

“What Buildings Dream”

(The Chrysler Building Reflected in the Façade of the Hyatt Hotel)

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If we think of them at all as we rush from here to there in our daily peregrinations and commutations, we might think of big cities merely as locations or addresses that mark and hold our various destinations and goals. In this sense cities are multi-form objects that register and embrace the empty places, spaces and pathways that help direct us here and there toward our varied objectives; but simultaneously they are blocks of impenetrable matter, solid stone, arching steel, bricks, mortar, and opaque glass through which we cannot penetrate. While solid, the buildings, themselves have holes, passageways, transparencies, vertical shaftways, hallways and subterranean tunnels that funnel us to our journey's end. In our busy days we hardly ever think of the city as an artifice or artifact of our personal and corporate needs, never think of it as composed of solids and voids. Our mission then is to negotiate our way through them quickly and efficiently. We do not allow ourselves to dally and wonder. The incessant repetition of our assigned travel, tunnels through our memory, leaving voids where we have passed, and confronting us with voids for where we are to go next. More often than not, the memory of our daily journey through the city's labyrinthine network evaporates from our consciousness just about as quickly as we are about to encounter the next step of our passage.

But if we were to stop, forgetting for just a moment the give and take of volume and void and pause to look around and

contemplate our surroundings, we might allow ourselves to discover another city, one that glimmers around us and feeds our imagination. This is not the stable city of bricks and blocks, of roads and routes, of trains and trams, but an illusion, a phantom full of light and sparkle, evanescent, protean and transitory, changing with every minute of the sun's passage



through the heavens, with the passing of every cloud, with every flicker of city lights, and with every step and glance we take.

In one sense we are confronted with a distorted replica of our tangible universe; but in another we are encountering bright presences that transform themselves into the myriad reflections that eternally surrounds us. This is not the city of obligation, compulsion, duty or responsibilities, but an exciting kaleidoscopic patchwork magically crafted from everything mundane that populates our metropolitan excursions.

The photograph I present to this exhibition is a snapshot of this fleeting fantasy.

Standing just in front of the Lexington Avenue entrance of the Chrysler Building, facing west at just the right moment – at about 5:17pm one early April day – gazing at the reflective screen that is the west façade of the immense Hyatt hotel, we found the sun glimmering on the building behind us, illuminating it and its neighbors while absorbing the haphazard

shadows cast upon it from invisible structures to the west. An image of the Chrysler Building shoots vertically, erotically, into the air with an exaggerated perspectival diminution, its surface scored with traces of the vertical and horizontal mullions of the Hyatt's flat surface, punctured only by an occasional open window and distorted by the inability of the Hyatt glass to hold onto its planar dimension. The more one contemplates this image, the

more impossible it is to dismiss it as a transient presence. The photograph holds it fixed, steady, yet melting.

Disappeared now is the Chrysler Building of stone and cement, of elegant deco shapes and anatomic gargoyles and of automotive decoration. Its familiar spire lays hidden in the heavens. But what remains is a speculation that for a brief moment the Chrysler Building's soul has revealed itself in a doppelganger – a ghostly double. It seems to be dreaming, mumbling something to itself, the meaning of which we might only be able to see in our mind's eye. What is it, we wonder, that buildings dream?