

Ghosts beneath the Grid: A Weird-fictional Account of Machine-age Manhattan

More than a century after the surface of Manhattan Island is rationalized as a Cartesian plane, H.P. Lovecraft explores the weird-fictional potential of space below the Grid. He descends into the basement of ‘the new black and gold Dunsanian skyscraper design’d by the Pawtucket architect’ (Raymond Hood’s American Radiator Building); loses himself in the ‘mazes’ of Grand Central Station’s ‘vast terminal’; traces the superficial shadow of an underground ghost river, Minetta Creek, in Greenwich Village; and hurtles ‘through interstellar blackness in cryptic subways, never knowing on just what planet or within just what universe [he] would emerge to overwhelming light.’ This article presents H.P. Lovecraft’s literary interpretation of the subterranean architecture of early twentieth-century Manhattan. It identifies critical subterranean-spatial reflections from his time of residence in New York City (between 1924-26), presents contemporaneous representations of these spaces with historic photographs and maps, and evaluates how these spaces mediate feelings of mystery and terror by analyzing their re-appearance in Lovecraft’s short stories.

Keywords: *Urban History, Literary Theory, Manhattan, Weird Fiction, H.P. Lovecraft*

Introduction

In his seminal work, *Space, Time and Architecture* (1954), Swiss historian Sigfried Giedion claims the prevalence of two ‘distinct trends’ throughout history: “one toward the rational and geometrical, the other toward the irrational and the organic: two different ways of dealing with or of mastering the environment... evident in all cultures, both early and late. [...] There have been cities planned according to regular schemes and cities which have grown up organically like trees.” He elaborates on the distinction between these two perceptions (‘organic and geometrical’) by describing the ‘mathematically proportioned temples’ of the Ancient Greeks ‘on the top of rocky acropolises, outlined against their southern skies’ and ‘the villages of the Greek islands, whitewashed on the crests of hills’ and ‘easily distinguishable far out at sea because of their clearly marked and periodically rewhitened walls’.¹ Citizen-seafarers of the lesser-known colonial American town of Marblehead, Massachusetts, who located their outhouses along the rocky north-Atlantic shoreline, evidenced an awareness of this distinction by seeking out their rectilinear silhouettes while bringing their ships into port – so much so, that a popular local expression, still in use today when referring to anything ‘overtly obvious’ is ‘standing out like an outhouse in the fog’.²

In the space between these perspectives is an arena of dialectical conflict in which the outstanding champions for rationality and irrationality in the popular

¹What Giedion refers to as the duality of ‘urban intent’. See Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982, p.412.

²See Hunt, Bette. Private email Archive. Athens, Greece: Gipe-Lazarou. Compiled in 2019.

1 imagination are, respectively, the Grid and the Labyrinth. Reuben Rose-Redwood
 2 and Liora Bigon, in their urban anthology *Gridded Worlds* (2018), qualify the Grid
 3 as a ‘world-making device that literally brings new worlds into being through the
 4 partitioning of space-times’: “If much of the literature has subscribed to what we
 5 might call a hermeneutics of the grid – which poses the question, *what does the*
 6 *grid mean?* – viewing the grid as a political technology of world-making calls our
 7 attention to the pragmatics of the grid, thereby shifting the focus from the meaning
 8 of the grid-as-representation to the spatial practice of *gridding* and the worlds it
 9 both produces and destroys.”³ The converse may be said of the Labyrinth, whose
 10 modern manifestations I continue to hermeneutically explore (here referring to my
 11 writings about Marblehead’s urban history and the open-source spatial mythology
 12 known as “the Backrooms”⁴) – it is a world-defying device (an escape from
 13 reality) which prevents or restricts the genesis of alternative space-times. It is all-
 14 encompassing like the Grid, but about a singular (rather than plurality of)
 15 conceptual perspective(s).

16 This article documents a single exchange in the perennial dialectic between
 17 the Grid and the Labyrinth, between the ‘totalitarian rationality’ of early 20th-
 18 Century Manhattan and H.P. Lovecraft, ambassador of colonial America’s
 19 irrational spatial legacy.

20

21

22 **The Grid**

23

24 Over the course of the 19th Century, the greater part of Manhattan Island is
 25 brought to grade; concavities like the sunken lots at 117th Street and 5th Avenue are
 26 infilled and rocky outcroppings like the site of the Brennan farmhouse at 84th
 27 Street and Broadway are demolished. The system engages two distinct parameters
 28 (north of Greenwich Avenue and Houston Street, beyond the irregularity of earlier
 29 colonial plans); the first determines street width – the avenues are 100 feet wide,
 30 the standard cross street is 60 feet, and major cross streets are 100 feet. The second
 31 determines block dimensions – all blocks are 200 feet north to south, but vary in
 32 width, from east to west. Along the west side, the blocks are 800 feet wide, and,
 33 along the east side, the blocks range from 620 to 640 to 940 feet wide.⁵

34 The culture to which Manhattan’s cartographic rationalization belongs is the
 35 culture of expansion and self-definition characterizing a newly-liberated,
 36 adolescent nation-state. The Confederation Congress (governing body of the
 37 United States from 1781-89) establishes a gridiron system with the Land
 38 Ordinance of 1785 to map unsettled land west of the Appalachians, north of the

³See Rose-Redwood, Reuben and Bigon, Liora. “Gridded Spaces, Gridded Worlds.” *Gridded Worlds: an Urban Anthology*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018. p.3.

⁴See, respectively, Gipe-Lazarou, Andrew. “The Marblehead Labyrinth: American Archetype of Irrational Urbanism”. *Weird-Fictional Narratives in Art, Architecture, and the Urban Domain*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing (forthcoming); and Gipe-Lazarou, Andrew. “Liminal Temporality and the Architecture of ‘the Backrooms’”. *Frascari Symposium VI*, 2023.

⁵See “The 1811 Plan.” *The Greatest Grid: The Master Plan of Manhattan 1811 – Now*. *Museum of the City of New York*. <https://thegreatestgrid.mcny.org/greatest-grid/making-the-plan/12#map> (Accessed 18 April 2020).

1 Ohio River and east of the Mississippi. And educated on the spirit of this plan, as
 2 evidenced by a half-century of Cartesian mapping, is Simeon De Witt, New York
 3 State Surveyor General from 1784-1834, and principal author of the Manhattan
 4 Grid, submitted and adopted (as the ‘Commissioner’s Grid’) in 1811.

5 “[The Grid] implies an intellectual program for the island: in its indifference
 6 to topography, to what exists, it claims superiority of mental construction over
 7 reality. The plotting of its streets and blocks announces that the subjugation, if not
 8 obliteration, of nature is its true ambition.”⁶

9 At the turn of the 20th Century, the hyper-dense metropolitan condition (what
 10 Rem Koolhaas refers to as the ‘Culture of Congestion’) defines the Grid as a three-
 11 dimensional ‘archipelago of colossal souvenirs’, of ‘Cities within Cities,’ where
 12 each ‘island’ block – in the absence of real history – develops its own
 13 ‘instantaneous folklore,’ creating a city ‘where permanent monoliths celebrate
 14 metropolitan instability’.⁷

15 The Grid is ‘a new system of formal values’ intended to ‘forever immunize
 16 [Manhattan] against any (further) totalitarian intervention.’ It is a static face,
 17 looking eternally upwards, envisioning a ‘*frontier in the sky*,’⁸ – like King’s
 18 Dream (1909)⁹ or *The Fifth Element* (1997).¹⁰ The cost of this neurotic delirium,
 19 this obsessive fixation, however, is neglect and denial of space beneath the plane.
 20 The Viele Map, produced by civil engineer Egbert Ludovicus Viele in 1865 to
 21 reveal the dynamics with which rationality (of systematic sanitation and storm
 22 water management) had to continuously contend, overlays the Commissioner’s
 23 Grid onto the island’s pre-colonial topography. It is a document of the urban
 24 subconscious,¹¹ that repository of forsaken history which haunts the city from
 25 below.

⁶See Koolhaas, Rem. *Delirious New York*. New York: The Montacelli Press, Inc., 1978. p.20.

⁷Ibid Koolhaas, p. 245, 296.

⁸“Manhattan has no choice but the skyward extrusion of the Grid itself; only the Skyscraper offers
 business the wide-open spaces of a man-made Wild West, a *frontier in the sky*.” See Koolhaas, p.87.

⁹Referring to Harry Pettit’s futuristic rendering *The Cosmopolis of the Future*, created for Moses
 King’s 1908-1909 guidebook to New York City. The guidebook’s publication coincided with the
 completion of the Singer Building (the tallest building in the world from 1908 to 1909, and the first
 time in history that a building in New York City held this record), which kicked off Manhattan’s
 first skyscraper boom. See King, Moses. *King’s Views of New York 1908-1909*. New York: Moses
 King, 1908.

¹⁰Referring to Jean-Claude Mézières’ conceptual design of future Manhattan (in the year 2263) for
 the movie *The Fifth Element* starring Bruce Willis, Gary Oldman, and Milla Jovovich. See *The Fifth
 Element*. Written and directed by Luc Besson. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 1997.

¹¹We are here referring to Pierre Janet’s term for the unconscious, from his work *Automatisme
 psychologique* (1889), with the intent of capturing the duality of meanings which drove Sigmund
 Freud, as explained in *The Question of Lay Analysis* (1947), to abandon its use: “If someone talks of
 subconsciousness, I cannot tell whether he means the term topographically – to indicate something
 lying in the mind beneath consciousness – or qualitatively – to indicate another consciousness, a
 subterranean one, as it were.” (p.98).

1 **The Labyrinth**

2
3 Renowned American writer, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, was born in
4 Providence, Rhode Island, in 1890. And with the exception of two years (from
5 1924 to 1926), he resides in his city of birth until his death in 1934. He never
6 leaves the North American continent, but travels often, up and down the east coast,
7 primarily throughout New England (which includes Maine, Vermont, New
8 Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut). He writes relentlessly,
9 completing over 60 short stories and 100,000 personal letters in his lifetime, some
10 of which total more than 70 pages.

11 Despite never receiving any formal architectural training, Lovecraft cultivates
12 an extensive knowledge of architectural history, formulates and refines a number
13 of unique aesthetic and architectural treatises, and practices several basic
14 architectural skills, including the analysis of historic urban contexts, the graphic
15 communication of ideas, and the creative adaptation of precedent to produce
16 weird-fictional designs. His letters include detailed speculation about the influence
17 of the Dutch on colonial American architecture, historical analysis of the gambrel
18 roof, informed reports about historic preservation initiatives, and rigorous
19 rhetorical explorations of his aesthetic disposition.¹² He regularly accompanies his
20 correspondences with freehand sketches, including self-portraits, landscape
21 depictions and architectural renderings, and weird-fictional scenes. And he
22 produces several historical urban case studies (most notably of Charleston, S.C.
23 and Quebec, Canada) which are accompanied by extensive hand-drawn urban and
24 architectural details.¹³

25 I have already written about Lovecraft’s lifelong commitment to the qualities
26 of labyrinthine space. To summarize with a few decisive points: a self-proclaimed
27 ‘cosmic indifferentist’ and ‘hater of actuality’, he describes one of his ‘basic life-
28 values’ as the illusion of ‘being poised on the edge of the infinite amidst a *vast*
29 *cosmic unfolding* which *might* reveal *almost anything*’ – an illusion which he
30 accesses throughout his life in the confined and convoluted historicity of colonial
31 New England towns; he is an outspoken critic of industrial ‘progress’, Modernism,
32 and, more specifically, Corbusier’s rationalization of the home as ‘simply a ‘living
33 machine’’, arguing that the maximization of physiological and economic
34 efficiency has ‘nothing to do with satisfying emotional yearnings or pleasing the
35 sense of harmony, continuity, and memory-fulfillment inherent in men’;¹⁴ and
36 perhaps the most definitive summary of his position is an unofficial planning
37 manifesto written to proclaim how urban space should come to be: “Happy indeed
38 is that town which grew slowly enough to leave traces of the gradual evolution
39 from year to year, and gently enough to preserve the original topographical lines of
40 hill and shore – the lines that are graceful because born of Nature, and that find

¹²See *SL I*, p.342; *SL II*, p.70-71; *SL III*, p.357-358; *SL IV*, p.177-178, and *SL V*, p.310-311; and Lovecraft, H.P. *Collected Essays of H.P. Lovecraft, Vol. 5: Philosophy; Autobiography and Miscellany*. Edited by S.T. Joshi. N.Y.: Hippocampus Press, 2006. p.119-140.

¹³See Lovecraft, H.P. *Collected Essays of H.P. Lovecraft, Volume 4: Travel*. Edited by S.T. Joshi. N.Y.: Hippocampus Press, 2006.

¹⁴See *SL IV*, p.21.

1 embodiment in curved streets, quaint slopes or flights of steps, simple and
 2 dignify'd bridges, sea-walls, and embankments, quiet nooks and terraces, and all
 3 other vestiges which show man's conformity to Nature rather than man's artificial
 4 conquest of Nature by prosaic, repudiatory feats of engineering. Once a city is
 5 linked with Nature and the past, you have the basis for unending beauty – not only
 6 the intrinsic beauty I have cited, but also the loftier beauty of *imaginative wonder*.
 7 When streets are new, all alike, and merely affairs of breadth and straight lines and
 8 right angles, there is nothing mysterious about them – nothing to allure the fancy
 9 and suggest a thousand odd thrills and grotesqueries arising from or obscurely
 10 related to the history of the race or of the locality itself. Straight lines and right
 11 angles are simply straight lines and right angles the world over, but the delicate
 12 and particular curves of a town slowly reared on a certain spot have a priceless
 13 wealth of suggestion pertaining to place and people; a suggestion which makes
 14 every narrow, devious hillside lane, rich with its mellow lining of antique,
 15 characteristic doorways and windows and chimneys and gables, a veritable
 16 gateway of memory and mystery inscrutable and ineluctable.”¹⁵

17 Lovecraft is an embodiment of the irrational and organic creative process, of
 18 the labyrinthine spirit, whose well-documented interactions with the spatial
 19 conventions of machine-age Manhattan provide the basis for the critical
 20 comparison developed herein.

21
 22

23 **Subway**

24

25 Lovecraft's first experience of the Grid takes place on April 6th, 1922.
 26 Descending southward from Providence, his train crosses the Harlem River
 27 viaduct shortly before 3pm and affords him his first view of New York's
 28 'Cyclopean outlines': "It was a myrical sight in the gold sun of late afternoon; a
 29 dream-thing of faint grey, outlined against a sky of faint grey smoke. City and sky
 30 were so alike that one could hardly be sure that there was a city – that the fancied
 31 towers and pinnacles were not the merest illusions.”¹⁶

32 Despite his overwhelming fascination with what he will term the 'New-York
 33 of the air', Lovecraft takes his first steps on the island *beneath the Grid*, losing
 34 himself in the 'mazes' of Grand Central Station's 'vast terminal' while descending
 35 into the subway. He boards the southbound 4 Train, transfers to the Q at Union
 36 Square Station, and proceeds to Brooklyn's Flatbush neighborhood to meet his
 37 friend and host, Samuel Loveman. Two years later, in 1924, Lovecraft will move
 38 to the same neighborhood (which he endures for little more than two years before
 39 moving back to Providence), and will use the same subway lines to make his way
 40 into and out of Manhattan. Careful to craft his experience of the city around
 41 consistent spatial sequences, he uses the subway as a metanarrative device – to
 42 initiate, conclude, or intermediate different urban plots. He describes this
 43 subterranean experience as being 'hurtled through interstellar blackness in cryptic'

¹⁵See *SL I*, p.287-289.

¹⁶See *SL I*, p.175-176.

1 space, ‘never knowing on just what planet or just what universe’ one might
2 ‘emerge to overwhelming light.’¹⁷

3 In one instance, Lovecraft dreams of time-traveling with Benjamin Franklin,
4 from Philadelphia in 1785 to New York City in 1935 (his present day), to show
5 him the ‘tragick and suicidal success’ of the Grid – the ‘monstrous nightmare and
6 decadence call’d 1935’. And the narrative device which he oneirically employs to
7 transition between these two time periods is the tunnel – after dismounting their
8 horses in Newark, New Jersey, he and Franklin enter the subway and travel aboard
9 the ‘Hudson Tubes’ into Manhattan, emerging at 33rd Street. There, Lovecraft
10 points out ‘to the philosopher various marvels and horrors (like the Empire State
11 Bldg., the foreign populace, the strange conveyances, and so on) of 1935 whilst’
12 Franklin attempts ‘to adjust them to his previous knowledge.’¹⁸

13 In another instance, he concludes a four-hour twilight walking tour of the
14 city’s historic spatial heritage, transitioning back to its modern reality through the
15 underground subway. The walk, which begins at around 4am on August 22nd,
16 1924, traces a labyrinthine route through the city, in defiance of the Grid, from
17 Abingdon Square, south through the back alleys of Greenwich Village, into Lower
18 Manhattan to the Financial District, and back to St. Paul’s Chapel and City Hall
19 Park, where Lovecraft boards the 4 Lexington Avenue Express at the Fulton Street
20 Station at 8am and heads back to his home in Brooklyn. His perambulation takes
21 him through a city full of weird antiquarian artifacts, ‘buried deep in the entrails of
22 nondescript commercial blocks’ (beyond the boundaries of the Grid): “Here
23 stretch worn pavements which silver-buckled shoes have trod – here, hidden in
24 cryptical recesses which no street, lane, or passageway connects with the
25 Manhattan of today! Two dim lamp-posts illumined the scene – that elder and
26 mysterious scene for which the uninitiated search in vain, though scouring every
27 linear inch of New-York’s visible streets. Transported, I paus’d to reflect and let
28 my fancy run riot.¹⁹ What awesome images are suggested by the existence of such
29 secret cities within cities! Beholding this ingulph’d and search-defying fragment of
30 yesterday, the active imagination conjures up endless weird possibilities – ancient
31 and unremember’d towns still living in decay, swallow’d up by the stern business
32 blocks that weary the superficial eye, and sometimes sending forth at twilight
33 strains of ghostly music for whose source the modern city-dwellers seek in vain.
34 Having seen this thing, one cannot look at an ordinary crowded street without
35 wondering what surviving marvels may lurk unsuspected behind the prim and
36 monotonous blocks...”²⁰

¹⁷See *SL III*, p.127-128.

¹⁸See *SL V*, p.142-143.

¹⁹Immersed in the ‘preservative’ atmosphere of old New York, Lovecraft is emotionally ‘transported’ by its marvellous defiance of (urban) space and time and he begins to architect Weird Fiction in real-time.

²⁰According to Joshi and Schultz, this particular experience was an inspiration for Lovecraft’s short story *He*; especially considering that, in the same transcript, he goes on to say ‘Gad’s death, if ever I get an unworried moment to write another story, I vow ‘twill deal with some such embalmed street, or square as this nameless inner court within a court.’ See respectively Joshi, S.T., and Schultz, David E. eds. *From the Pest Zone*. New York: Hippocampus Press, 2003. p.20; and Lovecraft’s

1 **Skyscraper**

2

3 In November of 1924 (during his first months living in the city), Lovecraft,
4 still bearing some optimism that the skyscraper will bear the symbols of the past
5 into the city of the future, visits the American Radiator Building, itself a vestige of
6 unrequited promises.²¹

7 As he descends below the Grid, into the building’s crypt, where new
8 construction contacts and reveals the strata of history, he finds a timelessly
9 subterranean atmosphere: “...we repaired to 40th Street to inspect the American
10 Radiator Company’s building – the new black and gold Dunsanian skyscraper
11 design’d by the Pawtucket architect – and for the first time explored the interior.
12 The basement is a dream of picturesqueness and spectral charm – crypt under
13 crypt of massive vaulted masonry ... terrible arches on Cyclopean columns, black
14 *things* and haunted niches here and there, and endless stone steps leading down ...
15 down ... down ... to hellish catacombs where sticky, brackish water drips. It is
16 like the vaulted space behind the entrances to some ancient amphitheatre in Rome
17 or Constantinople, or some ghoulish tomb-nightmare not to be imagined saved in
18 visions of nameless drugs of unfathomable Ind[ia]....”²²

19 The basement deceives him. Its voluminous expanse is *almost* labyrinthine;
20 its unrefined irregularity *nearly* incomprehensible. It is, like the rest of the
21 building’s monumental mass, however, constrained by the dimensions of its lot, by
22 the boundaries of the Grid – so that despite its otherworldly aesthetic, it remains
23 episodic, isolated and constrained.

24

25

26 **Minetta**

27

28 Among those urban and architectural moments in defiance of the Manhattan
29 Grid, Lovecraft identifies Minetta as the most definitive. The curvature of Minetta
30 Street, ‘a cute, bent, one-way street that begins at the northeast corner of Bleecker
31 Street and the Avenue of the Americas’²³ in Greenwich Village, presents as an
32 authentic urbanistic expression of *old* New York.

33 In the mid-1640’s, when the Dutch ruled Manhattan Island (the first time,
34 from 1625 to 1664), partially-freed landowning slaves formed a community to the
35 northwest of the New Amsterdam settlement, in a ‘marshy valley’ referred to as

letter to Lillian D. Clark, written on August 20th, 1924. Part of the Arkham House Transcripts (AHT) collection.

²¹Here referring to its international symbolism as a continuation of Howell and Hood’s triumphant Neo-Gothic aesthetic, the building following their winning proposal for the 1922 *Chicago Tribune* competition.

²²Lovecraft explores the skyscraper’s relationship with the ground by descending below the Grid, into the crypt of the American Radiator Building. From his letter to F. C. Clark, finished on November 6th, 1924. See *SL I*, p.361.

²³See Callahan, Jennifer. “Minetta Moments.” *The New York Times* (January 30, 2005). <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/30/ny-region/thecity/minetta-moments.html> (accessed May 1, 2019).

1 ‘the Negroes farm.’²⁴ A ‘trout-filled’²⁵ brook called ‘Manetta’²⁶ flowed through
 2 the land and into the Hudson River;²⁷ and a footpath called the ‘Negroe’s causey
 3 or causeway’²⁸ gradually developed along its curving shore. “Although no longer
 4 visible it flows in diminished volume in its old channel. Its east branch rises east of
 5 Fifth Avenue between Twentieth and Twenty-first Streets, whence it flows in
 6 nearly a straight line to the southwest corner of Union Square; thence in a slightly
 7 curving line to the junction with the west branch (which rises east of Sixth
 8 Avenue), near the middle of the block bounded by Eleventh and Twelfth Streets
 9 and Fifth and Sixth Avenues; from this junction it flows to Fifth Avenue and
 10 Clinton Place; thence across Washington Square through Minetta Street to the
 11 North [a.k.a. Hudson] River, between Charleton and Houston Streets.”²⁹

12 The ‘easy going methods of growth’ that shaped *old* New York maintained
 13 the Minetta curve for well over a century. (At one point, it even defined part of the
 14 northernmost boundary of New York’s city-limits³⁰). Then, in the early 19th
 15 Century, the ‘old carelessness of method’ was ‘rigidified’³¹ by the totalitarian
 16 intervention of the Grid.³²

²⁴The 32 acres ‘commonly called the Negroes farm’ was ‘comprised of the following negro grants: Emanuel’s plantation, Cleyn Antonio’s land, the lands of Cleyn Manuel, Anthony Portuguese, and Manuel Gerrit de Reus’ which were purchased by Wolfert Webber sometime before 1696. See, respectively, Booth, Mary L. *History of the City of New York*. New York: W.R.C. Clark & Meeker, 1859. p.324; and Stokes, I.N. Phelps. *The Iconography of Manhattan*, Vol.6. New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1928. p.76.

²⁵“...the hamleters doubtless had very fine trout-fishing between the Fifth and Sixth avenues in the Manetta Water...” See Janvier, Thomas A. *In old New York*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1894. p.93.

²⁶The origins of the modern designation ‘Manetta’ (or ‘Minetta’) are not clear; it may derive from the Algonquin word ‘Mannette’ (meaning ‘Devil’s Water’ or ‘Spirit Water’), or from the Dutch ‘Minnetje’ (meaning ‘the little one’). Its original designation by Dutch settlers was ‘Bestevaer’s Killitje’ (meaning ‘grandfather’s little creek’). See Sanderson, Eric. *Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City*. New York: Abrams, 2009. p.253-254.

²⁷The north-south road to Greenwich along the western shore of Manhattan was the ‘fashionable’ approach to the city in the middle to late 18th Century and it crossed ‘Manetta Water’ (on its way out to the Hudson River) ‘upon a raised causeway.’ See Bisland, p.285.

²⁸“The so-called ‘Negroe’s causey or causeway’ skirted the edge of the Cripple bush along Minnetta Water, from the Sand Hill road west. A vestige of it remains. That part of Minnetta Street between Bleecker Street and Minnetta Lane, was part of the old ‘way to go out,’ – the old path along the marsh.” Ibid Stokes, p.76.

²⁹See Bisland, Elizabeth. *Old Greenwich*. New York: Kinckerbocker Press, c1897. p.277.

³⁰The ‘principal event’ of John Montgomerie’s administration of New York is the granting of an amended city charter in 1730 by which ‘the limits of the city were made to comprehend four hundred feet below low-water mark on the Hudson River from Minetta Brook or Bestavers Killitje south-ward to the fort...” See Booth, Mary L. p.312.

³¹“...it was along the lines of this first parcelling out of the land that Greenwich developed, until the rectangular City Plan of 1811 rigidified its easy going methods of growth. Some traces of the old carelessness of method still are visible in such anomalies as that Fourth Street crosses Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Streets nearly at right angles.” See Stokes, p.284.

³²The Grid arrived in two major instalments; with the unrealized Mangin-Goerck Plan of 1803 (in which the Minetta brook is depicted following its natural course) and with the Commissioner’s Plan of 1811 (in which the brook is entirely absent). “The Commissioners’ Plan borrowed heavily from Goerck’s earlier surveys and essentially expanded his scheme beyond the common lands to encompass the entire island.” See Brazee, Christopher D. and Most, Jennifer L. *Upper east Side*

1 The Commissioner’s Plan of 1811, which marked ‘the end of the little old
2 city and the beginning of the great modern metropolis,’ superimposed a
3 topographically-indifferent matrix of straight lines and right angles over the
4 entirety of Manhattan Island, initiating the conversion of the Minetta brook into
5 the Minetta sewer.³³

6 But even with the Minetta waters entombed in concrete culverts beneath the
7 Grid,³⁴ the curve that would become modern-day Minetta Street remained. Its
8 shape had been sufficiently well-defined architecturally (above-ground, by
9 adjoining buildings) and its location was outside the jurisdiction of the 1811 plan³⁵
10 and inside an area already replete with, and receptive to irregular expressions of
11 the past. One example of its above-ground architectural definition is a ‘charming
12 little brick Greek Revival house’ built in 1846 at West Twelfth Street (between
13 Sixth and Fifth Avenues) on ‘an oddly shaped gore lot’ – ‘the diagonal line of its
14 east wall follows the approximate course of the old Minetta Brook.’³⁶

15 Over time, the existence of ‘Minetta Creek’ transitioned from memory to
16 myth, encouraged by the total denial of reality characteristic of *Manhattanism* (‘to
17 exist in a world totally fabricated by man, i.e., to live *inside* fantasy’).³⁷ The
18 creek’s last urban trace is present-day Minetta Street – the superficial shadow of an
19 underground ‘ghost river.’³⁸ A once-proud expression of the spirit of the land, the
20 Creek now haunts the city from below,³⁹ destabilizing new construction and
21 inundating the subterranean crypts which penetrate its ancient course.
22 “Notwithstanding the fact that this creek has been either culverted over or filled in
23 throughout its entire length, it still asserts itself occasionally with a most
24 undesirable vigor. Heavy buildings cannot be erected on or near its bed without
25 recourse to a costly foundation of piling or grillage, nor can deep excavations be
26 made anywhere near its channel without danger of overflow. Both of these

Historic District Extension Designation Report. NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, March 23, 2010. p.6.

³³The Minetta sewer is constructed in instalments, beginning in 1820, and continued in 1823, 1824, and 1828-29. See Geismar, Joan H. *Washington Square Park Phase IA Archaeological Assessment*. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, August 2005. p.27-29.

³⁴“Although the Manetta Creek no longer is visible on the surface, it still flows in diminished volume through its ancient channel... [having been] either culverted over or filled in throughout its entire length.” See Janvier, Thomas A. *In old New York*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1894. p.93.

³⁵It was located to the south of the southern-most boundary line of the 1811 Plan. See Laws of 1807, Chapter 115: “An Act Relative to Improvements, touching the laying out of streets and roads in the City of New-York, and for other purposes.” Passed April 3, 1807. The New York State Archives. Part IV.

³⁶See Heckscher, August. *Greenwich Village historic District Designation Report*, Vol. 1. City of New York: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration, 1969. p.99.

³⁷See Koolhaas, p.10.

³⁸ See Hunt, Will. “Ghost River.” *The Paris Review* (January 23, 2012).

³⁹ The menacing subterranean presence of the past is a familiar element of horror in the weird fiction method – Lovecraft’s short-story *He* (1926), for example, features a malevolent ‘torrent of blackness’ (representing the spirit of slaughtered Indian nations) which emerges from the cellar and consumes the soul of Old New York; and Stanley Kubrick’s film *The Shining* (1980) features multiple manifestations of America’s demon-haunted past, among the most memorable of which is a torrent of blood pouring from an elevator at the Overlook Hotel (which was, according to the film’s narrative, constructed on a Native American burial ground).

1 conditions have been in evidence recently – the pile-driving for the Lincoln
 2 Building at the southwest corner of Union Square, and the grillage for the building
 3 at the northeast corner of Nineteenth Street and Fifth Avenue; the inundation, in
 4 the deep cellar lately dug on the Sixth Avenue a little below Eleventh Street, and
 5 also in the cellar of the new building No. 66 Fifth Avenue.”⁴⁰ It is the lingering
 6 presence of the past – an urban apparition of *old* New York.

7
 8
 9 **He**

10
 11 Around the same time that Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou, likewise
 12 inspired by Manhattan of the mid-1920’s, explore the class divide above and
 13 below the Grid in their pioneering film *Metropolis* (1927), Lovecraft implicates
 14 the Grid as an agent of cultural oppression in his short story *He* (1926), which
 15 concludes with a ‘colossal, shapeless influx’ representing the native American
 16 spirit emerging violently from the basement of a historic mansion. The story’s
 17 narrative begins when an unnamed protagonist (the author’s fictional surrogate),
 18 ‘on a sleepless night’s walk’ in Greenwich Village, meets a mysterious old man,
 19 who, responding to the protagonist’s evident interest in the city’s antiquarian
 20 details, invites the ‘obvious newcomer’ on a guided tour. The protagonist follows,
 21 driven by his ‘quest for antique beauty and mystery’ which is ‘all he has to keep
 22 his soul alive.’

23 As he advances along his route, into a ‘maze of unknown antiquity,’ its
 24 architectural details – ‘tottering Ionic columns and fluted pilasters and urn-headed
 25 iron fence-posts and flaring-lintelled windows and decorative fanlights’ – appear
 26 to ‘grow quainter and stranger’ and the impression that he is walking into the past
 27 begins to crystallize into an authentic human mood. As the day breaks, the
 28 protagonist arrives at his destination (the old man’s private estate), primed by the
 29 mysterious route for the city’s marvellous reveal.

30 The soul of Old New York presents itself to the unnamed protagonist. It
 31 appears as an architecture (inspired by the Van Nest Mansion on Bleeker Street⁴¹
 32 – constructed c.1744 and razed for new development c.1864) and as a man, both
 33 possessed by the same spirit – the spirit of the eighteenth century, the golden age
 34 of the Anglo-Colonial narrative.

35 ‘Reflecting upon better times,’ the spirit of old New York maintains the
 36 ‘dress and manners’ of its pre-revolutionary colonial ancestry; it occupies a rural
 37 seat on Manhattan Island, ‘swallowed though it was by two towns, first
 38 Greenwich, which built up hither after 1800, then New-York, which joined on
 39 near 1830’; *and* it wields ancient wisdom, which it once requisitioned, together
 40 with ownership of the land, from ‘sartain half-breed red Indians once encamped
 41 upon this hill.’

42 It explains to the protagonist that, since its inception (with the colonization of
 43 the American continent), it has been suspicious of Manhattan Island’s *metropolitan*

⁴⁰See Janvier, Thomas A. *In old New York*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1894. p.86-89.

⁴¹See Joshi, S.T. and Schultz, David E. *An H.P. Lovecraft encyclopedia*. Westport, C.T.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001. p.108.

1 destiny, having already detected the ambitions of the Grid in the heart of western
 2 man: "...there appeared to reside some very remarkable qualities in the will of
 3 mankind; qualities having a little-suspected dominance not only over the acts of
 4 one's self and of others, but over every variety of force and substance in Nature,
 5 and over many elements and dimensions deemed more universal than Nature
 6 herself."

7 And, finally, it resolves to show the protagonist what he desires to see – the
 8 terrifying consummation of Manhattanism – as a time-defying sequence of vistas.

9 "My host now took my hand to draw me to one of the two windows on the
 10 long side of the malodorous room... Once at the window, the man drew apart the
 11 yellow silk curtains and directed my stare into the blackness outside. For a
 12 moment I saw nothing save a myriad of tiny dancing lights, far, far before me.
 13 Then, as if in response to an insidious motion of my host's hand, a flash of heat-
 14 lightning played over the scene, and I looked out upon a sea of luxuriant foliage –
 15 foliage unpolluted, and not the sea of roofs to be expected by any normal mind. On
 16 my right the Hudson glittered wickedly, and in the distance ahead I saw the
 17 unhealthy shimmer of a vast salt marsh constellated with nervous fireflies." The
 18 first vista presents the continent's pristine natural landscape (as it was prior to
 19 colonization) – a wellspring of weird, natural design parameters waiting to be
 20 engaged by the Anglo-Colonial narrative.

21 "Again the lightning flashed – but this time upon a scene not wholly strange.
 22 It was Greenwich, the Greenwich that used to be, with here and there a roof or row
 23 of houses as we see it now, yet with lovely green lanes and fields and bits of
 24 grassy common. The marsh still glittered beyond, but in the farther distance I saw
 25 the steeples of what was then all of New York; Trinity and St. Paul's and the Brick
 26 Church dominating their sisters, and a faint haze of wood smoke hovering over the
 27 whole." The second vista presents the golden age of Old New York – historical
 28 Greenwich in harmony with the land and, in the distance, Lower Manhattan and
 29 the imminent origins of *new* New York.

30 "...he gestured anew; bringing to the sky a flash more blinding than either
 31 which had come before. For full three seconds I could glimpse that pandaemoniac
 32 sight, and in those seconds I saw a vista which will ever afterward torment me in
 33 dreams. I saw the heavens verminous with strange flying things, and beneath them
 34 a hellish black city of giant stone terraces with impious pyramids flung savagely to
 35 the moon, and devil-lights burning from unnumbered windows. And swarming
 36 loathsomely on aerial galleries I saw the yellow, squint-eyed people of that city,
 37 robed horribly in orange and red, and dancing insanely to the pounding of fevered
 38 kettle-drums, the clatter of obscene crotale, and the maniacal moaning of muted
 39 horns whose ceaseless dirges rose and fell undulantly like the waves of an
 40 unhallowed ocean of bitumen. I saw this vista, I say, and heard as with the mind's
 41 ear the blasphemous domdaniel of cacophony which companioned it. It was the
 42 shrieking fulfilment of all the horror which that corpse-city had ever stirred in my
 43 soul, and forgetting every injunction to silence I screamed and screamed and
 44 screamed as my nerves gave way and the walls quivered about me." The third and
 45 final vista presents the total triumph of the modern metropolis, the ultimate
 46 denouement of Manhattanism; it presents the metropolitan delirium operating

1 beyond its full capacity – turbocharged – to effect a state of perpetual fantasy in its
 2 paranoiac inhabitants and their architecture. The city has finally succeeded in
 3 totally denying its connection with nature and history, and has architected its
 4 delirium into an alternate reality. In this alternate reality, man inhabits Manhattan’s
 5 *frontier in the sky* (‘with strange flying things’ and ‘on aerial galleries’) – totally
 6 denying the natural foundations and historical experience which elevate and
 7 stabilize him.

8 Discarded and denied by the metropolis of the future, the soul of Old New
 9 York submits to decay, instantaneously exposing its *true* form – ‘sagging’,
 10 ‘battered’, ‘rickety’, and ‘ragged.’ “Now swift and splintering blows assailed the
 11 sickly panels, and I saw the gleam of a tomahawk as it cleft the rending wood. I
 12 did not move, for I could not; but watched dazedly as the door fell in pieces to
 13 admit a colossal, shapeless influx of inky substance starred with shining,
 14 malevolent eyes. It poured thickly, like a flood of oil bursting a rotten bulkhead,
 15 overturned a chair as it spread, and finally flowed under the table and across the
 16 room to where the blackened head with the eyes still glared at me. Around that
 17 head it closed, totally swallowing it up, and in another moment it had begun to
 18 recede; bearing away its invisible burden without touching me, and flowing out of
 19 that black doorway and down the unseen stairs...”

20 Compelled by the Native American spirit (itself relegated to oblivion by the
 21 Anglo-Colonial narrative which superseded it), the soul of Old New York joins the
 22 ‘colossal, shapeless influx’ of forsaken history which lurks beneath the Grid. As
 23 the protagonist returns to the present time, his body bloodied and broken by the
 24 collapse of history, his mind overwhelmed by the revelation of the city’s
 25 impending future, he resolves to leave New York and return to the living past – ‘to
 26 the pure New England lanes up which fragrant sea-winds sweep at evening.’⁴²

27 The work, which is a creative condensation of the author’s xenophobic
 28 disposition – attempting to evoke sympathy and despair for the disempowerment
 29 of Anglo-Colonial tradition (following as an expression of Lovecraft’s racist
 30 ideology, of the ethnic superiority of his own cultural tradition) – employs the Grid
 31 as a kind of interstitial timestamp denoting a before (below) and after (above) of
 32 ‘rapid and radical’ ethnic change.⁴³

35 Conclusions

- 37 • *Lovecraft’s reflections are an original criticism of the Grid, as a defense of*
 38 *the collective cultural imagination (literally and figuratively suppressed).*

40 There have been many notable criticisms of the Grid. Poe, who witnesses the
 41 application of the Grid in the 1840s while living in an old farmhouse on the upper
 42 West Side, condemns its monotony: “...these magnificent places are doomed. The
 43 spirit of Improvement has withered them with its acrid breath. Streets are already

⁴²See Lovecraft, H.P. *He*. 1926.

⁴³See Gipe-Lazarou, Andrew. “Weird fiction and the architecture of xenophobia”. *Changing Cities* V (conference), June 2022.

1 ‘mapped’ through them, and they are no longer suburban residences, but ‘town-
 2 lots.’ In some thirty years every noble cliff will be a pier, and the whole island will
 3 be densely desecrated by buildings of brick...”⁴⁴ Likewise, de Tocqueville, while
 4 visiting the city in May of 1831: “From a Frenchman’s perspective, it looks
 5 disarmingly weird. There isn’t a dome, a steeple or a large edifice in sight, which
 6 leaves one with the impression that one has landed in a suburb, not the city itself.
 7 At its very core, where everything is built of brick, monotony rules.”⁴⁵

8 Whitman criticizes its suppression of natural beauty: “The elevated and stony
 9 grounds about here will cost their owners dearly to get them graded and paved in
 10 the monotonous style required by most of our American cities. I always think it a
 11 pity that greater favor is not given to the natural hills and slopes of the ground on
 12 the upper part of Manhattan Island. Our perpetual dead flat, and streets cutting
 13 each other at right angles, are certainly the last things in the world consistent with
 14 beauty of situation.”⁴⁶ Moore describes its creation as an iconoclastic act: “The
 15 changes wrought in the face of this island by the present mode of levelling and
 16 filling, and thus reducing it to a flat surface, are lamented by persons of taste, as
 17 destructive to the greatest beauties of which our city is susceptible. ...our
 18 corporation [is] so devoted to this system, that they cannot think any beauty to
 19 exist without it... to judge from appearances, they seem resolved to spare nothing
 20 that bears the semblance of a rising ground; nothing is to be left unmolested which
 21 does not coincide with the street-commissioner’s plummet and level. These are
 22 men, as has been well observed, who would have cut down the seven hills of
 23 Rome, on which are erected her triumphant monuments of beauty and
 24 magnificence, and have thrown them into the Tyber or the Pomptine marshes.”⁴⁷

25 Olmsted observes its banal unattractiveness: “The great disadvantage under
 26 which New-York labors is one growing out of the senseless manner in which its
 27 streets have been laid out. No city is more unfortunately planned with reference to
 28 metropolitan attractiveness.”⁴⁸ Stokes likewise decries its lack of picturesqueness:
 29 “We have now reached the point where the old city, which had grown up at
 30 haphazard, with crooked streets, wooded hills, and fertile valleys traversed by
 31 streams and winding country roads, begins to be absorbed into a new city, in
 32 which antiquity and nature are no longer respected, with streets laid out in
 33 accordance with a carefully considered, symmetrical plan – that evolved by the
 34 commissioners of 1807 – which was submitted and adopted in 1811.
 35 Unfortunately, this plan, although possessing the merits of simplicity and

⁴⁴From an article written for the *Columbia Spy* in 1844, and later reprinted in the *Doings of Gotham*, in 1929 (Pottsville, Penn., 1929), p.25-26.

⁴⁵See de Tocqueville, Alexis. Edited by Frederick Brown. *Letters from America*. Yale University Press, 2012.

⁴⁶See Whitman, Walt. “Letters from a Traveling Bachelor” No. VII. *The Walt Whitman Archive*. <https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/journalism/tei/per.00298.html> (Accessed 17 May 2023).

⁴⁷Written by American writer, seminarian, and ardent resistor against the tyranny of the Grid, Clement Clarke Moore (1779-1863). See Moore, Clement Clarke. *Plain statement, addressed to the proprietors of real estate, in the city and county of New York*. New York: Eastburn and Co., 1818. p.49-50.

⁴⁸See Olmsted, Frederick Law. “The Future of New York.” *Frederick Law Olmsted: Essential Texts*, edited by Twombly R. New York: W.W. Norton, [1879] 2010. p.109-20.

1 directness, lacked entirely the equally essential elements of variety and
 2 picturesqueness, which demand a large degree of respect for the natural
 3 conformation of the land. The new plan was entirely deficient in sentiment and
 4 charm, and with its gradual development, little by little, the individuality, the
 5 interest, and the beauty of one choice spot after another have been swept away;
 6 until now, except in Central Park and at the extreme north of the island, scarcely
 7 anything remains to remind us of the primitive beauty and the fascinating diversity
 8 of natural charms which we know Manhattan once possessed.”⁴⁹

9 Mumford condemns its pathological regularity: “Within a short while after its
 10 introduction in New York in 1811 the effects of the rectangular streets and
 11 rectangular lots became evident; whereas the prints of New York before 1825
 12 show a constant variety in the elevation and layout of houses, those after this date
 13 resemble more and more standardized boxes. Long monotonous streets that
 14 terminated nowhere, filled by rows of monotonous houses – this was the net
 15 contribution of the formal plan.”⁵⁰ Sartre laments its malevolent anonymity:
 16 “Amid the numerical anonymity of streets and avenues, I am simply anyone,
 17 anywhere, since one place is so like another. I am never astray but always lost.”⁵¹

18 And Wright condemns its deplorably massive scale and hazardous congestion:
 19 “The dreary emphasis of narrowness, slicing, edging, niching and crowding. Tier
 20 above tier the soulless shelf, the empty crevice, the winding ways of the windy,
 21 unhealthy canyon. The heartless grip of the selfish, grasping universal structure.
 22 Box on box beside box. Black shadows below with artificial lights burning all day
 23 in the little caverns and squared cells. Prison cubicles. Above it all a false, cruel,
 24 ambition is painting haphazard, jagged, pretentious, feudal skylines trying to
 25 relieve it and make it more humane by lying about its purpose. Congestion,
 26 confusion and the anxious spasmodic and fro – stop and go. At best the all too
 27 narrow lanes, were they available, are only fifty per cent effective owing to the
 28 gridiron. In them roars a bedlam of harsh sound and a dangerous, wasteful,
 29 spasmodic movement runs in these narrow village lanes in the deep shadows.
 30 Distortion. This man-trap of gigantic dimensions, devouring manhood, denies in
 31 its affected riot of personality any individuality whatsoever.”⁵²

32 Lovecraft’s criticism stands out among those decrying the Grid, as a defense
 33 of the collective cultural subconscious. He writes: “Any mushroom oil centre can
 34 have bright lights, skyscrapers and apartment blocks, but only a well-loved seat of
 35 centuries of pure taste and gracious living can have the urn-topped, ivied walls, the
 36 gabled and steepled vistas, the unexpected twists of cobbled court and alley, and
 37 all the manifold touches of elder landscape which mean Providence to those real
 38 natives who have grown up in it and cherish its every mood and aspect, summer
 39 and winter, sun and rain.”⁵³

⁴⁹See Stokes, I.N. Phelps. *The Iconography of Manhattan*, Vol.1. New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1915. p.407.

⁵⁰See Mumford, Lewis. *Sticks and Stones: a Study of American Architecture and Civilization*. Boni and Liveright, 1924. p.68.

⁵¹See Koepfel, Gerard. *City on a Grid: How New York Became New York*. De Capo Press, 2015. p.236.

⁵²See Wright, Frank Lloyd. *The Disappearing City*. New York: W.F. Payson, 1932. p.22.

⁵³See *SL II*, p.73-74.

1 “I find existence tolerable – because I keep aloof from the rising machine-
 2 culture and remain part of the old New England civilization which preceded it.
 3 ...nothing good can be said of that machine-culture itself. It is a treadmill, squirrel-
 4 trap culture – drugged and frenzied with the hasheesh of industrial servitude and
 5 material luxury. It is wholly a material body-culture, and its symbol is the tiled
 6 bathroom and steam radiator rather than the Doric portico and the temple of
 7 philosophy.”⁵⁴

8 He elaborates on his position, critical of the extent and pace of cultural
 9 change: “Tradition can change and grow with time, of course; and it must
 10 occasionally admit new elements or discard certain old elements when they are
 11 proved contrary to fact. But the mutation and substitution must be gradual. It must
 12 not be so rapid or radical as to pry the individual loose from everything which
 13 gives him a sense of placement, interest, motivation, and direction – not so rapid or
 14 radical as to *destroy* tradition instead of properly *modifying* it.”⁵⁵ The nineteenth-
 15 century superimposition of the Grid, in this sense, is a violent, unnatural act. By
 16 disregarding the essential ‘interval of neglect’ or ‘interim of death or rejection’
 17 which J.B. Jackson identifies in his seminal work *The Necessity for Ruins* (1980),
 18 the Grid defies the life-cycle of the landscape, defies time, and ‘history ceases to
 19 exist’.⁵⁶

- 20
- 21 • *Though the Grid aspires to be a final solution (a final ‘totalitarian*
 22 *intervention’), in actuality, it is another layer, subject to the same*
 23 *superimposition of changing socio-cultural dynamics which once elevated*
 24 *it above the natural topography of the island.*

25

26 During his ‘nocturnal pilgrimages’, Lovecraft witnesses the levelling of the
 27 Grid firsthand – on one occasion, he notices ‘with horror the replacement of a fine
 28 colonial row [on Vandewater St.] by a damnable new garage, (other excellent
 29 colonials have vanished in Greenwich, at Barrow & Hudson Sts.)...’⁵⁷ and the
 30 recent demolition of ‘the old Harpers publishing house;’⁵⁸ on another occasion, he
 31 observes that ‘...the quaintness of Greenwich-Village is rapidly passing. Whole
 32 blocks of colonial houses have come down since I knew the place; & now the
 33 more placid but less ancient Chelsea-Village to the north of it is menaced. Famous

⁵⁴Lovecraft is writing here about the ‘Machine Age,’ the extensive technological development of Western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. See *SL II*, p.304.

⁵⁵See *SL III*, p.48-49.

⁵⁶See Jackson, J.B. (1980). *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics*. University of Massachusetts Press. p.102.

⁵⁷See Jackson, J.B. (1980). *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics*. University of Massachusetts Press. p.102.

⁵⁸Once-located at 331 Pearl Street, facing Franklin Square (which also no longer exists), the publishing house was designed by James Bogardus and constructed in 1854. “The combination of wide expanses of glass with iron columns and arches in the Venetian Renaissance style is a perfect illustration of the spirit of his time... ‘the idea of emulating [the rich architectural designs of antiquity] in modern times, by the aid of cast-iron.’” (A similar architectural effort was made at 24 Water St., in the Fraunces Tavern Block). See Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982. p.197.

1 ‘London Terrace’ in West 23rd St. – where a friend of mine has lived all his life –
2 is to come down shortly to make room for a wretched apartment skyscraper.’⁵⁹

3 But the Grid, too, is just another layer. The High Line (an elevated, 1.45-mile-
4 long linear park located on the Lower West Side, designed by James Corner Field
5 Operations in collaboration with Diller Scofidio + Renfro, and Piet Oudolf, and
6 completed in three phases in 2009, 2011, and 2014) may represent the impending
7 evolution of metropolitan space-making – the manifestation of a true *frontier in*
8 *the sky*, of occupying the volume between blocks and substratifying the Grid. The
9 city’s mid-century skybridges temporarily manifested a similar ambition but,
10 following their construction, were either privatized or abandoned.⁶⁰

11 To ghost the Grid and bring life to the ‘wide-open spaces of a man-made
12 Wild West,’⁶¹ the city must reject the isolated block and make omni-directional
13 interconnections across suspended road- and rail-ways, tiers of sidewalks, and
14 elevated terraces; it must explode the social activity of public spaces – of the town
15 square, of the commons, and the street – in three dimensions; it must cultivate
16 ‘growth by subtle processes’, embody ‘curved streets, quaint slopes or flights of
17 steps, simple and dignify’d bridges, sea-walls, and embankments, quiet nooks and
18 terraces’, enable the reformation of ‘thrilling and grotesque topographies’ in the
19 sky demonstrating ‘man’s conformity to Nature rather than man’s artificial
20 conquest of Nature by prosaic, repudiatory feats of engineering’;⁶² it must permit
21 the irrationality of the labyrinth to take root in the sky.
22
23

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⁵⁹ Excerpted from a letter to Elizabeth Toldridge, written on April 15th, 1929, in which Lovecraft documents some of his ‘favourite antiquarian haunts’ during a brief visit to New York in 1929 (three years after having moved back to New England). See *SL II*, p.329-330.

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⁶¹ “Manhattan has no choice but the skyward extrusion of the Grid itself; only the Skyscraper offers business the wide-open spaces of a man-made Wild West, a *frontier in the sky*.” See Koolhaas, p.87.

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