscraper. The following chapter is a research into the "beginnings" of the skyscraper form, and its attendant function and symbolism.