

# VANESSA JOAN MÜLLER

## DOUBLE EMPIRE

in:

BETTINA POUSTTCHI - REALITY RESET

144 pages, english / german

Von der Heydt Museum Wuppertal, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008

Buildings are static; our experience of space, by contrast, is dynamic. Even observing architecture produces a topography of the visible constituted by perspectival foreshortening, plummeting lines, and additive gazes at different parts of the building.

The video *Double Empire* from the year 2000 breaks down the static structure of the Empire State Building in New York by means of the fragmenting camera perspective and rearranges the architecture of the building beyond the actually visible. This cinematic approach to the legendary building begins with a shot of the upper floors, glides down along the facade for a while, and then plunges into the depths in a seemingly endless journey along the serial grid of the facade. Fragments of the architecture are multiplied and cut behind one another in such a way that a pulsing structure emerges and reduces the skyscraper to a sequence of light and dark. The height of the building is expanded into infinity; ideas of the urbanity of the filmic dynamic are made parallel. The resulting representation does not aim at recognition but rather offers a media equivalent of the psychological aspect of perceiving space. Only after phases of acceleration and deceleration does the vertical vortex lead into the depths of the lower, darker parts of the building. The tip of the tower, which in a spatial structure that distinguished between top and bottom would have been at the beginning, enters the image only as the final shot; hence the most significant part of the building, which makes it identifiable as the Empire State Building, is introduced only at the end of the tracking shot.

In this cinematic approach to the iconic high-rise, architecture becomes a dynamic construct that questions empirical notions of space. The gaze plunging into the depths and the seemingly endless grid structure of the building create an imagination of the urban that

reformats the building blocks of the real and turns metropolitan energy into a psychologically loaded backdrop. *Double Empire* is in that sense not only a deconstructive counterpart to Andy Warhol's eight-hour film *Empire*, but also an attempt to produce its own, genuinely cinematic experiential reality that does not deny its manipulative character. Rather, the repetition of the uniform grid draws attention to the act of seeing, which cannot create its own image beyond the one presented cinematically and which can never grasp the building itself as a metaphorically charged totality, communicated in part and precisely by cinematic means, as the epitome of New York.