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ARCHITECTURAL POSTMODERN WORLD AND CITIES OF GLASS REVISITED[1]

Within the Architectural Postmodern World Systems, Fredric Jameson raises the issue of the "inner" and "external" reality constituting a picture book, representing the textual "reality" of architectural design. Architecture of the cities, outer or inner places, the concepts of the "inner" and "external" become an idiosyncratic code and analogy, a neologism as a textual wrapper. Jameson asserts that the consequence of the wrapper:wrapped dialectic process is the strategy of the process denoting the paradox of the postmodern novum claiming its historical originality. According to Michel Foucault the sites and architectural space grids constitute the dialectics of mutual neutralization and the invention of the set of relations that designate a mirror reflecting architectural heterotopias as the utopian counter-sites. Such a place is New York City, the city of dreams and shattered illusions, or as Paul Auster would put it, "City of Glass", which brings about a deep-rooted feeling of utter displacement, disorientation and Lacanian loss. New York's urban mesh functions as both a prison and a map. In the light of these hypotheses, the paper seeks to present megalopolis as a metaphor of human condition. Jameson's and Baudrillard's postmodern idiosyncratic codes, sign-production, time-space compression and discursive signification process remain to be further reexamined within the field of cultural, more precisely anthropological studies.

Key Words: semiotic "reality", architectural and textual grids, megalopolis, anthropology

Fredric Jameson's New World System refers to the third stage of industrial development, that of late capitalism (Jameson 1991). In the light of the discursive mapping of contemporary criticism, as well as in the light of the global/individual, virtual/palpable phenomenon, the paper seeks

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to further Jameson's concept of a singular Hyper-System absorbing all other systems and modes of their (self)development. Although the Hyper-System of the Cultural self-production displays a tendency to consume all other systems fluctuating within the hyper one, it appears that, at the same time, the phenomenon of the cultural self-production in the third stage of late capitalism displays a tendency of splitting within itself. The inner splitting of this social and ideological Hyper-System is triggered by the three-layer cognitive mapping Jameson proposes. Jameson's New World System, totalizing and global in its nature, can regain its aesthetic revalorization through the aforementioned process of cognitive mapping. The basic mode of the mapping implies a concrete, that is to say individual representation of a situation in which an individual is able to perceive himself/herself in relation to the hyperspace delivered by contemporary hyperstructures. In the context of the existential, that is to say biologically and anthropologically conditioned subject/individual, the concept of *hyper* is not self-representable in its totality. Otherwise, the anthropological stratum of the individual is inevitably neutralized. Thereby, a certain mode of *intermediary* space between the hyper, that is to say virtually mapped (cyber)space and the anthropologically determined individual must be established. Without the intermediary space, the individual, as well as the collective aspect of human existence is subject to the process of neutralization by the spatial logic of the global. Given the contemporary theoretical tenets (Lyotard, Foucault, Baudrillard, Virilio, etc.), the architectural discourse, representing the pattern-discourse for the poststructural and postmodern ones, is now assuming a reversed position. Namely, it seeks to overtake the poststructural and postmodern discursive mappings and carve them into the human body. That way, the human body is to represent a pre-modeled narrative paradigm trying to tell its "own" story while placed within the hyperstructures of the hyperspace. With the annihilation of the anthropological impulses of the subject, we are inevitably faced with the following disproportion: the hyperspace *outside* the subject and the *inner* space of the subject's perception capacities.

> "Along with food, architecture may be thought to be a relatively late *taste* among North Americans, who know all about music and story telling, have been less interested in eloquence, and have sometimes painted small, dark, secret pictures for suspicious purposes, redolent of superstition or occult. But until very recently they have not wanted – for good reason! – to think much about what they were eating; and as for built space, there too a protective narcosis has long regained, a don't want-to-see-it, don't-want-to-know-about-it attitude that may, on the whole, have been the most sensible relationship to develop with the older American city" (Jameson 1991: 97).

However, within the plurality of the *Postmodern World Systems* there lies the intersection of the appetite for food, (other) spaces and architecture, visualized and experienced through the conceptual and pictorial monumental block of postmodern stones as semiotic apparatus. Instant commodification, "as a kind of security blanket" (Jameson 1991: 96) has replaced the biological species protection. According to Fredric Jameson, the appetite for the *monumental*, implying the concept of totality, raises the issue of the contemporary need for the human body to map out its trajectories through the space and its multiple representations. Postmodern tends to abolish the distinction between the outside and the inside, thus emphasizing the need for the "secret inner structure", as well as the appetite for the structural to be conceptualized. So, are we actually dealing with the appetite for the visual, photographic representations as the objects of the postmodern manner of consuming the concept of architecture, rather than the monumental block of stones, cities, buildings and the existing outer or inner (secret) places? It seems that what we are consuming is the consumer's appetite for the appetite, as a representation of the appetite for the *inner* appetite that is long lost.

The latter raises the issue of the "inner" and "external" reality constituting a *picture book*, be that via through its photographic or discursive representations of the two realities, yielding multiple layers of numerous reality *representations*, resulting in the (postmodern) textual "reality" of architectural design. We are facing the dispersive and disjunctive nature of late capitalism, representing metaphorical postmodern concept of space still nurturing the ideological forms of high modernism. Thus, the Postmodern World Systems designate a kind of pictorial representation of the process in question. Jameson uses the term *wrapping*, suggesting a reaction to the disintegration gradually passing into the form called "context" in which the hierarchy of subordination is reversed. "What is wrapped can also be used as the wrapper; the wrapper can also be wrapped in its turn" (Jameson 1991: 101–102). The latter imposes the dialectic ambivalence, as well as the antinomy of the *architectural picture book*, with architecture and spaces now being translated into (postmodern) texts and fictional design. A sentence, a moment torn out of its textual and conceptual context, becomes an autonomous body with its fictional architectural bodily trajectories. Architecture of the cities, outer or inner places, the concepts of the "inner" and "external" become an idiosyncratic *code* and analogy, a neologism as a textual *wrapper*. The block of stones is dissolved into the postmodern discursive dissemination of fictional, literary or theoretical, architectural *virtual* experience. In regard to his theoretical tenets, Fredric Jameson asserts that the con-

sequence of the *wrapper:wrapped* dialectic process is the strategy of the dialectic process offering the paradox of the postmodern novum claiming its historical originality. Furthermore, as we gradually move through the aforementioned process, taking small steps from the minimal units of space (ex. corridors, flight of stairs, private rooms, living rooms), including the category of the so-called "shapeless places" (ex. vast lobbies) in efforts to assimilate them with macro units of the complex superstructures of the new spatial wrapper (ex. public parks, avenues skyscrapers), we are actually immersed into the process of architectural renarrativization as a mode of the postmodern dialectic of the fragmentized units and the old referential systems of the monumental. The process as such inevitably imposes the concept of the loss of spatial orientation – the postmodern hyperspace and Jameson's nonarchitectural phenomenon in postmodern art and theory. The nonarchitectural phenomenon, as well as the architectural renarrativization, photographic visualization and conceptualization sets forth the acute difference between the process of intellectualization and real perception (palpable reality), between space and spatial code language as the two realms/dimensions of reality. As Jameson claims, if we are faced with the process of intellectualization versus palpable reality, the following issues are thus to be discusses – is postmodern architecture the writing that reads us? Is architectural fictionalization *dis*placing the architectural, that is to say, *palpable real*? Are *we* displacing time, space, therefore the architectural sites? It seems that the "wrapper:wrapped" dialectics actually designates the "dweller:dwelling" dialectics of *dwelling* between the discursive spaces and palpable architectural sites.

Michel Foucault sees the present epoch as the epoch of space, the epoch of here-and-there, far-and-near, of the dispersed (Foucault 1984). The perception of the site, as well as the site itself is described in terms of intersections, series, grids, cluster of relations. Architectural space is the space that "claws and gnaws at us" (Foucault 1984, 3), thus constituting a heterogeneous and dispersed space of cultural, ideological and discursive grids. The sites and architectural spaces-grids constitute the dialectics of mutual neutralization and the invention of the set of relations that designate a mirror that reflects architectural heterotopias as the utopian counter-sites. Foucault's heterotopias represent the spatial turn in regard to Jameson's nonexistent realm of reality. Heterotopias are the real social and cultural places that are simultaneously represented, contested, and mirror-like inverted, which define our existence, as well as our perception. However, if our architectural experience/perception is inevitably linguistically transferred, representing cultural, ideological

and discursive grids, how *real* can heterotopias actually be? The question thus raised gains on its complexity if the architectural narrativization and the *real* architectural sites are set within Foucault's theory of mirror. The mirror is the nonexistent utopia, as a "placeless place" in which I perceive myself in an unreal, inverted virtual space. Yet, at the same time the mirror is a heterotopia since it does exist in reality, contrary to our inverted perception through which, nevertheless, one regains his/her "self", reconstitutes the "self" from the standpoint he/she occupies. If we apply Foucault's mirror-theory to Jameson's loss of spatial orientation, we are inevitably entangled into the dialectics of architectural space and architectural narrativization. We are both, architecturally and narratively *wrapped*. Through the dispersion, grids and the concept of "reality" we are entering the third realm of "reality" representation – that of *phantasmagoria*. The root of the word phantasmagoria is *Agora*, originally designating an assembly place, or an open space in Ancient Greece. Agora had a twin function. Initially it served as a place for male meetings in order to discuss strategic military matters. Subsequently, it also became a market place, place of commerce. Over the course of time, within the Postmodern Architectural World Systems, the twin function of the Agora, that of military, political and debating space on one hand, and commercial place on the other, irrevocably lost its essence – the one referring to the *purpose* of the place. One might assert that we have maintained all the architectural *formal* features of the Agora. However, the process of multiplication is delivering a series of contemporary phantasmagorias., be that in space, time or discursive grids. The multiplication process is further *wrapping* the reality realms and their representations.

Within the series of phantasmagoria-grids, body in space becomes Baudrillard's "cunning trickster, for some cunning screenwriter (…) has drawn the world into the phantasmagoria whose enchanted victims we have all become" (Baudrillard 1994: 87). According to Baudrillard we share the space of absolute publicity, placed in the glass-transparent Agora, thus diminishing and, eventually, neutralizing any distinction between the subject and the object. The individual, as well as the global share the same degree of transparency – an absolute one. Yet, the subject's anthropological impulses still yearn for its contemporary phantasmagoric twin. Contemporary, glass-transparent Agora yields no more than a *coded* twin whose body represents a body-pattern. Jameson's realm of hyper, thus the total reproducing itself by itself, is Baudrillard's absolute *model* of reality. The perception and the inner experience of the subject are as much reduced as they are expanded into the spatial *surreal*. In primitive societies, according to Baudrillard, the concept of

reality is abolished by the very fact that a primitive man abolished any possibility of the *real* and *imaginary* dualism (Baudrillard 1993). In the symbolical order of the primitive society, the "inside" and the "outside" did not represent two distinct entities. Thus, despite the space that the subject occupies, and the space that occupies the subject, the anthropological *perpetuum mobile* – DESIRE, cannot ever be buried. Hence, the subject's yearning for reaching out its hand toward the phantasmagoric twin. Baudrillard's contemporary phantasmagoria constitutes itself as a Virtual Agora, providing no palpable reality, only yielding grids of Jameson's discursive *wrappings*, wrapped around the virtual *dwellers*.

According to Michelle Foucault, Bentham's Panopticon represents the prototype of a contemporary Agora. Within the panoptical structure, the Tower occupies the central position. It overlooks the cells placed in a ring-like shape. From the Tower, each of the cells is absolutely visible (public). Yet, when each of the cell-dwellers is placed on the brims of the ring-like, hive-structure, they *see* all other cell-dwellers and *are seen* by them in turn (Foucault 1995). The individual simultaneously attains the absolute sense of *individualization* and *visibility*. The panoptical architectural site, as one of Foucault's heterotopian sites, represents Baudrillard's contemporary phantasmagoria and Jameson's hyperspatial architectural picture book. Foucault points out that ancient cultures had their arenas, stages, temples, etc. Ancient Greece is representative of the principle of the *public* and *bodily*, that is to say palpable. Contemporary space imposes its own, panoptical rules. The individual is bred/fabricated with meticulous attention so to become a perfect victim, as well as the trigger for creating and multiplying contemporary Agoras (Foucault 1995).

Given just the brief account of the panoptical discursive apparatus of contemporary theoretical elaborations, it appears that Jameson's "intermediary space" remains to be a utopian one, a placeless place. Jameson's spatial wrapper equally constitutes itself as a discursive wrapper of idiosyncratic codes – a discursive *code language*. Foucault's architectural heterotopias represent just but one among the numerous contemporary heterotopian sites. The one we are inevitably faced with is the discursive panoptical hive, while the anthropological impulses of a contemporary individual remain to be deprived of the privilege to regain even the illusion of attaining the state of Baudrillard's primitive societies unaware of the *real* and the *imaginary* dualism. If the palpable and the *inner* are inevitably represented through the discursive grids, the issue of how *real* heterotopias can actually be still remains to be just one among the many of the "reality" *representations*. However, the contemporary Tower of Ba-

bel seems to constitute itself as a contemporary, phantasmagoric Agora-counterpart *par excellence.*

Phantasmagoria, previously defined in the paper as the third realm of "reality" representation, was postulated by Walter Benjamin in the essay "Paris – Capital of the Nineteenth Century" as one of the main characteristics of rapidly developing nineteenth century metropolitan areas. He uses this term to denote the state, or rather the process that is characterized by the penetration of the new into the old, or to put it differently, the clash of two disparate systems of representation resulting in the formation of utopian interface. Such Benjamin's concept finds further corroboration in the word's denotative and connotative paradigm. Namely, *phantasmagoria* is, at the same time, an exhibition or display of optical effects and illusions, constantly shifting complex succession of things seen or imagined or bizarre or fantastic combination, collection, or assemblage. Consequently, megalopolis is both perceivable by and elusive to the senses; it is both shifting and encompassing; it is a distorting mirror and a melting pot. What further enhances a city's phantasmagoric quality, apart from its ever expanding and polymorphous urban layout, are the human subjects, who occupy the city's streets and squares. Nevertheless, they are not perceived as heterogeneous group of individuals, but are rather present as a uniform mass – *the crowd*, to use Poe's, Engels' or Benjamin's term. According to Benjamin, the crowd is that "veil through which the well known city appears to the *flâneur* as phantasmagoria" (Benjamin 1999: 84). For the urban wanderer, the known, hence, becomes dimmed and disfigured, no certainties apply any longer, a place becomes a no-place, space loses its *placefulness,* and a city becomes a commodity exchange oriented phantasmagoria complex – an embodiment of hyperreality. What this social and urban (re)production of spaces generates is a postmodern megalopolis which is in fact a complex and incessant interplay of both palpability and transcendence, on one hand, and translucence and (self-)reflection on the other. "Ludic and hallucinogenic, is this postmodern architecture" (Baudrillard 1989: 59), Baudrillard would say. Post-imperialist, technocratic capitalism engendered an urban zone marked by the disappearance of interior/exterior interface:

> "Everything pretentiously termed 'communication' and 'interaction' (…) ends up with each monad retreating into the shade of its own formula, into its self-regulating little corner and its artificial immunity." (Baudrillard 1989: 59)

Paradoxically, such hyper-systems, heavily reliant on commodity, money and information exchange, experience the implosion of move-

ment. Perpetual flux turns into an acute standstill, and accordingly, city-dwellers become suspended in motion – physically moving, yet essentially motionless. However, the illusion of movement is not the only phantasm that human subjects harbor – they also perceive themselves as the creators of the space, be it actual or fictional, as the grand narrative weavers in control of their motion, perspective and identity when, in fact, they themselves become narrative structures just like as cities they inhabit – insubstantial and phantasmagoric.

> "All around, the tinted glass facades of the buildings are like faces: frosted surfaces. It is as though there were no one inside the buildings, as if there were no one behind the faces. And there *really* is no one. This is what the ideal city is like." (Baudrillard 1989: 61)

In the light of the mentioned hypotheses, the fictional representation of a megalopolis can be understood as a metaphor of human condition. City, a narrative structure in its own right, undergoes further fictionalization through symbolic representation. Such a place is New York City, be it factional or fictional, or as Paul Auster, a contemporary American author, would put it "City of Glass". However, in his novels, most prominently in *The New York Trilogy* and *Moon Palace,* this urban hyper-system is not depicted as a blank piece of paper. It has the ability to create its own narratives and to (re)model its "protagonists" since, unlike the void of the paper, it has its own structure, an *always already* imprinted discursive under-layer, a palimpsest, one might even say. Indeed, humans could hold on to an illusion that they are the ones doing the writing, that they are the grand artists, the omnipotent creators of the space. Thus, one of Auster's protagonists, Peter Stillman Senior, the master of peripatetics, attempts to symbolically reestablish a dreamed-of utopia, *The New Babel*, by the simultaneous use of two distinct media: letters and steps. On his seemingly haphazard walks throughout New York City, he attempts to create *The Tower of Babel*, both the phrase and the actual utopia, letter by letter, using the city's plan as parchment sheet and his own steps as writing utensils, but the product of such an endeavor is, evidently, just another *architectural picture book.* For another Auster's flâneur, Daniel Quinn, New York is:

> "an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a

measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within. The world was outside of him, around him, before him, and the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long. Motion was of the essence, the act of putting one foot in front of the other and allowing himself to follow the drift of his own body. By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal, and it no longer mattered where he was. On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. And this, finally, was all he ever asked of things: to be nowhere. New York was the nowhere he had built around himself, and he realized that he had no intention of ever leaving it again." (Auster 1990:4)

Once again, the reader, the writer and the protagonist are faced with deep-rooted feelings of utter displacement, disorientation and Lacanian loss which are essential characteristics of human condition within the context of technocratic, post-imperial metropolis.

However, the ambiguity is ever present in Auster's depiction of this postmodern (no)place, and it can best be observed in the comparative analysis of syntactic units he uses to describe *his* "translucent" city. Namely, from a single paragraph in the novel *Moon Palace*, the reader learns that people are subjected to "grinding **demands**" of New York streets where "everything is bodies and commotion, and like it or not, you cannot enter them without adhering to a **rigid** protocol of behavior." (Auster 1992: 56) The paragraph also contains a semantically polyvalent phrase depicting the landscape of the metropolis as "the massive **grid-work** of buildings and towers" (Auster 1992: 56). Closer inspection of the connotative paradigm of the highlighted words reveals an indisputable sinister undertone of the passage.

Gridwork[2]

1. A framework of crisscrossed or parallel bars; a grating or mesh;
2. A network of uniformly spaced horizontal and vertical lines (as for locating points on a map)

Rigid

1 Deficient in or devoid of flexibility, fixed – motion-LESS
3 Strict, inflexibly set in opinion, appearing stiff and unyielding, implying uncompromising inflexibility

To grind

1 to reduce to powder or small fragments by friction: annihilate
3 to wear down, polish, or sharpen by friction: create

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2 Source: Merriam Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary, CD ROM Edition.

So, at the same time, New York's urban mesh functions as both a prison and a map; it is as destructive as it is creative; it restrains and liberates. The city thus becomes an entity displaying contradictory features – it, on one hand, acts as the catalyst of the search for the individual identity and, on the other, as the factor that restricts the development and change of Auster's protagonists.

Moreover, inherently irresolvable inner space:outer space dialectics finds it further literary representation in the never ending search of Auster's characters for "the imaginary Edens" cradling within the megalopolis. Oftentimes, they are epitomized in the "accidentally" homophonic room-tomb-womb triad – dark and coffin-like abodes of Auster's characters that incite spiritual death of selfhood and its consequent rebirth.

But sometimes, these nooks of innerness are actual "open" spaces, most often Central Park, that offer "a refuge of inwardness" and "the possibility of solitude, of separating oneself from the rest of the world" (Auster 1992: 56). These are the places of healing and growth, of escape and self-redefining. However, it is an indisputable fact that such gardens are artificial Edens, "nature enhanced", "a man-made natural world" (Auster 1992: 62). What is more, they, too, have their perimeters. So the question remains whether these inner-city sanctums of the Self can confer genuine and absolute de-*wrap(p)*-ing when they themselves are phantasmagoric products of premeditated architectural planning and narrativization.

It only appears obvious that Auster's New York is a translucent metropolis, a place completely composed of glass, a pure abstraction in which the horizon first becomes elusive and then reaches a vanishing point somewhere beyond the gothic towers of skyscrapers. It is the scene of absolute urban and individual absence, an image of mental void satiating Auster's characters. In it, the physical space becomes warped, and concrete, steel, buildings, streets and people merge within the vortex of constant motion. New York thus becomes a "placeless place" characterized by transience and evanescence. Auster's City of Glass is an "urban nothingness", a *sui generis* chronotope that has stolen the history, identity and ability to achieve contact with the Other to those who roam it. The aforesaid implies that the described postmodern, spatial and *meta*spatial, nothingness can also function as the metaphor of contemporary human condition.

According to Fredric Jameson, it is important to distinguish postmodern*ism* as a genre of idiosyncratically coded expression from postmoderni*ty* as a socioeconomic and cultural trend. Postmodernity in the

latter sense is linked to the time-space compression of the late capitalism that informs large-scale changes in Western societies and cultures. The aforementioned includes the following: the enormous growth of service industries, the shift from an industrial economy to an economy based on electronic and mass media, the increase of information flow and the speed of communication and movement across social and geographic boundaries, the shift from the production of commodities to the production of signs, time-space compression and acute experiential dislocation.

Thus the empirical strengths of anthropology are yet to be fully engaged. Postmodern tendencies having opened up new, *virtual* spaces, therefore initiating the reflexive turn in cultural anthropology, now seem to be preoccupied with surfaces, veneers and adjudicating innovations in textual forms. In this sense, ethnography is particularly important since the global influence of Western postmodernity is certainly as variable and uneven as it is diffuse (Geertz 1988). One contemporary reflection of this diffusion is the proliferation of public cultures and national mass medias. The influence of postmodernism as a disjointed, reflexive genre of writing can be a guide for further engagement of ethnography. While the postmodern dissolves itself in semiotic apotheosis, the social and political dimensions of late capitalism continue. This pattern underscores and diminishes the need for human substance.

Within the given perspectives, being a postmodern "human" seems to impose an ambivalent state of anthropological existence. In postmodernity, the once meaningful being, now irreversibly consumed by sign images and simulations, experiences Lacanian schizophrenia thus defining our existence as devoid of purpose: a shadow of no substance, a reflection with no authenticity.

Among the French critical theorists, Baudrillard presaged much of the anthropological decentering of signification. According to him, signification increasingly creates need for consumption while consumption is itself a semiotic product. The integrity of entities in the external world is not a given but rather a product of the concepts used to identify and designate them. Given Baudrillard's essential anthropological line of thought, one might conclude that Baudrillard deconstructs the signification process through which palpable values and commodities are conceptually constituted, yielding semiotic alienation of the material object in favor of its image.

In conclusion, the cynical dismissal of humanism, as Peter Sloterdijk would put it, the reemergence of essentialism through Jameson's pastiche and acute fragmentation, the pushing of post-critical irony, that is to say

Jameson's blank parody, to the point of anti-criticism, and the textualism of fluctuating signification, represent only some of the problems that postmodernism leaves for cultural anthropology and cultural studies.

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АРХИТЕКТОНСКИ ПОСТМОДЕРНИ СВЕТ И ПОВРАТАК ГРАДОВИМА ОД СТАКЛА

Резиме

Рад се бави анализом литерарне репрезентације Њујорка коју је Пол Остер понудио у свом роману *Њујоршка трилогија* са становишта теоријских поставки Фредрика Џејмсона, Мишела Фукоа, Жана Бодријара и Валтера Бењамина. Посматрајући савремени мегалополис, било реални било фикционални, кроз призму дијалектичких односа, у контексту концептуализације, те и текстуализације архитектонског простора, постмодерних идиосинкратичких кодова, процеса производње знакова, компресије времена-простора, дискурзивног означавања, фантазмагорије и хетеротопије, рад настоји да представи Њујорк, али и било коју другу савремену метрополу, као метафору егзистенцијалног стања хуманог субјекта оптерећеног осећајем исконског неприпадања, дезоријентације и лакановског губитка/недостатка. Рад, такође, настоји да утврди у којој мери, и теорија и фикција субјекту нуде могућност избављења из овако конституисане архитектонско-фикционалне мреже.