Introduction

Roberta Moudry

A long tradition in this country grants the ceremonies of human life to architecture. Buildings enter their productive lives with fanfare: a flag raised at the top of a steel frame; a cornerstone bearing pedigree; a dedication with all the trappings of a christening. The skyscrapers of the twentieth-century American city were dramatic in their arrival and equally dramatic in their visual and spatial presence, changing the physical and social spaces of everyday life and giving to the city its visual signature – the skyline (Figure 1).[1]

As everpresent as the skyscraper on the skyline was its engagement with nearly every sector of the urban population. Architects, engineers, and workers in the building trades were directly involved in skyscraper design and construction, and corporate officers and executives and the army of clerks they employed determined the meaning and usage of the tall office building. Municipal officers, planners, and civic-minded laypersons worked to develop land use patterns, set building height and safety standards, and create or expand urban infrastructures that serviced the skyscraper's mechanical and human components. Inventors and sociologists developed machines and practices demanded by the consolidated workplace of the tall office building. Children, mothers, domestic help, and an assimilating immigrant workforce experienced the skyscraper as urban theater – free for the watching – and as the backdrop for nursery rhymes, socialist and consumer pitches alike. Urban muses – photographers, artists, poets, musicians, and journalists – took the skyscraper as the main character of their stories, the means for exploring the nature of modern urban life. Each of these urbanites walked daily among a growing number of tall buildings and viewed these structures, which were only partially visible from adjacent sidewalks, as constituent parts

1. "New York City from Brooklyn Bridge." Reprinted with permission of the Keystone–Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside.

of the skyline. Beyond the city limits, a flood of novels, magazines, three-dimensional stereoviews, and postcards, delivered cross-country for a penny stamp, brought the image of the skyscraper to the most remote household (Figure 2). This aggregation of meanings and experiences surrounding the skyscraper – its cultural identity – is the focus of this anthology.

The American skyscraper has spawned over a half-century of rigorous scholarship, largely

2. New York skyscrapers souvenir folder. Collection of the editor.

in the area of art and architectural history. Substantial book-length studies such as Carl W. Condit's *The Rise of the Skyscraper*, Sarah Bradford Landau and Carl W. Condit's *Rise of the New York Skyscraper, 1865–1913*, Merrill Schleier's *The Skyscraper in American Art*, and Carol Willis's *Form Follows Finance* focus on specifics of design and structure, representation, and economics.[2] Monographs of major buildings and architectural firms offer a cross-sectional study of building culture in a specific instance – of the specific and at times interlocking roles of client and urban context, architect, engineer and contractor, and building occupants.[3] Geographers, business historians, gender studies scholars, labor and urban historians, and historians of technology have contributed information and their distinctive disciplinary perspectives to skyscraper studies. However, most of these studies remain isolated in their intellectual arenas. To make aspects of this rich body of historical work available to a broad audience and to permit cross-disciplinary analysis and discussion, this volume collects work from scholars in diverse disciplines that addresses the engagement of the skyscraper with the experience and meaning of city life.

Purpose and Scope

Using the skyscraper, the signal architectural and spatial event of the modern American city, this volume's essays bring primary focus to the complex relationship between culture and the buildings and spaces it inhabits and inflects. They probe, among other things, how this building type shaped professional practices of developers, designers, and policymakers; the workplaces and streetscapes of workers and management; the image of corporations and organizations seeking cultural hegemony and financial success; and the vision of the city created by writers, artists, and photographers and handed back to its occupants. Collectively, the essays render a kaleidoscopic view of the skyscraper city and its cultural life – a multiplicity of overlapping histories, of public events and spaces, and of various professionally or politically homogeneous cultures.

The essays focus on a particular span of time in the history of the skyscraper: between the 1880s and the 1950s in the two major American skyscraper capitals, New York and Chicago. Thus, this collection does not grapple with the "first" or early skyscrapers, and it does not

consider the tall building in its postwar, postmodern, or post-September 11 conditions. Nor does it offer a broad geographic survey of the building type beyond the two major centers of skyscraper production, although trends and practices that evolved in other urban centers may be observed in these two locations. Within these narrow parameters of time and place, depth and variety are provided by disciplinary diversity: the essays employ materials and methods from art and architectural history, urban planning, business and labor history, literary criticism, the history of photography, and the rich multidisciplinary field of American studies.

It is by design, then, that these stories overlap and intersect, for each investigation pivots upon the architectural/spatial reality of the skyscraper and its relationship with individuals, social and professional groups, and the ambient public culture. Therefore, certain events such as the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and New York's 1916 zoning ordinance, places such as Fifth Avenue, and buildings such as the Metropolitan Life and Woolworth towers appear in multiple essays. These points of intersection provide consistent referents for the reader moving from one interpretation to another, integrating a substantial body of information about a single urban building type. However, the intentions, concerns, uses, and interpretations related to these common places and recorded by the authors are wide-ranging and sometimes oppositional: the work of city-building and skyscraper design and the process of popular culture's absorption of the skyscraper as a norm in visual, spatial, and experiential realms look different through the lens of different stakeholders and through the medium of different materials. Thus, the result is not a generalized, but a relational history. Roland Barthes, in search of a semiology of the city, declared that it was "not so important to multiply the surveys or the functional studies of the city, but to multiply the readings of the city."[4] These essays articulate multiple cultural readings of the city, through study of its built environment and the singular urban monument of the skyscraper.

Organizational Themes

The essays are organized in four thematic sections. While every essay in this volume in some way considers skyscraper makers (clients, designers, engineers, and contractors) and/or users (workers, tenants, shoppers, passersby, or distant observers of visual material), the first part, "Makers and Users," gathers three essays that probe the complex culture of architects, planners, and clerical workers. Each of these professional groups was profoundly influenced by the quickening pace of skyscraper construction in the American city, and these essays indicate that there were both incredible opportunities and challenges posed by this urban phenomenon. Architects, engineers, and planners were compelled to develop new systems and strategies for collaborative work, as they encountered a design problem that demanded the coordinated contributions of an increasingly large number of professionals and tradesmen. Likewise, the internal work world of the skyscraper created an important niche for the female clerical worker that had to be defined, described, and codified by manuals as well as the popular press. The skyscraper shaped each of these professional groups beyond their specific contact with the building type, affecting how these groups would occupy and interact with the surrounding city.

In "The Beaux-Arts Architect and the Skyscraper: Cass Gilbert, the Professional Engineer, and the Rationalization of Construction in Chicago and New York," architectural historian Gail Fenske provides an in-depth look at prominent architect Cass Gilbert's efforts to maintain aesthetic control of the skyscraper, even as he realized that the contributions of

skilled engineers and contractors were essential for a successful design. Her examination of the intricacies of Gilbert's practice and architectural theories suggest that Beaux-Arts aesthetic and urban design principles were neither irrelevant to nor irreconcilable with the realities of skyscraper design, but were a means of making the skyscraper a landmark, a beautiful and monumental "ornament" to the city.

Furthering the discussion of City Beautiful ideology in relation to skyscraper design, historian Keith D. Revell looks at the intersection of architecture and law and probes the interests and goals of planning professionals, including Edward Bassett, George Ford, and Nelson Lewis, who crafted New York's 1916 zoning ordinance. "Law Makes Order: The Search for Ensemble in the Skyscraper City, 1890–1930" details the means by which these men incorporated City Beautiful ideals about urban ensemble into zoning legislation. By regulating the skyscraper's vertical lines with a setback formula, they preserved individualistic design initiatives while protecting the collective goals of health and visual order. Legally defensible on the grounds of public health rather than civic beauty, skyscraper regulation ultimately enlarged the regulatory powers of municipal government and helped shape a skyscraper urbanism practiced by the most skilled of designers; the City Beautiful extended vertically onto the skyline.

Into this emerging skyscraper city, shaped by architects, planners, and corporate executives, arrived a flood of white-collar female clerical workers, altering the spatial reality and practices of the once-male realm of the business office and the nature of the urban downtown business district. The presence of women in the skyscraper office posed challenges to behavioral norms based on traditional gender roles that segregated work and spaces, and spawned entire genres of advice literature and secretarial pulp fiction. Labor historian and women's studies scholar Lisa M. Fine brings focus to "The Female 'Souls of the Skyscraper'" and describes the ways that the skyscraper and its workspaces transformed not only women's occupational opportunities but also their social and home lives, their image in the popular culture, and their public roles as individual citizens and as a collective presence in the urban business world.

Part Two, "In the Image of the Client," comprises four essays that examine the use of skyscraper design and publicity by specific corporate and institutional clients. Written by architectural historians, these essays draw on urban, advertising, and business history to explore the role of the skyscraper in a corporate or institutional agenda. Uncovering an array of goals and values that shaped clients' mandates concerning exterior design and internal spatial programs, these essays suggest that skyscraper design was far more complex than the confluence of economic requirements and engineering and aesthetic formulas. Using images, corporate records, and public statements, the authors show that attitudes about nationalism, citizenship, art, morality, and the role of men and women in an urban consumer society all contributed to clients' ideas concerning skyscraper form and function, and to the resulting interplay between public and private, inside and outside, culture and commerce.

The creation of a specific building type for the urban newspaper office is chronicled by Lee E. Gray in "Type and Building Type: Newspaper/Office Buildings in Nineteenth-Century New York." From the 1850s to the 1870s, New York City newspapers developed a commercial architecture that integrated mechanical systems and office workspaces in an efficient vertical arrangement, while employing siting and architectural design to declare the newspaper as a prominent institution in the modern city. Newspaper editors believed it was the role of commercial enterprise to furnish an appropriate civic architecture for the city, and they used

their print resources to make clear their self-appointed roles as purveyors of architectural taste and the makers of new civic centers, such as Newspaper or Publishers' Row, and the subsequent Herald and Times squares.

In "Chicago's Fraternity Temples: The Origins of Skyscraper Rhetoric and the First of the World's Tallest Office Buildings," Edward W. Wolner brings into focus a critical but little-noted aspect of the Masonic Temple of 1890 and the 1891 unexecuted plan for the Odd Fellows Temple – the motivations of their clients, fraternal organizations steeped in archaic social hierarchies and rituals. Turning to the skyscraper as the means of achieving both social and financial prominence in an increasingly commercial urban culture, the Masons constructed the world's tallest building, which housed under one roof elaborate lodge rooms, first-class business suites, ten floors of luxury shops, and a glazed roof garden for 2,000 people. By closely examining the nature of Masonic and other fraternal cultures, this study documents the commodification of American fraternalism through the act of skyscraper building and the impact of this shift on both the societies and their urban environments. Also central to this study is a consideration of gender in relation to the skyscraper that focuses not on women clerical workers, but on men and their efforts to redefine masculine work and social identities in the changing environments of an increasingly mechanized, white-collar and mixed-gender skyscraper city.

Also eager to employ the skyscraper as advertisement were industries that had no tangible products such as banks and insurance companies. In "The Corporate and the Civic: Metropolitan Life's Home Office Building," I document the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's embrace of the skyscraper office building as an efficient work center and as a vehicle for the dissemination of a corporate ideology that sought to influence all aspects of the built environment. The company's full-block complex and tower altered its immediate urban context and skyline, and its internal work systems were well publicized and influential. However, it was the form and symbol of the tower – wielded by architects, photographers, the popular press, and most extensively by the company itself – that loomed largest in the public eye. It carried to diverse viewers a multiplicity of messages and values, from American cultural superiority and technological prowess to corporate success and civic responsibility, blurring categories of public and private.

Katherine Solomonson's essay "The Chicago Tribune Tower Competition: Publicity Imagines Community" brings our attention once again to the newspaper industry, this time to the 1922 competition for the *Chicago Tribune*'s new office building in Chicago. This competition has been well documented as a landmark event in the architectural world, and Solomonson acknowledges the Tribune's architectural position while interpreting a broader range of evidence concerning the company's intentions and the political context of the immediate post–World War I era. Examination of the company's extensive publicity campaign surrounding the competition and subsequent building program reveals an "elaborate web of words and images" that shaped not only the skyscraper but also the set of values it represented and the community it would bind together.

Part Three, "Urban Contexts," collects three different perspectives of a city shaped by skyscraper form and meaning. Viewing New York City as both built and cultural landscape, these essays trace the conditions that shaped skyscraper development and the ways that this dense, tall urban landscape was interpreted by diverse constituencies. In these studies, the focus is not on specific buildings and their internal workings, but on the effect of the urban space and culture on the skyscraper, and the building type's reciprocal effect on the experience, meaning, and economics of the city.

In "The Heights and Depths of Urbanism: Fifth Avenue and the Creative Destruction of Manhattan," historian Max Page points to the skyscraper as the principal urban form representing the massive physical, economic, and social transformation of American cities. Looking at the urban landscape in the decades around the turn of the century, he describes the phenomenon of "creative destruction." This tumultuous cycle of tearing down and rebuilding reshaped the city, while presenting city dwellers with a chaotic physical landscape that mirrored the multiple social and economic changes wrought by waves of immigration, urban expansion, and the rise of corporations. At the center of this process, the skyscraper urged replacement of the nineteenth-century urban fabric with taller structures designed for spatial economy and symbolic power, structures that fundamentally changed the visual and experiential nature of the city.

Historian Sarah Watts views skyscrapers as the backdrop for labor protests and rallies, with focus on the 1913 Paterson Strike Pageant staged at Madison Square Garden. In "Built Languages of Class: Skyscrapers and Labor Protest in Victorian Public Space," Watts uses union records and published accounts of the strike and other labor actions to specify the meanings and values attached to the skyscraper by factory workers, civic leaders, and businessmen. Labor viewed skyscrapers as representations of their corporate owners, whose work processes, social behaviors, and economies increasingly controlled urban life beyond the walls of the office building. Businessmen and civic officials likewise acknowledged their influence on the city, but cast skyscrapers in a positive light, as symbols of civic order and capitalist progress. In contrast, they likened labor's irrational outbursts to the overcrowded and disordered tenement landscape, presenting the city in text and images as a built metaphor for the cultural clashes of labor with capitalist giants. Used by labor for mass marches and demonstrations and by corporations as venues for dramatic skyscraper construction, dedications, and operations, the city operated as a theatrical set upon which workers and management presented opposing views of labor's role in society. In this "urban dialogue," the skyscraper occupied center stage.

The creation of a skyscraper ensemble within the city is the subject of architectural historian Carol Herselle Krinsky's chronicle of Rockefeller Center, "The Skyscraper Ensemble in Its Urban Context." Built primarily between 1929 and 1940, the coordinated complex of skyscrapers, lower buildings, public art, and pedestrian plaza was the product of a collective of designers and a client's substantial financial resources and aesthetic insights. Krinsky shows how the project was further shaped by legal constraints, which orchestrated heights of periphery buildings and the length of the promenade and plaza to allow for the height and bulk of the central monolithic form of the RCA Building. Economic considerations determined the need for shops below grade, which in turn generated the slope of the promenade and the innovative use of the sunken plaza as an ice skating rink. Finally, Krinsky looks beyond the borders of this exceptional skyscraper ensemble to track and analyze its effect on the city around it.

The fourth and final section, "Popular Culture," follows the skyscraper as it was represented and interpreted through the media of photography, theater, and literature. Released of its specific architectural and functional obligations, the skyscraper in these realms existed as an image shaped by experience and meaning, by the perceptions of a diverse and cacophonous metropolitan culture, and by the experiences and aspirations of artists and writers. For millions who did not regularly engage with the skyscraper or the modern city, images and texts describing and analyzing this phenomenon were persuasive points of contact. For

those who gazed upon and navigated the city on a daily basis – a diverse group that included white-collar workers, artists, children, rag pickers, and corporate captains – these "texts" referenced the familiar, both in recording fragments of popular culture and in creating new meanings, thus adding yet another layer to the metropolitan experience.

Three essays present the skyscraper as an article of cultural currency, underscoring what preceding essays suggest: the simultaneous operation of the skyscraper as an urban architecture and as an image. This image carried with it multiple conflicting meanings, signifying the exhilaration of corporate and technological accomplishment and/or the disorientation of a modern urbanity characterized by speed and a lack of physical and social coherence.

In "The Shadow of the Skyscraper: Urban Photography and Metropolitan Irrationalism in the Stieglitz Circle," Antonello Frongia, a historian of urban photography, focuses on the skyscraper as a subject of urban photography in the 1900s and 1910s. He locates in the skyscraper photography and criticism of Alfred Stieglitz and his colleagues Alvin Langdon Coburn and Sadakichi Hartmann, a "negative shadow-city" that expressed a pervasive cultural ambivalence about metropolitan modernism. Such classic images as Stieglitz's "Flatiron" and Coburn's "The Octopus" may be understood not only as products of technical experimentation and artistic interest, but also as efforts to subsume in a single image the "sunshine and shadow" of nineteenth-century urban commentaries. Thus, through the act of seeing and photographing, oppositional aspects of a fragmented and irrational urban environment could be revealed, organized, and resolved. Frongia's close reading of critical texts by Hartmann, the major spokesman for Pictorialism, and his consideration of urban photography from Jacob Riis to Lewis Hine uncover dialectical relationships between slums and skyscrapers, fact and fiction, rationality and fear.

Bringing a consideration of gender, class, mental health, and urbanism to skyscraper studies, architectural historian and women's studies scholar Merrill Schleier examines Sophie Treadwell's play *Machinal*, in which the main character is consumed both physically and emotionally by a mechanized and masochistic skyscraper culture. Considering the script and sets from the 1928 New York and 1933 Russian productions, Schleier documents the means by which Treadwell dramatizes the effects of the skyscraper and mechanized work environments on women. Based on a real-life murder trial, Treadwell's own experiences as an office worker, and her knowledge of contemporary psychiatric studies of gendered nervous disorders, *Machinal* recounts the "skyscraperization" of Young Woman. In the course of the play, the impersonal, mechanized, and male-controlled culture of the skyscraper office invades every physical and social aspect of her life, ultimately leading to her death. With exaggerated dialogue, characters, and sets, Treadwell theatricalized many concerns of feminists and the mental health profession about the modern city, skyscraper offices, and women's well-being.

The anthology's final essay, "The Sublime and the Skyline," shows how technology, nature, and history were woven into an urban and corporate mythology that defined the skyscraper in cultural terms. Using novels and the writings of architectural and cultural critics, as well as the work of commercial photographers, American studies senior scholar David Nye examines two paradigmatic experiences that forged the skyscraper's symbolic identity and shaped the public's experience and acceptance of "a landscape of skyscrapers": the view of the skyscraper as a constituent part of the skyline, and the view of the city from the top of the building.

These two ways of understanding the skyscraper, as skyline and vantage point, place the skyscraper at the center of the urban ensemble and the experience of urban modernity. Nye describes how the skyscraper, from a distance and from within, evoked a sense of the sublime, the sense of awe typically ascribed to experiences of natural power and beauty. The skyline, the collective of tall buildings, was overwhelming and cliff-like, at once naturalistic and a visual shout declaring victories of engineering and economics. As emphatically, the view from the top of a skyscraper denoted power and a command of both the built and natural visible landscape. Once positioned upon a public observation deck atop a corporate skyscraper, actually or virtually through the media of postcards or stereoviews, one could experience the magisterial gaze, the "solar eye" of the great corporations. These experiences are themselves not without complexity, however, and Nye points to the skyscraper's evocation of past and future and to the elevator's insistent inward focus on the individual, even as it moved upward to a platform of god-like height.

Collective Threads and Suggestions

The case studies presented here contribute to a growing body of research that builds upon and complements the foundational work of past skyscraper historians and critics. Although the essays cover a range of subjects, this collection is selective, both topically and methodologically, and many pieces of the skyscraper's kaleidoscopic story are not represented. The critical technologies of illumination, steel, and fireproof construction that made the skyscraper both structurally viable and then rentable and habitable; and communities of workers, like European immigrant custodians and Akwesasne Mohawk ironworkers whose very urban presence revolved around skyscraper employment, are just two avenues of study not pursued in this collection that yield additional insights into the skyscraper's urban cultural and spatial contexts.[5]

Within this collection, individual studies present methods, materials, and interpretations that generate further questions and observations. Read comparatively, these essays offer additional insights into the skyscraper, the city, and the discipline of history. For example, readers may find that topical or theoretical links between essays serve to highlight differences in sources and analytical strategies. Sarah Watts, Antonello Frongia, and I each consider in our studies Madison Square and its skyscrapers, the Met Life Tower and the Flatiron. However, to striking factory workers and labor advocates, corporate officers, and the Stieglitz circle, all of whom viewed and used Madison Square, this built landscape looked quite different. Our documentation of these differences of experience and perspective lends a "thickness," a historical articulation, to the much-used phrase "contested terrain," and suggests further productive study for historians. Likewise, the entangled processes of citybuilding and skyscraper design, and considerations of public versus individual rights are probed by Keith Revell and Max Page, yet they examine these issues in the context of different social and professional groups. The gendered qualities of skyscraper spaces and symbolism, and popular culture's absorption of the skyscraper as a spatial and experiential norm are at the center of Lisa Fine's and Merrill Schleier's essays, and the very nature of urban masculinity plays a significant role in Edward Wolner's study of fraternal orders and their skyscraper lodges.

This considerable topical and analytical overlap serves as a hinge between studies that are rooted in varied historical subdisciplines. This cross-disciplinary conversation, however, is enabled by a consistent *cultural approach* to the architectural history of the city.[6] The authors

bring to this history observations concerning the spaces and structures in which personal and cultural forces operated, and they place aesthetic knowledge in a historical context that will explain motivations and perceptions. They identify the skyscraper as a focal point in the urban landscape – a physical place – where relationships and negotiations within and among groups defined by race, class, profession, and gender were concentrated and enacted.

The cultural history of architecture effectively engages Architecture with a capital A (signature or iconic buildings), as well as generic tall buildings that constitute the skyline, city streets, and office interiors. In these pages, a constellation of great American skyscrapers, urban ensembles, and planning milestones – the Chicago Loop and Rockefeller Center, the Woolworth Building, the Metropolitan Life and Tribune towers, the Flatiron Building, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, and the New York 1916 zoning ordinance – loom large. Authors make no attempt to sidestep these major monuments; in fact, they serve as the primary subject of a number of the essays. These studies, however, are not focused on authorship and architectural style, but on meaning, experience, and the relationship of these architectures and events with public spaces and social life. With a collective voice, the authors assert that the skyscraper, the major monument of the modern American city, is an excellent candidate for the cultural approach that frequently bypasses monuments to interpret "the spaces between," or the "nooks and crannies of the urban environment."[7]

Visual materials play a critical role in this collection, which suggests their significance as interpretive tools in urban architectural study. They document specific buildings, sites, and events, and they record cultural attitudes about the skyscraper and the modern city. Many images reproduced here are the work of commercial photographic companies, stock photographs intended for mass production as postcards and stereoviews. Others represent elaborate constructions by corporations and other groups or the creative experiments of art photographers, architects, and planners. Among their subjects are distant views and busy streets seen from atop skyscraper towers, panoramic skylines, the daily life of a skyscraper office, an imagined city of the future, and a city whose present is in constant dialogue with its past.[8]

Visual materials offer us a window, a nontextual commentary, on the urban experience. Commercial photographs of skyscraper offices, for example, not only provide valuable information about workspaces and behavioral norms, but also document corporate and municipal strategies to construct self-portraits legitimizing and boosting their political, economic, and social influence. "It is noticeable," stated one turn-of-the-century journalist, "that every American city and town that aspires to metropolitan importance wants to have at least one skyscraper – one that can be illustrated on a picture postcard and sent far and wide as evidence of modernity and a go-ahead spirit."[9]

Likewise, art photography of skyscrapers, frequently the subject of visual analysis or a survey of a photographer's technical and artistic accomplishments, is situated here in a literary and historical context. Photographers turned repeatedly to the skyscraper as *the* object of the modern city, a site for their experiments with technics and technique.[10] At the same time, they imprinted on film the disparate forces of urban culture – of history and invention, of creation and destruction, of fear and excitement – and sought there to reconcile them.[11]

Stereoviews, a valuable tool for documenting specific urban landscapes, are also rich in cultural content. These three-dimensional virtual glimpses of city architecture and life were originally offered to the parlor set, and a number of them appear in these pages. A view from a high