

Capital

of the

GOLDSMITH

New York:

20th Century

Capital

**New York:
Capital of the
20th Century**

**KENNETH
GOLDSMITH**

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Facilis descensus Averno;

Noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;

Sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,

Hoc opus, hic labor est.

Virgil, *Aeneid*

Contents

Part 1

Preface

- A Dream City
- B Empire
- C Antiquity
- D Nature
- E Panorama
- F Architecture
- G Empire State Building
- H Crowds
- I Street
- J Flâneur
- K Psychogeography
- L Body
- M Sex
- N Coney Island
- O Alcohol
- P Drugs
- Q Sound
- R Smell
- S Food
- T Advertising
- U Times Square
- V Dirt
- W Central Park
- X Subway
- Y Poetic Empire
- Z 1939 World's Fair

Postscript

Interlude

Part 2

Preface

a	Downtown
b	Art
c	Textuality
d	Grid
e	Loneliness
f	Mundane
g	Mapplethorpe
h	Glass
i	Simulacrum
j	Media
k	Monument
l	Robert Moses
m	Power
n	Commodity
o	Gentrification
p	Suburbs
q	Crime
r	Poverty
s	Unrest
t	Harlem
u	1964 World's Fair
v	World Trade Center
w	Light
x	Air
y	Death
z	Apocalypse

Postscript

Bibliography

Acknowledgments

Part 1

Preface

Chapter One. He adored New York City. He idolized it all out of proportion. Uh, no, make that, he-he ... romanticized it all out of proportion. Now ... to him ... no matter what the season was, this was still a town that existed in black and white and pulsed to the great tunes of George Gershwin. Ahhh no, let me start this over. Chapter One. He was too romantic about Manhattan as he was about everything else. He thrived on the hustle-bustle of the crowds and the traffic. To him, New York meant beautiful women and street-smart guys who seemed to know all the angles. Nah, no ... corny, too corny ... for ... my taste ... I mean, let me try and make it more profound. Chapter One. He adored New York City. To him, it was a metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture. The same lack of individual integrity to cause so many people to take the easy way out ... was rapidly turning the town of his dreams in—No, it's gonna be too preachy. I mean, you know ... let's face it, I wanna sell some books here. Chapter One. He adored New York City, although to him, it was a metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture. How hard it was to exist in a society desensitized by drugs, loud music, television, crime, garbage. Too angry. I don't wanna be angry. Chapter One. He was as tough and romantic as the city he loved. Behind his black-rimmed glasses was the coiled sexual power of a jungle cat. I love this. New York was his town. And it always would be.

Allen and Brickman, *Manhattan*, p. 1

A Dream City

Enough leeks to coat all Fifth Avenue with vichyssoise.

Brook, p. 53

A Good Humor bar gooilily obstructing Park Avenue.

Conrad, p. 316

A violin crafted from wood from an old house in Elizabeth Street.

Berger, *Eight Million*, p. 164

The Library lions refuse any longer to guard people who believe that wisdom lies in books and vow that they'll repatriate themselves to Africa, "where there is still some freedom."

Conrad, p. 203

The statue of Father Duffy in Times Square, mummified on his pedestal by a shroud of plastic sheeting, bundled in his sacking against his cross, against a sky of streaming neon and balletic peanuts.

Ibid., p. 169

When the south tube of the Lincoln Tunnel was officially opened on December 12, 1937, it had already been sanctified by the legend that its glass roof was intended to give travelers a good view of the fishes in the North River.

Federal Writers, *Panorama*, p. 407

On Sutton Place a man fishes out his eighteenth-story window for eels.

Talese, p. 48

If it were blood pouring out of the hydrants, would people stanch the flow?

Atkinson, p. 229

A naked butcher on a roof in Hester Street.

Mitchell, *Ears*, p. 189

Dogs wag their tails up and down instead of sideways in the Flatiron Building.

Barnes, *New York*

Sea monkeys from a curio shop peddling twentieth-century Americana, and these sea monkeys mutated into King Kong-sized jumbo shrimp that almost destroy the futuristic city of New New York.

Bennett, *Deconstructing*, p. 41

An urban science fiction.

Koolhaas, p. 15

A thick-hipped and swollen-breasted nude ignores the snow on the Museum of Modern Art courtyard tilting her pelvis at the muffled landscape.

Conrad, p. 174

Cloud-descended, these Venuses in transit between the sky and the streets land on the city's rooftops

Ibid.

What is a ship, in fact, but the great skyscraper turned upon its side and set free?

Sanders, *Celluloid*, p. 279

Los Angeles is just New York lying down.

Steele, p. 26

skyscrapers
filled with nut-chocolates

Williams, *Collected*, p. 187

An evening up on the Empire State roof—the strangest experience. The huge tomb in steel and glass, the ride to the eighty-fourth floor and there, under the clouds, a Hawaiian string quartet, lounge, concessions and, a thousand feet below, New York—a garden of golden lights winking on and off, automobiles, trucks winding in and out, and not a sound. All as silent as a dead city—it looks *adagio* down there.

Powell, p. 12

The Seagram Building fountains dissolve into snowflakes, I enter a revolving door at twenty and come out a good deal older.

Didion, "Goodbye," pp. 168–77

The buildings, as conceived by architects, will be cigar boxes set on end.

White, *Here*, p. 55

Dalí's New York is a laboratory of intensified entropy, where things become surreal in a thermodynamic malaise.

Conrad, p. 146

One of Oldenburg's 1965 projects was an ironing board, canoping the Lower East Side. The board replicates the shape of Manhattan and with its shadow blesses the former ghetto. Its baldachin testifies to the "million miles of devoted ironing" done beneath it by immigrant mothers sprucing up their offspring.

Ibid., p. 318

He would love to pad Central Park and the slope of Park Avenue with green baize, in homage to the grass of the former and the merely titular vegetation of the latter, and to use them as pool tables. Colored balls would be sent bumping through the park to roll down the declivity of the avenue. They be collected at Grand Central and shipped back uptown on the underground railroad tracks. At 96th Street they'd pop into view again, ready to resume the game.

N. cit.

Christo during the 1960s planned the packaging of three New York buildings, 2 Broadway, 20 Exchange Place, and the Allied Chemical Tower in Times Square.

Conrad, p. 312

Bill told me he had been walking uptown one afternoon and at the corner of 53rd and 7th he had noticed a man across the street who was making peculiar gestures in front of his face. It was Breton and he was fighting off a butterfly. A butterfly had attacked the Parisian poet in the middle of New York.

Denby and Cornfield, p. 3

Breton continued to live in New York City; he remained totally French, untouched by his residence in America, almost as though he had never left Paris.

Myers, p. 37

As reality goes into hiding in the prudish city, realism becomes an illicit art. Sometimes Marsh was denied permission to sketch in the burlesque houses, so he taught himself to scribble on paper concealed in his pocket.

Conrad, p. 97

He wishes that some aesthetic tyrant would make amends for the grayness of New York by decreeing that all the avenues be painted in contrasting colors.

Ibid., pp. 139–40

The patterning of tracks in Washington Square after a blizzard is decorative rondure.

Ibid., p. 175

Surreal New York is a pornotopia, a jungle of regression or an infirmary of the psychologically maimed.

Ibid., p. 142

Invading New York, the modernists put it through a succession of iconographic torments. It's demolished by the cubists, electrified by the futurists, sterilized by the purists. Cubism piles up New York's architectural building blocks only to capsize them. Surrealism carnivorously interprets its stone and steel as flesh, of which it makes a meal. Inside the body, the surrealist city rots; purism arrests that fate by setting its temperature at a sanitary degree zero. But the radical muralists, unrelenting, inscribe on the city's walls a prophecy of doom.

Ibid., p. 127

Tex Rickard built a giant swimming pool in Madison Square Garden in 1921. The giant white-tiled pool was 250 feet long by 100 feet wide, two-thirds the size of a football field. The water tank held 1,500,000 gallons of water. The ends of the pool had a depth of three feet and sloped to the center for a depth of fifteen feet, an area that served amateur and professional swim and dive competitions on Thursday evenings. A cascading waterfall was incorporated into the design at one end.

Aycock and Scott, p. 137

On the side of a blazing warehouse is a proud advertisement for the food products manufactured therein: “SIMPLY ADD BOILING WATER.” And the fire occurs, to make the joke even crueler, on Water Street.

Conrad, p. 291

Astronauts from the future discover that the mysterious world on which they have landed actually sits atop a post-apocalyptic New York—the ruined Grand Central has become the temple for a future race. A wide, double staircase serves as the altar. Like Luthor’s lair, this set is not a reconstruction of the real building, but a rather free interpretation that takes advantage of the enormous familiarity of the station’s design, manifested in details as simple as the shape of an arch or a style of lettering. In such details resides Grand Central’s power as an almost universally recognizable “place,” even as it offers a superb springboard for fantasy. How many other structures could be so universally identified by a few fragments of their graphics?

Sanders, *Celluloid*, p. 284

Stephen Crane’s description of the sensation of riding in an elevator, written in 1899: “The little cage sank swiftly; floor after floor seemed to be rising with marvelous speed; the whole building was winging straight into the sky.”

Crane, *Active*, p. 32

Transference of night imaginations to the daytime world—a way of forcing the impressions gained on the radically changed night streets back upon the “real” world.

Haden, p. 49

The city is a built dream, a vision incarnated. What makes it grow is its image of itself.

Conrad, p. 207

I am going to carry my bed into New York City tonight
complete with dangling sheets and ripped blankets;
I am going to push it across three dark highways.

Stern, p. 55

A dream, not a place.

Pomerance, p. 3

These New Yorkers are often shunted to the margins of a spectacle that is half like a poster and half like a dream. They exist in an urban-scape made up of just bits and pieces that have little in common

but their amputation by the frame.

Kozloff

Sleep ... is where you find it. But the other fire escape is somewhat overcrowded ... it's not so bad sleeping that way ... except when it starts to rain ... then back to the stuffy tenement rooms.

Weegee, *Naked*, p. 20

Both Kansas and Oz, both black-and-white and technicolor, with wicked witches on both sides of town, and good ones too, showing up in bubbles every so often—if you know how to blow them.

McCourt, p. 79

Battery Park, the rendezvous of dreams.

Riesenberg and Alland, p. 13

Absent-minded city of unconscious revelations in our mental age of the nightjar and the candle.

Ibid., p. 206

I stopped in this restaurant down on 2nd Avenue, sat at the counter for a moment and ordered a cup of coffee, feeling kind of warm and happy, the remnants of some dream from that morning still in my head.

Wojnarowicz, p. 187

There were tracks of iron stalking through the air, and streets that were as steep as canyons, and stairways that mounted in vast flights to noble plazas, and steps that led down into deep places where were, strangely enough, underworld silences. And there were parks and flowers and rivers. And then, after twenty years, here it stood, as amazing almost as my dream, save that in the waking the flush of life was over it. It possessed the tang of contests and dreams and enthusiasms and delights and terror and despairs. Through its ways and canyons and open spaces and underground passages were running seething, sparkling, darkling, a mass of beings such as my dream-city never knew.

Dreiser, p. 1

Here, in this ever renewed dreamland of the city, the comic-book shadows and cinematic styles of 1930s Manhattan are always present, always available, beckoning us to a mythical past.

Kingwell, p. 200

Cinema

A thousand movie screens flickered in New York from morning to midnight.

Jones, *Dynamite*, p. 200

Wandering through the souk of the Lower East Side, you could find the Palestine, the Florence, the Ruby, and the Windsor (among many others, most of which were nicknamed The Itch); they, too, die driven into the Lost City with the great Yiddish theaters: the Grand, the Orpheum, the Yiddish Arts.

Out in Queens, around 165th Street, the Loew's Valencia closed, along with the Alden, the Merrick, the Jamaica, the Savoy, and the Hillside. On East 14th Street in Manhattan, there was a place called the Jefferson, where we went to see the Spanish movies and vaudeville acts, improbably trying to learn the language from Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete, lusting for Sarita Montiel, laughing at the comedies of Johnny El Men, while ice-cream vendors worked the aisles. Gone. In Times Square, the Capitol disappeared, the Roxy, the Criterion, the Strand. The Laffmovie on 42nd Street played comedies all day long, but now, where Laurel and Hardy once tried to deliver Christmas trees, the movies are about ripped flesh. Who now can verify the existence of the old Pike's Opera House on 23rd Street and Eighth Avenue (converted first to vaudeville and then to movies after the Metropolitan Opera established itself at 39th Street and Broadway)? It was torn down to make way for the ILGWU houses thus eradicating the building where Jay Gould once had his office and where Fred Astaire learned to dance. And most astonishing and final of all, the Paramount itself was murdered in its sleep.

Hamill, "Lost"

You should not begin with the city and move inwards to the screen; you should begin with the screen and move outwards to the city.

Baudrillard, *America*, p. 56

The view of Manhattan's skyline emerging, walking on the Brooklyn Bridge to Manhattan: However far the stranger has come to see this view, he will almost certainly feel that it has been somewhere in his background for most of his life, courtesy of the cinema or (as likely) the television screen.

Moorhouse, p. 19

When they shoot, no one dies. The Pop city is becoming a kindergarten.

Conrad, p. 310

From a brownstone wall to carved wood paneling to a limestone facade. Dozens of these panels stood drying outside the shop, awaiting the artful painting that would assure their verisimilitude. The thick plantings of a soundstage Central Park—either real or, more likely, artificial—could be provided by the nursery's greensmen; the enormous plate-glass windows of a mythical Fifth Avenue department store readily supplied by the studio glazier. The Chinese or Yiddish store signage that graced the Lower East Side's streets were no challenge for artisans of the paint-splattered sign shop, while the lacy ironwork of a Gramercy Park balcony was probably not iron at all but inexpensive "pot" metal, cast from a plaster original produced in the high, glassy sculptor's studio.

Sanders, *Celluloid*, p. 67

With lobby, elevator, and hallway behind us, we at last open the door and enter the apartment itself—and therein find the single most familiar interior in New York movies. As in the real city, where apartments are by far the most common kind of domestic interior, the movie apartment long ago became the standard setting for middle-class New York life, the background of hundreds upon hundreds of films.

With its relatively simple and standardized layouts, the movie apartment's importance has often been less a space in itself than the neutral canvas for a decorating scheme bent upon revealing its occupant's personality.

“New York Street”—half a dozen can be found around today’s Los Angeles: at the height of the studio era, six decades, almost twenty such “streets” stood around Southern California, on lots large and small, celebrated and obscure.

Ibid., p. 143

Brick facades and brownstone stoops, canvas awnings and fire hydrants and street lamps evoke a New York that is, if anything, a little *too* real, even brick popping out with intense clarity. But soon discrepant details start to creep in, like the strange incongruities of real dramas. There are few people, no traffic, and a very un-New York sense of quiet. Through the upper windows can be glimpsed not bedrooms, but snatches of blue sky. Views of good-sized hills and, yes, snow-peaked mountains appear beyond the building cornices. As in a dream, these peculiar details hint at something about the experience we are having (something, in fact, we already know).

But meanwhile the street continues to beckon, encouraging us to stay within its surreal confines. At the end of the block we spot another street, crossing ours. We turn the corner and find ourselves on a new street, somewhat different in style and mood but still plainly part of the same city. Ahead there is another intersection, and another block; by now we realize that the term “New York Street” is something of a misnomer: this is not one street but many, an entire matrix of streets, in fact, meeting at odd angles and T-shaped intersections and spreading over several acres.

Eventually, however, we wander a few steps too far, and catch sight of the buildings from the back—only to be instantly confronted by the secret they tried so hard to keep: that they are not buildings at all, but merely false fronts, propped up with bracing. Nothing could be farther from the conscious urban clarity of the façades than this behind-the-scenes thicket of raw lumber. The front doors and entries, so prominent from the sidewalk, are from here hardly visible, leading not to actual parlors or lobbies but, we now see, to vestibules just big enough for an actress to kiss the leading man goodnight before scampering down the steps and onto the next scene. Behind the upper-floor windows, meanwhile, are narrow platforms stretched below the sills, allowing grips and stagehands to install curtains or flower pots, or rig lights, or cover the windows with sheets of non-reflective cloth, called *duvetyn*, to keep the sky from poking through and destroying the illusion. And no matter what elaborate materials are implied up front—granite, limestone, brick—from behind it is plain that these “buildings” are all made of the same stuff: plywood sheets, overlaid with molded veneers of plaster or fiberglass. This is a street just inches thick.

It has always been thus, ever since Hollywood first started reconstructing New York on a large scale in the early 1920s. To do so, the city’s urban fabric had to be sliced in two—the outer layer of buildings neatly sheared away from the interiors, which were shot inside enclosed soundstages, some distance away. The reason lay in part with the nature of film stock itself, which responds very differently to natural and artificial light: the higher “color temperature” of the sun’s light makes it difficult to blend with that of electric lamps. From this technical constraint arose an entire production strategy, separating the movie city’s exterior skins from everything else. Lacking any internal structure, the “buildings” of New York Street formed a membrane-like container, a vessel of space that encompassed only the public, outdoor life of the city—a reality with some provocative implications of its own.

Ibid., pp. 143–5

Night scenes on the New York Street were rarely filmed after dark, when expensive overtime

provisions would be in effect, but during the day, with sections of street darkened by black tarpaulins stretched from timber frameworks rising above the facades on either side. The result was an almost surreal sight: a cocoon-like enclosure, blocking out the bright sun of a California day to create a sleep-velvety Manhattan night.

[...]

In this light, it was worth taking a last look at the New York Street itself, still standing in the California sun. For clearly it was a place with its own distinctive reality, less a copy of the real city than a vigorous interpretation. This was especially true of its layout, more picturesque than the notoriously rectilinear Manhattan street grid, where except for a few blocks in Greenwich Village and another couple near Wall Street, the streets are arrow-straight, flying off into infinity. The blocks of Hollywood's New York Street, by contrast, had a gentle bend midway in their length, or met each other in T-shaped intersections very unlike the real city. Though the effect may have been picturesque, the motivation was anything but: bending the street, or having it intersect another, served to close down the vista and eliminate the need for expensive additional streets trailing into the distance.

The curious result, evident in countless films, was to give a distinctly small-town scale to one of the world's largest cities. In doing so, the filmic street illustrated one of the more surprising characteristics of New York: that what outsiders see as endless stretches of avenue actually break down for residents into small overlapping neighborhoods, each just a few blocks in size and encompassing the shops and services of daily life. The New York Street's great conceit, that it could condense the urbanism of the sprawling metropolis into a few blocks, thus made manifest what most New Yorkers know to be the truth, that their "city" does in large part consist of the few blocks around them.

Ibid., pp. 176–7

The apartments all had to be separately wired to allow their lights to be switched on or off individually, as they would in a real city. A subtle lighting design was required to ensure that the apartment interiors did not appear artificially bright, like shop windows, when seen from outside. And the huge space of the courtyard itself had to be bathed in the glare of a summer day.

Ibid., p. 237

Los Angeles's horizontal endlessness ... would be avenged by movie New York's overwhelming verticality. If the real New York had many tall buildings, it had plenty of low ones as well, especially in its outer boroughs and residential districts. But the dream city would seem to be all vertical, every scene playing in a penthouse, on a terrace, in a rooftop nightclub, every window looking onto a glittering view of rising towers.

Los Angeles's sleepy boulevards, meanwhile, would be retaliated against with an imaginary New York street life that surpassed almost anything the real city could offer. The lowliest side-street would have scores of pedestrians rushing purposefully across the frame; dozens more sat on stoops and played on the sidewalk. The quiet landscape of Los Angeles's bungalows or the orange groves of the San Fernando Valley would be shattered by the backlot cries of the Italian hurdy-gurdy man, the Irish cop, the Jewish pushcart vendor, as if packing, by scripted instruction, all of New York's human diversity onto a single block. And on these streets, leading men and women would constantly bump into one another, chance encounters that not only served the needs of the plot—but worked to demonstrate how a real city worked.

With the twilight, imagination took a special leap. The dream city would burn most brightly after dark, would indeed seem to live by night, as if to exorcise Los Angeles's dreary early-to-bed

puritanism. The rain-slicked streets, the bright glow of the theaters as audiences spilled out, the warm interiors of the supper clubs, the sequence of overlapping neon signs (“Panorama Club,” “Casino Moderne,” “Café Intime”) that signified a romantic dusk-to-dawn, all these would feed the projected fantasies of the ex-New Yorkers. The movement, by turns languid and urgent, of the *demimondaine* through a nocturnal cocoon of dark, slick exteriors and luminous interiors would give movie New York its most dreamlike aspect.

The characters moving through these evenings, walking these streets, surveying this skyline from its upper precincts were in some sense the greatest creation of all: idealized “New Yorkers,” polished and elegant, or exquisitely rough-hewn, and equipped with all the wit and style that had once graced the Round Table and its like. In these filmic New Yorkers—Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Myrna Loy and William Powell, Jimmy Cagney and Bette Davis—the style of Café Society was wed to the verbal agility of the Algonquin crowd to create an elite worthy of populating the impossibly grand city that the writers were inventing. As Pauline Kael has noted, apropos of one of the greatest of these “New Yorkers”: “Sitting out in Los Angeles, the expatriate New York writers projected their fantasies of Eastern connoisseurship and suavity. Los Angeles itself has never recovered from the inferiority complex that its movies nourished, and every movie-going kid in America felt that people in New York were smarter, livelier, and better looking than anyone in his hometown. There were no Cary Grants in the sticks. He and his counterparts were to be found only in the imaginary cities of the movies.”

Ibid., pp. 58–9

If shooting the real city was impossible, Hollywood would simply rebuild New York.

Ibid., p. 63

Tall file cabinets bulged with thousands of special photographs of New York, taken by crews regularly sent back East to shoot parts of the city for a specific film or to supplement the general collection. They recorded everything, from the broadest skyscraper views to the homeliest details of streets and sidewalks, creating a file-cabinet panorama that comprised one of the most exhaustive urban portraiture ever realized.

Many of the collection’s images were prosaic, at least when looked at individually. But they gained a kind of cumulative power from the sheer volume with which they were assembled. Nothing was beneath the studio’s notice, not even the humblest elements of the civic landscape: the lamppost, fire hydrants, police call-boxes, street signs, and manhole covers that constituted New York’s municipal “street furniture,” even down to the granite Belgian blocks that gave the street bed its distinctive cobbled texture. Other views showed the various building fronts that lined the city’s streets: the awnings and show windows of department stores, the classically carved names over the entrances to banks and office buildings, the elegant stenciled lettering on the glazed storefronts of *modistes* and jewelry shops. The images sought to catalog every element of the urban landscape, both inside and out: the riveted columns and ornate staircases of the El; the benches, water fountains, and statuary of Central and Bryant Parks; the canopies, taxi lights, and uniformed doormen of Park Avenue apartment houses. And onward, through hotel lobbies and elevator cabs, bars and restaurants, tenement hallways and the observation deck of the Empire State Building. Probably never has any living city been documented quite so obsessively, in thousands of sharp, large-format photographs carried across a continent to be assembled, labeled, and filed into an encyclopedic collection, all for the purpose of rebuilding any and every portion of it on a moment’s notice.

Ibid., pp. 66–7

Against shooting on location in New York. Studio telegram to director hoping to shoot in NYC: ~~A TREE IS A TREE, A ROCK IS A ROCK, SHOOT THE PICTURE IN GRIFFITH PARK.~~

Ibid., p. 332

This being Manhattan, a totally made-over rock with barely a patch of what is natural left upon it, it is taken for granted that what does not exist can spontaneously be created.

Ibid., p. 143

Rosalind Russell: “I had the same set in I don’t know how many pictures! Ten or fifteen!! The opening shot was always an air shot over New York. Then it would bleed into my suite of offices on the fortieth floor of Radio City. Out of the window behind me was always a view of the Empire State Building, in order to identify the setting. I used to say to cameraman Joe Walker, ‘Joe, where was the Empire State Building in the last picture?’ He would say, ‘I had it a little to the left.’ I’d say, ‘Well, this time throw it over to the right.’”

Ibid., p. 62

Hitchcock quietly sitting between takes of *Rear Window* in different spots around the set, as if to more fully enjoy the “city” he had brought into being.

Ibid., p. 238

The year of *Rear Window*’s release, 1954, also marked the construction of a landmark in postwar urban design: the Pruitt-Igoe Houses in St. Louis, a design similar to most postwar housing developments across the country. A series of freestanding slabs poised in open space, it offered no hierarchies at all outside the apartment door. There were no rear windows at Pruitt-Igoe. Or front windows, for that matter. Every window was the same. Everything existed in a field of open space, equal to everything else. As an expression of the professional understanding of cities at the time, it represented what can only be described as a profound impoverishment of urban vision, a broad failure of imagination that transcended this particular project’s notorious social failure, which resulted in its state-sponsored destruction by dynamite, two decades later.

Ibid., p. 241

The Naked City (1948): the first feature shot on location in New York since the late 1920s ... two hundred thousand New Yorkers turned out to watch the camera crews; at one point the producers turned to a professional juggler to help distract the crowds while the actual shooting was completed.

Ibid., p. 330

Unable to find a suitable freestanding tenement on the Lower East Side, the designer for *batteries not included* (1987) and his crew spent ten weeks constructing a four-story exterior set on a bombed-out lot in Alphabet City, built on three sides and wide open in the back, whose façade of brick-patterned fiberglass was “aged” by burning, chipping, and staining. The result looked so authentic that passersby inquired about available apartments and the sanitation department emptied prop garbage cans in front of the building.

Trager, p. 430

One day, probably early in 1980, a film crew commandeered Eleventh Street between Avenues A and

Band, with minimal adjustments, returned the block to the way it had looked in 1910. All they did was to pull the plywood coverings off storefront windows, paint names in gold letters on those windows, and pile goods up behind them. They spread straw in the gutters and hung washlines across the street. They fitted selected residents with period clothes and called forth a parade of horse-drawn conveyances.

When I walked down that street at night, with all the trappings up but the crew absent, I felt like a ghost. The tenements were aspects of the natural landscape, like caves or rock ledges, across which a lot of us—inhabitants, landlords, dope dealers, beat cops, tourists—flitted for a few seasons, like the pigeons and the cockroaches and the rats, barely registering as individuals in the ceaseless churning of generations.

Sante, "My Lost City"

Sprayed with graffiti and strewn with garbage, streets in Toronto and Montreal became blandly familiar stand-ins for crime-ridden "New York" neighborhoods.

Sanders, *Celluloid*, p. 381

It was rewarding for filmmakers to cast middle-class citizens into a loft setting and show them trying and often failing, to find their bearings.

Ibid., p. 215

Battery Place and the Bay are operatic, the stage for a thrilling fairy spectacle.

Conrad, p. 74

Photographed in the spring or fall, the city proved a cinematographer's delight, with its complex cloud formations, its lucid sea-washed air, and its relatively low sun angles, which softened the daylight and cast long shadows on the buildings' ornamented masonry—offering unbounded visual richness and texture that registered handsomely on black-and-white film.

Sanders, *Celluloid*, p. 333

During the day, his New Yorkers pine for the oblivious dark. The movies sell them an artificial night; many of them go to matinees just to sleep.

Conrad, p. 274

People are waiting in line in the cold to see the new Gloria Swanson picture.

Wilson, "Leaving New York," p. 477

Filmmakers that represent NYC as a city of ethnic and racial groups: Allen on Jews; Scorsese on Italians; and Spike Lee on African Americans.

Halle and Beveridge, p. 487

The exterior of a movie theater, its marquee saying: "Inagaki's Chushingura; Dovzhenko's Earth."

Allen and Brickman, *Manhattan*

(They move into the ticket line, still talking. A billboard next to them reads "INGMAR BERGMAN")

'FACE TO FACE,' LIV ULLMANN".)

Ibid.

I'm not in the mood to see a four-hour documentary on Nazis.

Ibid.

The movies being shot all over SoHo tonight are backing up traffic everywhere.

Ellis, *Glamorama*, p. 153

From 1977 to the present there is only one ethnically themed New York hit movie, the comedy *Coming to America* (1988). In it, an African aristocrat travels to New York City seeking an untraditional wife.

Halle and Beveridge, p. 487

I like the idea that people in New York have to wait in line for movies. You go by so many theaters where there are long, long lines. But nobody looks unhappy about it. It costs so much money just to live now, and if you're on a date, you can spend your whole date time in line, and that way it saves you money because you don't have to think of other things to do while you're waiting and you get to know your person, and you suffer a little together, and then you're entertained for two hours. So you've gotten very close, you've shared a complete experience. And the idea of waiting for something makes it more exciting anyway. Never getting in is the most exciting, but after that waiting to get in is the most exciting.

Warhol, *Philosophy*, p. 115

B Empire

If, as Walter Benjamin said, the capital of the nineteenth century was Paris, then the capital of the American Century was New York.

Shefter, p. 1

Skyscrapers and swing, action painting and modern dance, Beat poetry and Pop art, *Partisan Review* and *West Side Story*, the Living Theater and the Guggenheim Museum: if Paris was, in Walter Benjamin's famous phrase "the capital of the nineteenth century," then New York surely has become the capital of the twentieth.

Wallock, p. 9

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.

White, *Here*, p. 55

There it was, the Rome, the Paris, the London of the twentieth century, the city of ambition, the dense magnetic rock, the irresistible destination of all those who insist on being where things are happening.

Wolfe, *Bonfire*, p. 78

John Lennon: "If I had lived in Roman times, I would have lived in Rome. Where else? Today America is the Roman Empire and New York is Rome itself."

Norman, p. 682

Walter Winchell: "New York is a glorious monument to the 20th century."

Ibid., p. 9

Now I live in New York City, which I believe to be the center of the world.

Haring, p. 90

Imperial Rome was one-eighth the size of New York.

Caro, p. 838

Athens at the height of its glory was never larger than Yonkers.

Ibid.

Manhattan was the unchallenged center of the planet. Political decisions were made in Washington, but most of the other decisions that counted in the United States—those involving the disposition of money and fame and the recognition of literary and artistic achievements—were made on that rocky island, that diamond iceberg between rivers. Eight major papers made everything that happened in the

five boroughs, no matter how trivial, sound grave and consequential, while a battalion of gossip columnists made the city seem smaller than it was with their breathless chatter about the famous, and those who would like to be famous.

Bockris, *Warhol*, p. 78

Whatever the cause of the New York turnaround, it would not have been possible without Robert Moses. Had he not lived, or had he chosen to spend his productive years in isolation on a beach or a mountaintop, Gotham would have lacked the wherewithal to adjust to the demands of the modern world. Had the city not undertaken a massive program of public works between 1924 and 1970, had it not built an arterial highway system, and had it not relocated 200,000 people from old-law tenements to new public housing projects, New York would not have been able to claim in the 1990s that it was the capital of the twentieth century, the capital of capitalism, and the capital of the world.

Ballon, p. 68

Greenberg plotted modernist art's relocation from Paris to New York City as the "main premises of Western art ... migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power."

Bennett, *Deconstructing*, pp. 12–13

In 1948, Jack Kerouac writes, "What a great city New York is! We are living at just the right time—Johnson and his London, Balzac and his Paris, Socrates and his Athens—the same thing again."

Trager, p. 565

A metropolis without being a national capital or even symbol.

Bender, *Unfinished*, p. xi

Not representing the nation but rather its own culture and economy.

Ibid.

No wonder that one accustomed to the rich memories of the Old World thinks he has come upon an eighth wonder—a city without a past!

Josephy and McBride, p. 52

I had witnessed the growth and expansion of New York ... and therefore I was feeling entitled to interpret the titanic efforts, the conquests already obtained by the imperial city in order to become what now She is, the center of the world.

Sharpe, p. 199

While Europeans still shivered, exhausted in their damp monochrome deprivation in the aftermath of the ruinous war, New Yorkers assumed world leadership with a cool sophistication that they'd previously granted to Paris, Rome or London. In the excited, urgent chatter in the new air-conditioned offices, in the packed bars and increasingly worldly restaurants, in the crammed theater lobbies and Fifth Avenue stores there was a new confidence gained from global domination. New Yorkers basked in the health and wealth reflected back at them in the glass and chrome of their elegant bustling

streets. They reveled in the status as citizens of the busiest, noisiest, fastest growing, most advanced, most cosmopolitan, coolest, most desirable and most photogenic city in the world.

Cracknell, pp. 16–17

The sun is rising overhead, the sun which once shone brightly on Europe alone and threw slanting rays merely upon New York. The sun has moved across the Atlantic. The far coasts of Europe still shine with light. But they shine mildly, softly, like eastern coasts in late summer afternoon when the sun commences to slope toward the western sea. And behind us, over the American hinterland, morning rays slant where deep, impenetrable murkiness lay, and begin to unveil the face of a continent. But over New York dayspring commences to flood his fruity warmth.

Rosenfeld, p. 471

The returning troops marched up Fifth Avenue and girls were instinctively drawn East and North toward them—this was the greatest nation and there was gala in the air.

Fitzgerald, “My Lost City,” p. 108

There was a certain romantic grandeur to American pessimism that was different from anything found in Europe. Money was flowing again. The ash-in-your-eye bleakness of New York in the Depression was lifting.

Stevens and Swan, p. 297

Manhattan is the sun at the center of all the wealth in the universe. No power on earth, or in the rumored colonies of the moon and the planet Mars, is greater than the power emanating from Manhattan. If there was a Golden Age of Babylon, in which all that made it a name of infamy had not existed, Manhattan is that Babylon. There are streets of gold in Manhattan.

Abbott, “Bowery,” p. 78

New York always asserts itself. Gathering into itself all ships and all flags, New York makes a summary of and a distillation from the world, equalizing all nations and all creatures, as cubism does in showing them all to be recombinations of a few unitary and universal forms. Abstraction, like New York, is a melting pot.

Conrad, p. 117

It is the place where all the aspirations of the Western world meet to form one vast master aspiration as powerful as the suction of a steam dredge. It is the icing on the pie called Christian civilization. That it may have buildings higher than any other, and bawdry shows enough, and door-openers enough, and noise and confusion enough—that these imperial ends may be achieved, millions sweat and slave on all the forlorn farms of the earth, and in all the miserable slums, including its own. It pays more for a meal than the Slovak or a Pole pays for a wife, and the meal is better than the wife. It gets the best of everything, and especially of what, by all reputable ethical systems, is the worst. It has passed beyond all fear of Hell or hope of Heaven. The primary postulates of all the rest of the world are its familiar jokes. A city apart, it is breeding a race apart. Is that race American? Then so is a bashi-bazouk American. Is it decent? Then so is a street-walker decent. But I don't think that it may be reasonably denounced as dull.

Mencken, p. 188

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