

**FROM HARDCORE TO SOFT CORE: RECONSTRUCTING THE IMAGE OF TIMES SQUARE  
AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF PLACE**

by

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Master of City Planning (M.C.P.)**

at the

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology**

June 1995

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## A B S T R A C T

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Since the 1970s, cities have looked to the histories and traditions of place to provide new settings for consumption as both people and economic production have become more mobile. Festival marketplaces, historic districts and restored waterfronts have familiar elements in new urban typology of place and integral components of many cities' urban redevelopment strategies. In places like Faneuil Hall and South Street Seaport historic architecture provides the stage set for the reconstruction of an image that is rooted in the past but which has been redeployed for new commercial uses.

The image of Times Square as the neon-lit backdrop for fantasy and desire has been a unique and enduring icon of American popular culture. But with the passing of the golden age of Broadway in the 1920s, Times Square entered a long period of decline and neglect. Beginning in the early 1980s, therefore, the City launched a major redevelopment effort to attract new businesses to Times Square and clean up its badly tarnished image. However, unlike the privatized commercial enclaves that have been largely invented from scratch, Times Square is still a living and vital part of the urban public realm. Thus, as the City and developers have attempted to reconstruct its image and rationalize its economic role, Times Square has become highly contested political terrain.

This thesis examines the process by which the image of Times Square has changed as a result of urban redevelopment and economic restructuring over the last fifteen years. This thesis argues that the struggle to shape a vision of the new Times Square and control the reconstructed images of its past is the result of competing claims to the economic and social value of place. It argues further that we are witnessing the emergence of a new instrumental place-image for Times Square which reflects its primary function today as a center for mainstream entertainment and leisure.

Thesis Advisor: Professor Lawrence Vale  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I have had the good fortune over the last year to take part in a challenging and vital dialogue on the politics of urban design and the social life of cities with the two members of my thesis committee. This dialogue has informed much of my thinking on the subject of how places are shaped in the larger environment of social relations and political symbols. I would therefore like first to acknowledge the contribution of time and intellect of my advisor, **Professor Lawrence Vale**. I have been consistently inspired by the scope of his analytical vision, from the politics of the design of national capitals to public housing; my interest in the power of symbolic urban places like Times Square is motivated by much the same vision. My thesis reader, **Professor Lisa Peattie**, has shared with me a wealth of experience and insight on how people forge a politics of place, and challenged me to adopt a rigorous theoretical approach to understanding its dynamics.

There are several people who encouraged me to pursue this topic further from its early stages as a class research project. I would like to thank two in particular: **Professor Dennis Frenchman** and **Amy Brown**. During my frequent trips to New York to do research, I benefited from the commitment of time and professionalism of many individuals involved in the redevelopment of Times Square. In particular, I would like to thank: **Naresh Kapadia** the Project Manager for the 42nd Street Development Project; **Peter Kohlman** and the staff at the Times Square Business Improvement District; **Brian Segal** of the “New 42” Corporation; **Minakshi Srinivasen** at the New York City Department of City Planning; **Radhika Balakrishnan**, project officer at the Ford Foundation; the staff of the Municipal Art Society, Manhattan Community Board #4, Avery Library at Columbia University and Rotch Library at MIT.

Finally there are two very special people without whom this project would not have been possible. At several points during the course of my research **Erik Mar** has provided a critical insight that has informed and enriched my thinking on the nature of places and borders in the human space of identity. Although it was not always as apparent as it should have been, my gratitude is deepest to **Jyotsna Uppal**, in whom I have found the inspiration to always ask the most difficult questions of oneself and one’s work even, and especially, when the “truth” is elusive.

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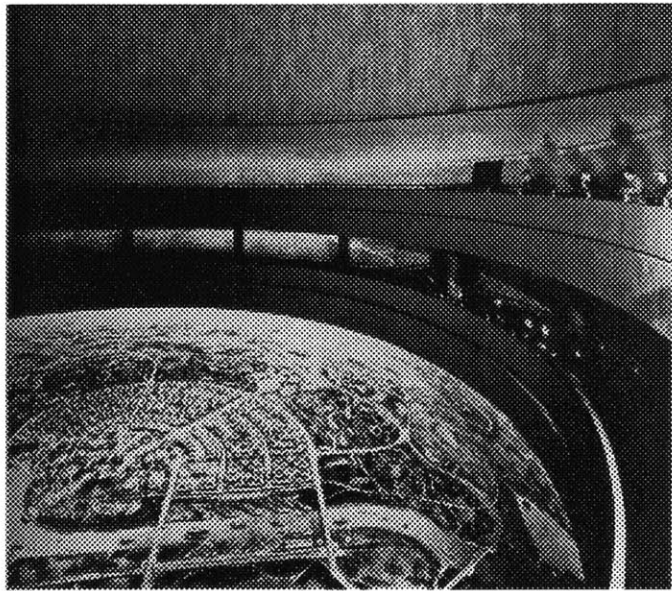
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*In the city of Fedora, that grey stone metropolis, stands a metal building with a crystal globe in every room. Looking into each globe, you see a blue sky, the model of a different Fedora. These are the forms the city could have taken if, for one reason or another, it had not become what we see today. In every age someone, looking at Fedora as it was, imaged a way of making it the ideal city, but while he constructed his miniature model, Fedora was already no longer the same place as before, and what had been until yesterday a possible future became only a toy in a glass globe.*

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*



## I N T R O D U C T I O N

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I first visited Times Square in the 1982. I remember coming out of the Port Authority Bus Terminal and staring straight into the gaping maw of 42nd Street--pinstriped commuters and runaway teenagers, doomsday preachers, the soulless and the soulful, street peddlers and flesh peddlers, flashing neon advertising everything from "Nathan's Hot Dogs" to "Live Girls." I threaded my way along the crowded sidewalk toward the luminous glow of Times Square in a stranger's pilgrimage to the center of it all. In that short journey, the whole city in all its beauty and ugliness, hope and despair, seemed to have been compressed into a just a few city blocks.

I took that same journey again last summer, over twelve years later, and found something quite different. The theaters on are almost all boarded up now, condemned as part of the current redevelopment plan, the sidewalks nearly deserted, and 42nd Street has the eerie appearance of an empty stage set awaiting its next production. By contrast the rest of Times Square seems even more lively than it was ten years ago<sup>1</sup>. New supersigns and colorful banners lend air of festive conviviality to the area that has smoothed over its rougher edges. You have to fight your way past the knots of camera-toting tourists and wide-eyed school kids that fill up the sidewalks on Broadway. "Times Square--

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1. I am making a distinction here between the particular way in which redevelopment has occurred since the early 1980s on 42nd Street and in the rest of Times Square. However, for the rest of the paper I refer to Times Square and 42nd Street somewhat interchangeably. A note of geographical explanation may therefore be needed here. Forty-second Street as it is used here refers except where indicated only to the one block and a half area between Broadway and Eighth Avenue. The boundaries of Times Square, on the other hand, are usually considered to extend from 42nd Street as far north as 53rd Street and include the two main triangles of the "bowtie" formed by Broadway and Seventh Avenue, Duffy Square to the north and Times Square itself to the south. However, while 42nd Street makes up a small part of Times Square's geography and has its own spatial and social dynamic, it has always been the symbolic other half of the total image of Times Square, the other being the neon landscape at the bowtie itself. It is in the two areas' combined symbolic identity, therefore, that I am considering them two parts of a single place called "Times Square."

everything you want in a neighborhood... and getting better” reads the eye-catching ad, and you are almost convinced.

This thesis is about what has happened in Times Square in the twelve years between my first visit there and my visit last summer. These years correspond to a period in which the City has focused considerable energy and resources on luring investment to the area as part of its Midtown development strategy. At each step in this development process I have sought to understand the motives of the various different actors in the context of the broader struggle to define and control urban space, both in terms of the physical and symbolic value of place. The iterative and incremental changes in the use and representation of Times Square over time have been connected to the shifting social, economic and cultural landscape of the modern city.

The authors of a recent collection of historical essays on Times Square have described this process of change in terms of the "invention" of place. In the Introduction to *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, William R. Taylor explains: "We hoped that by stressing invention, we could steer attention to the deliberate tactics and strategies that were employed to shape the cultural productions of the area. The bustling cultural scene of the 1920s and 1930s was not inevitable; it was contrived."<sup>2</sup> In the final essay, architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable adds the notion of reinvention to complete the cycle of invention/reinvention in the context of the more recent efforts to redevelop Times Square:

The efforts to [save Times Square] are focused on preserving myths and illusions and some emblematic characteristics divorced from their original function and meanings--metaphors, of a sort, for Times Square. Times Square cannot be saved in any form resembling what so many want to save; the process of physical and economic conversion is overwhelming and irreversibly at work...Times Square is dead; long live Times Square!<sup>3</sup>

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2. William Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square* (New York, 1991), p. xii.

3. Ada Louise Huxtable, "Re-Inventing Times Square," in Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square*, p. 370.

The dual process by which space is constructed as both place and place-image is the starting point for this paper. I draw on many of the insights in *Inventing Times Square* to develop an historically-grounded analysis of how the urban planning and development process in New York City has reconstructed Times Square in the 1980s and 90s. My approach to analyzing this process, however, departs from both of the interpretations expressed above--that places can be deliberately invented by "contrivance" or artifice or that they are the byproducts of inevitable structural forces of change. I argue that notions of place arise out a matrix of social interactions which simultaneously create a spatial order and its representations. The primary elements of place are thus the space in which prosaic social practices occur and the images, rituals and myths that evolve over time as a result of these practices.<sup>4</sup> The relationship between these elements is not necessarily a deterministic one of cause and effect or base and superstructure.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the lines of causality between spatial practices and representations may operate in both directions or autonomously of one another. The singular notion of invention does not adequately capture the dialectical nature of this relationship and assumes an originary moment that I believe cannot be established. I therefore use the term construction or reconstruction to indicate that place-making is a iterative process of building from the fragments of old and new.

My second aim in the thesis is to locate social configurations of power in the various place-making strategies that have given Times Square its particular identity over

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4. The seminal work on how notions of national identity and tradition are constructed through the discourse of nation-building is Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (New York, 1983). I have drawn upon Hobsbawm's concept of how national traditions, customs and rituals are "invented" as an instrumentalist process of nation-building to analyze how the traditions of place have been similarly reconstructed by planners and developers.

5. The roots of the debate over the relationship between the economic base of production and ideological superstructure go back to Marx's original formulation. However, neo-Marxists like Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells and David Harvey have theorized the spatial dimension of this formulation in terms of space itself is produced and represented under modern ("late") capitalism. I am most sympathetic in this debate to the general theoretical position of Lefebvre, who argues that the spatial representation--in the images and symbols of place--operate relatively autonomously of the economic production of space. He develops this theory most comprehensively in *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

time. In doing so, I seek to analyze the redevelopment process as a mechanism through which the power to reorder space and reconstruct place is manifested. Certainly there are few other places in the world whose identity is more closely associated with the images of corporate advertising and commercialized entertainment. At one level then, Times Square is a symbolic landscape of modern mass culture and the corporate power to shape it.<sup>6</sup> At another level, however, the image of place emerges out of a particular set of social experiences, habits and rituals. The spatial relations of power thus operate both at the "microphysical" level of day-to-day social contestation and in the larger realm of cultural and economic production.<sup>7</sup> The power of architects, planners and developers to shape place is often defined in terms of the economic logic or formal order of space. But as places have become increasingly important as sites for the production and consumption of information and ideas instead of goods, the power to control the image of place becomes critical to the development process. The politics of planning thus embraces the contested symbols and meanings of place as well as the struggle to directly shape the physical environment.

The final proposition that I put forth is that the power to reconstruct place within the planning and redevelopment process operates through the market-based forces and relations of economic production. Places function as economic commodities with a specific use and exchange value that is determined by a number of economic, political and cultural factors. The market-based value of places rises and falls according to their

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6. In understanding how landscapes can be interpreted as reflections of underlying the political economy of place, I have found particularly useful Sharon Zukin's *Landscapes of Power* (Berkeley, CA, 1991).

7. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault develops the concept of a "microphysics of power" to describe a system of tactics, strategies and operations through which institutional power is exercised. This apparatus of domination is never total, however; power is contested at every step. The "microphysics" of power are "univocal," he argues; "they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of at least temporary inversion of power relations." (Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader*, p. 174). In this paper I have drawn upon this dialectical notion of power to understand how the various forces of urban redevelopment operate to transform public space. I have been influenced by Christine Boyer's Foucauldian analysis of the history of urban planning in the U.S. in *Dreaming the Rational City*. (Cambridge, MA, 1983).



location, potential use and, increasingly, image in a dialectical process of "creative destruction" of the urban environment <sup>8</sup>. The perceived value of Times Square in terms of investment potential for private developers and tax revenues to the city has fluctuated since the beginning of the century according to the changing tastes and technologies of urban popular culture. The "postindustrial" transformation of the U.S. toward a predominantly service-based economy has had a profound impact on social and spatial order of cities over the last twenty-five years <sup>9</sup>. This transformation, I argue, has revalorized Times Square as a setting for new forms of entertainment and consumption in which image and aesthetics are crucial to the reconstruction of place.

In the title of the thesis, I have tried to capture in shorthand the complex transformation that I believe Times Square is undergoing. The phrase, "From Hardcore to Soft Core", is intended as a *double-entendre* referring to the literal replacement of "hardcore" sexual subculture of Times Square with the more soft-edged titillation of mainstream advertising and entertainment. The second meaning refers more broadly to the shift in the economic function and image of Times Square as envisioned in the redevelopment process from a conventional business and commercial district to a center for "soft" entertainment and tourism uses. This shift has redirected the focus of planning from new development to preservation and from the "hard" built form of place to its "soft" representations in images and symbols. In the second part of the title, I divide the redevelopment of Times Square into two related processes by which its image has been

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8. The concept of "creative destruction" was developed by the economist Joseph Schumpeter to describe the historical cycles of modernization under capitalism. I believe this process can also be seen in the patterns of uneven social and economic development in cities.

9. Sociologist Daniel Bell first described the rise of "postindustrial" society in the 1960s when white collar jobs and service industries began to replace the traditional manufacturing base of the American economy. Manuel Castells and Saskia Sassen have questioned the degree to which the shift toward a service-based economy has meant a necessary decline in manufacturing. They argue, for example, that certain service and information intensive industries have generated many new manufacturing needs. I nevertheless find the phase "postindustrial restructuring" useful as a shorthand way of describing a general pattern of economic change over the last twenty five years. See Castells, *The Informational City* (Cambridge, MA, 1989) and Sassen, *Global Cities: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ, 1991)

manipulated to support new development and the place itself is commodified for new and higher value uses.

The thesis is organized into three chapters. In the first chapter, "Reconstructing Times Square," I reach back to various points in the history of Times Square to trace how its socio-spatial order and representation have developed in response to particular configurations of economic and political power. The second chapter, "Designing Desire: The 42nd Street Development Project," I focus on how the City in its fourteen year redevelopment effort has sought to reconstruct the image and reorder the space of Times Square from 1984 to the present. The final chapter, "Soft Core: Postindustrial Restructuring and the Commodification of Times Square," I locate the redevelopment of Times Square in the larger framework of urban economic change over the last twenty five years. I conclude with a critical evaluation of the underlying politics of the 42nd Street Development Project and its implications for planners and citizens concerned with the preserving the social value of place in the modern city.

### (RE)CONSTRUCTING TIMES SQUARE

Edward L. Bernays, the son of Jewish immigrants from Austria and the nephew of Sigmund Freud, reflected in 1988 on the role of the public relations and image-brokering business he helped invent during the early development of Times Square:

Times Square wasn't well established in 1913. Then a very important theatre was built around Forty-ninth Street. After that the League of Theatres got to work with publicity. So, I think Times Square was developed by the press agents of that era.<sup>10</sup>

Bernays' wry observation highlights the degree to which the image of Times Square was consciously constructed to meet the needs of new forms of urban popular culture in turn-of-the-century New York City. As the city expanded northward from lower Manhattan, Times Square emerged as a transportation crossroads, which established its locational value a center of commerce. Moreover, the rise of the new cultural forms like Broadway theater helped to shape a powerfully symbolic image of place that has carried down to the present.

The chapter examines the process by which places are constructed with reference to the history and social life of Times Square. It provides a theoretical framework within which to understand how various actors in the city are again seeking to shape an appropriate image for Times Square for new forms of entertainment and consumption and for a new national and international audience. The chapter is organized into four thematic sections. The first, "From Spectacle to Specter," presents a brief overview of how social, political and economic forces have shaped the image of Times Square since the beginning

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10. Quoted in William Leach, "Brokers and the New Industrial Order," in W. Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square*, p. 99.

of the century; the second, “Space and Place,” focuses on the processes of human agency by which space is transformed into a living place; the third, “The ‘Eye’ and the ‘I’ of Power,” considers the important relationships of social and spatial power and how they are played out on contested field of public space; and finally, “Social Space, Representation and the Politics of Planning” ties together the themes introduced in the previous sections in an analysis of how planning and development influences the production and representation of space.

### **From Spectacle to Specter**

Times Square officially became Times Square on April 9, 1904 when Mayor McClellan signed a proclamation renaming Longacre Square after the newly built Times Tower. The Times, declaring Times Square the “Name of the City’s New Center,”<sup>11</sup> sought to identify itself with the area’s emerging image as the city’s new crossroads of modern commerce and culture. The designation of the “Times Square” IRT station at Broadway and 42nd Street soon followed as part of a campaign by the Rapid Transit Commission to name stations along the new subway lines after major architectural landmarks. On the New Year’s Eve of its first year as Times Square, Times owner Adolph Ochs decided to use the Tower as the centerpiece of a spectacular public celebration for New Yorkers. “From base to dome the giant structure was alight,” marveled the Times, “a torch to usher in the new born, a funeral pyre for the old which pierced the very heavens.”<sup>12</sup>

Times Square was created in the twentieth century crucible of urban commerce, culture and myth. Its spatial and symbolic order was initiated by that first act of (re) naming, in which the identity of the Times Tower was forever inscribed upon the space of Times Square. As Adolf Ochs clearly understood, the creation of socially and

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11. *New York Times*, April 9, 1904.

12. *New York Times*, January 1, 1905.

spatially bound ritual is a critical component in the invention of place. The ritual of the New Year's Eve pilgrimage, the appropriation of the streets, the contained carnivalesque, all centered around the staged spectacle of the countdown has indelibly inscribed the image and myth of Times Square on the popular imagination. Five years later, the Times consciously created another institutionalized tradition, that of the billboard (and later the electric "ticker") news displayed on the second story of the Times Tower.<sup>13</sup>

The introduction of electric lighting for advertisement in the beginning of the century further melded the identity of Times Square with its commercially constructed spectacle of place, and inspired yet another name, The Great White Way. In 1911 the English writer Arnold Bennet visited New York for the first time and found himself "overpowered by Broadway." He was awe-struck by the "enormous moving images of things in electricity--a mastodon kitten playing with a ball of thread, an umbrella in a shower of rain, siphons of soda-water being emptied and filled, gigantic horses galloping at full-speed and incredible heraldry of chewing gum....Sky signs!"<sup>14</sup> The kaleidoscope of kinetic light on the Great White Way formed what historian David Nye has called the "dynamic sublime" of the modern cityscape<sup>15</sup>. As much as Broadway's commercial and entertainment moguls might have wanted it, the neon signs were not mere signifiers for the commodities they advertised; they transformed and dematerialized the city itself into a collective image with its own meanings. H. G. Wells expressed the power of the city as spectacle to transform both the object and subject: "New York is lavish of light, it is lavish of everything, it is full of the sense of spending from an inexhaustible supply. For a time one is irresistibly drawn into the universal belief in that inexhaustible supply."<sup>16</sup> (see **figs. 1.1** and **1.2**)

In his use of a quantitative vocabulary, moreover, Wells recognizes that the images of lavishness and inexhaustibility are reflections of the underlying forces of urban

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13. Jill Stone, *Times Square: A Pictorial History* (New York, 1983), pp. 102 - 3.

14. Quoted in David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), p. 193.

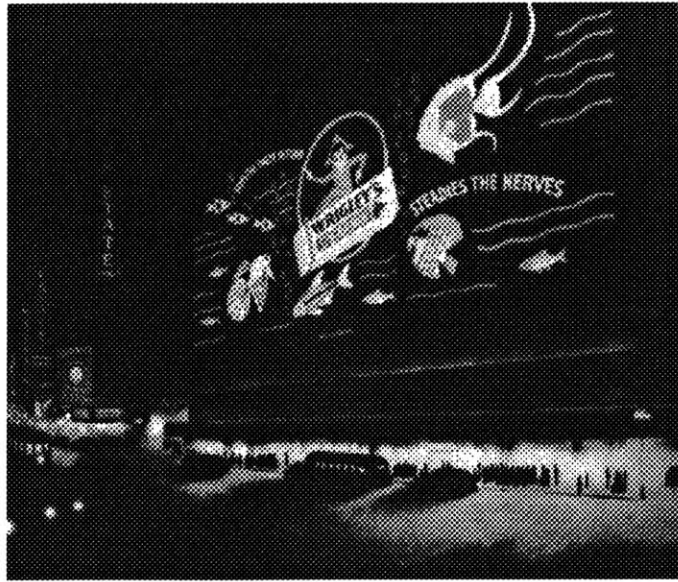
15. Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, p. 196.

16. Quoted in Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, p. 195

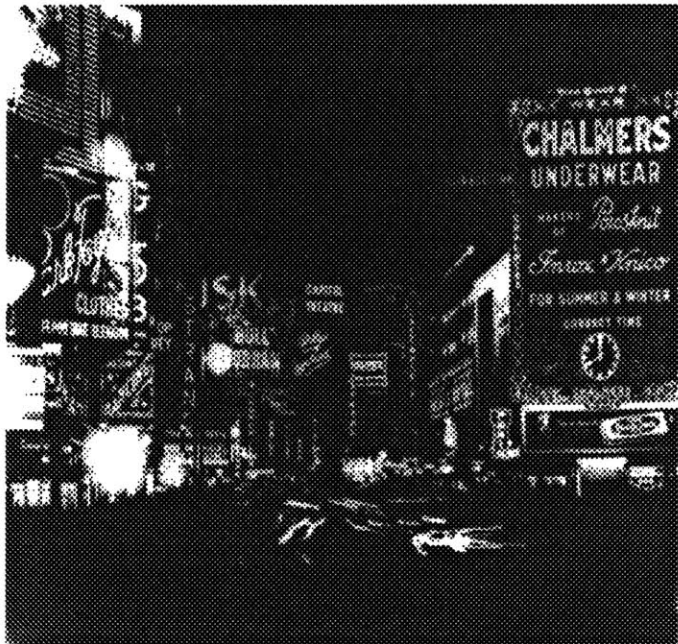
**Constructing the Spectacle  
of Place:**

**The Great White Way**

**fig. 1.1**  
The Wringley Spearmint Gum  
neon supersign in the 1920s.  
(source: Stone, *Times Square: A  
Pictorial History*, p. 108)



**fig. 1.2**  
Times Square, 1919.  
The cityscape as "electronic sublime."  
**Museum of the City of New York**  
(source: Stone, *Times Square: A  
Pictorial History*, p. 109.)



political economy. The image of Times Square in the early twentieth century is inseparable from spectacle of glamour and desire created by advertisers and businesses to exploit the commercial potential of new forms of entertainment and consumption. By the 1920s, Times Square must indeed have seemed to be the “center of the universe,” as Edward Bernays remembered it; it was “a staggering machine of desire”<sup>17</sup> in the earthly garden of modern consumer and entertainment delights. Bernays operated the “desire machine” to stunning effect using some of the very same principles of psychoanalysis pioneered by his famous uncle. Modern advertising became a “science of unlocking the human mind” as the “image” (ego) of consumers, commodities and sites of consumption was constructed to serve the needs and desires of the emerging mass market<sup>18</sup>. Place thus became image as much as it did form.

The invention of Times Square as real estate and commercial venture was tied to larger changes in the social and cultural landscape of the city. In an incisive analysis of the Midtown real estate market at the turn of the century, Elizabeth Blackmar identifies how commercial “risk” comes to replace older notions of respectability as the mediating factor between cultural and economic value. The breach opened up by economic forces in the “cultural equation of desirability and respectability” paved the way for Times Square’s emergence as a uniquely “amoral” commercial space in the city.<sup>19</sup> Times Square’s position as a major transportation hub, moreover, increased land values and made it easy to bring the spectator to the spectacle. Until the 1920s, new and innovative forms of theatrical extravaganza like Zeigfeld’s Follies, the Hippodrome, and Hammerstein’s Paradise Roof Garden as well as vaudeville attracted large numbers of New Yorkers and tourists alike.

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17. Leach, “Brokers,” p. 104; 99.

18. Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, (New York, 1976), p. 84.

19. Elizabeth Blackmar, “Uptown Real Estate and the Creation of Times Square,” in Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square*, p. 64.

By the end of the 1920s, the innovations in economic and cultural capital that had given rise to Times Square had largely run their course. Contemporary observers spoke of the “decline” of the area and declared that Times Square had “peaked” as the nation’s premier cultural and entertainment center.<sup>20</sup> The change in perception was caused by mutually-reinforcing transformations in popular forms of entertainment and in the class and ethnic composition of Times Square’s pleasure-seeking audiences. In the early years of the century, the Broadway theaters provided Times Square with an image of “almost anything goes” that was nevertheless largely contained within the bounds of white, middle-class gentility. The onslaught of Prohibition and the Depression, however, created economic pressures within the “legitimate” theater industry to convert to “low” cultural attractions with high turnover and wide popular appeal. By the mid-1930s, most of the legitimate theaters on 42nd Street had been converted to “grind” movie palaces offering cheap, second-run shows with popular themes of mayhem and immorality. Broadway met the Midway in what one contemporary described as the “bargain basement counter” of mass-produced spectacles: “There are chow-meineries, peep shows for men only, flea circuses, lectures on what killed Rudolph Valentino, jitney ballrooms and a farrago of other attractions which would have sickened the heart of the Broadwayite of even ten years ago.”<sup>21</sup>

The transition from “high” to “low” forms of public entertainment in Times Square in the 1930s was accompanied by a masculinization of the street and a rougher and more dangerous image. In tracing the evolution of a gay male cultural space in Times Square, George Chauncy, Jr. notes that the Depression had forced growing numbers working-class men to support themselves by hustling in Times Square. The presence of this new “rough trade” hustler within the male street culture on 42nd Street combined with the expansion of burlesque to create an image of the area as an

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20. Blackmar, “Uptown Real Estate,” p. 65.

21. Quoted in Brooks McNamara, “The Entertainment District at the End of the 1930s,” in Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square*, p. 181.



exclusively “working-class male domain.”<sup>22</sup> This perception was reinforced during the war by the large numbers of servicemen who flocked to Times Square to “let their hair down” before heading off to an uncertain future.

The imaging of Times Square by the movie industry in the 1930s and 40s, particularly in the institution of the “opening premier,” kept a glamorous and star-studded public face on the area even while the streets told a much different story. The Depression-era Hollywood musicals, like *42nd Street* and *Ziegfeld’s Follies* kept alive the enchanted myth of Broadway’s bright lights and big dreams (see **figs. 1.3** and **1.4**). In the 1940s, the wartime recovery boosted spirits and profits on Broadway and added a new audience of servicemen who filled the nightclubs, theaters and restaurants. Times Square functioned during the war as the symbolic stage set of a powerful pageant of national and nationalist myth-making. The Army recruitment booth at located at the crossroads of the Broadway and Seventh Avenue “bowtie” was where large numbers of men went to sign up for the war. Crowds gathered at the theaters to buy war bonds and, in the largest spontaneous celebration the area had ever seen, more than two million people descended upon Times Square on August 15, 1945 to mark the end of the war, the moment immortalized in the in the image of cathartic abandon in the soldier’s kiss<sup>23</sup> (see **figs. 1.5** and **1.6**)

From the highpoint of Times Square re-enchantment during the war, its reputation entered a period of steady decline through the 1950s and 60s. Suburbanization and the widespread access to television and movies reduced the market for mass entertainment in public urban districts like Times Square. The theaters owners turned to showing B-movies and live “freak show” acts with ever-greater shock value to retain dwindling audiences. A series of Supreme Court’s decisions in the 1960s which brought sexually explicit materials under the protection of the First Amendment ushered in the

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22. George Chauncy, Jr., “The Policed: Gay Men’s Strategies of Everyday Resistance,” in Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square*, p. 322.

23. Jill Stone, *Times Square: A Pictorial History* (New York: Macmillan, 1982), p. 125.

## From Broadway to Hollywood



**fig. 1.3**

Ziegfeld's *Midnight Frolic* was a nightly feature on the roof garden of the New Amsterdam Theater from 1913 to 1927. Museum of the City of New York (source: Taylor, ed *Inventing Times Square*)



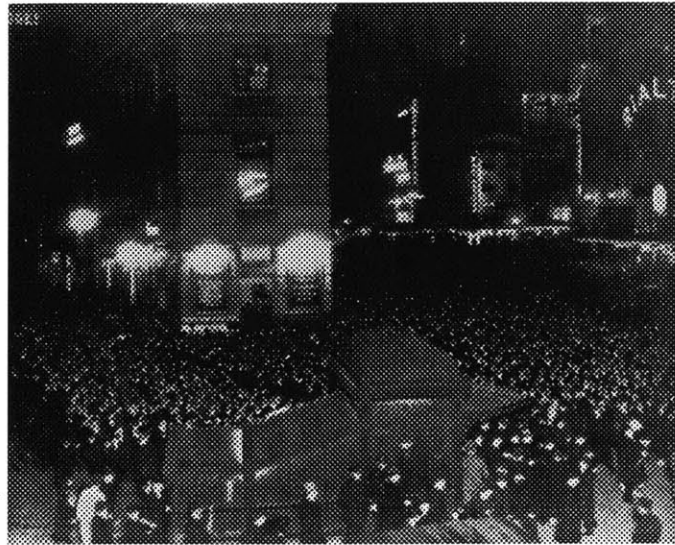
**fig 1.4**

The Ziegfeld Girl immortalized on the screen by Lucille Ball in the 1940s. *Movie Star News* (source: Stone, *Times Square: A Pictorial History*, p. 96)

## Times Square as a Setting for Public Ritual

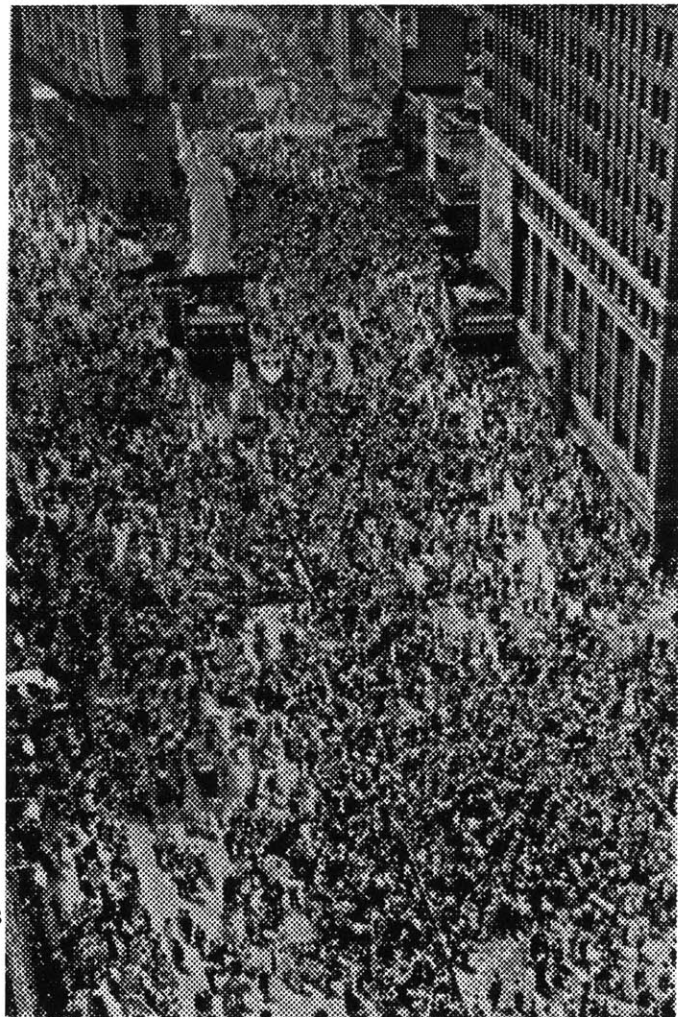
**fig. 1.5**

Crowds on election night watching the returns, November 1916. New York Public Library (source: Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square*)



**fig. 1.6**

VJ Day, August 15, 1945. Crowds await the announcement of the war's end, which sparked the largest celebration ever in Times Square. World Wide Photos (source: Stone, *Times Square: A Pictorial History*, p. 124.)



era of hardcore pornography and live sex shows mainly on 42nd Street that has dominated the image of Times Square until today. (see **figs. 1.7** and **1.8**) Increasing crime in the area related to drugs and prostitution prompted a series of “clean up” campaigns in the 1970s and contributed to the perception of Times Square as a “night frontier” of danger and otherness<sup>24</sup>.

A study of crime in the so-called “Bright Light District” in the late 1970s indicated that, although most of the illegal activity on West 42nd Street fell into the category of “victimless crime,” the area was perceived as a lawless frontier zone in the city. A series of extremely violent and random crimes in the 1970s certainly contributed to this perception. However, a more insidious factor was the racist perception of the area as a “no (*white*) man’s land” in response to the increasing numbers of Black and Hispanic youth who patronized and hustled Times Square.<sup>25</sup> The specter of danger and deviance in Times Square was also reflected in the changing images coming out of Hollywood in the late 1960s and 1970s. The relatively benign portrait of gay hustling on 42nd Street in *Midnight Cowboy* had by the early 1970s become a symbol of urban dystopia in *Taxi Driver*.

The journey of Times Square from a spectacle of bright lights and glamour at the beginning of the century to the more recent specter of urban danger followed a tortuous and unpredictable path. Its image was shaped by the intersecting and diverging forces of entrepreneurial and corporate capital and popular culture. The reconstruction of Times Square has involved both a changing set of social and spatial relationships as well as collection of images, symbols and myths that defined it as a place. The multiple and multilayered reconfigurations of physical space and its symbolic representations as place together define the process by which Times Square has been and will be created.

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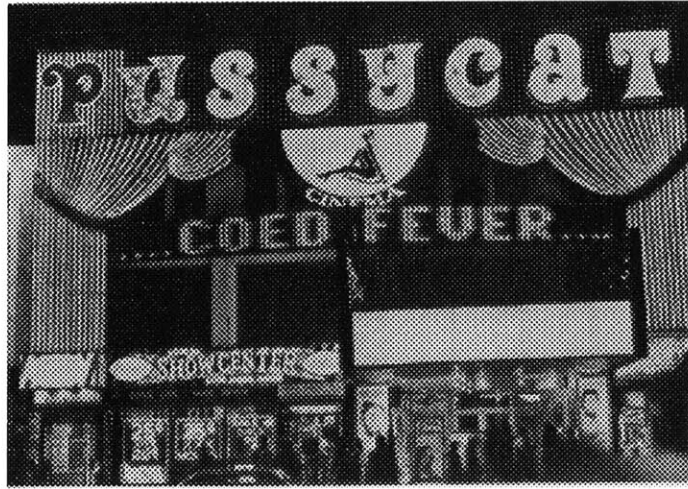
24. On the persistence and locational logic of prostitution in Times Square see Laurence Selnick, “Private Parts in Public Places” in Taylor, ed, *Inventing Times Square*.

25. Stanley Buder, “Forty Second Street at the Crossroads, History of Broadway to 8th Avenue,” in “West 42nd Street: The Bright Light Zone,” (City University of New York, 1978) p. 74.

## Times Square Honky Tonk

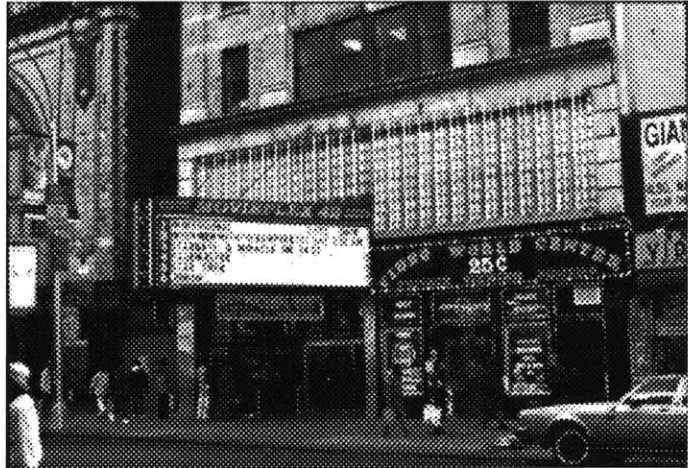
**fig. 1.7**

Pornography became prominent feature of 42nd Street beginning in the 1960s. Sex "emporiums" like the Pussycat developed in the 1970s and '80s. Daniel Meltzer (source: *Stone, Times Square: A Pictorial History*, p. 155.)



**fig. 1.8**

Today, first-run movie theaters compete with the few remaining sex establishments on 42nd Street..



## Space and Place

In a now famous essay entitled "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," Michel Foucault identifies the problem of space, rather than time or history, as the central preoccupation of the twentieth century. "The space in which we live, from which we are drawn out of ourselves, just where the erosion of ourselves, our time, our history takes place, this space that wears us down and consumes us, is in itself heterogeneous." This heterogeneous space of the everyday, he adds, is shaped by a "set of relationships that define positions which cannot be equated or in any way superimposed"<sup>26</sup>

Foucault's observation that space is also the fundamental anxiety of our era has been borne out recently in the proliferation of books and articles declaring an almost millenarian end to the possibility of urban public space. A recent collection of essays that is representative of this genre and has received wide attention is *Variations on a Theme Park*, which projects a foregone conclusion in its subtitle, *The New American City and the End of Public Space*. In the Introduction, Michael Sorkin explains that "theme park presents its happy regulated vision of pleasure--all those artfully hoodwinking forms--as a substitute for the democratic public realm, and it does so appealingly by stripping troubled urbanity of its sting, of the presence of the poor, of crime, of dirt, of work." In *Public Space*, a book that represents the optimists' counterargument to that of *Variations on a Theme Park*, the architects and urbanists uncritically celebrate the rebuilding of festival marketplaces, urban parks and waterfronts that, they argue, are helping to weave back together the frayed fabric of the cities and communities.<sup>27</sup>

The problem with much of the current debate about the meaning of public space is its point of departure in the essentialist notion that some ideal of democratic space has either been lost or is being found. The danger in this formulation is that public

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26. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in Joan Ockman, ed. *Architecture Culture 1943-1968*. New York: Rizzoli, 1993, p. 421.

27. Stephen Carr, Mark Francis, Leanne G. Rivlin, and Andrew Stone. *Public Space*. (New York: Cambridge University, 1993).

space becomes reified into a discrete and measurable thing that is either created or destroyed, present or absent, in the city. On the one hand, this is clearly true: laws define the precise boundaries of public versus private space, specific value is attached to it as a public good and it is moved in and out of the public domain. But, as Foucault reminds us, the essence of space is not the physical thing itself, but the complex set of social forces and relationships that order the physical environment. The French sociologist Henri Lefebvre has probably provided the most sustained theoretical argument for the reassertion of space as a social product intrinsic to the economic mode of production. Space, according to Lefebvre, can be thought of as a "concrete abstraction" which functions both as a form of material production and a mode of representation<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, the process by which space is produced and reproduced is dialectical. "Space and political organization of space," Lefebvre insists, "express social relationships but also react back upon them."<sup>29</sup>

Lefebvre's formulation of a dual dialectic in both the production and representation of space suggests that there is a critical link between space and its imaged and imagined representations as place. Spaces come into being, he argues, "inhabited by a higher reality" as a series of lived places--sacred and profane, natural and social, practical and symbolic.<sup>30</sup> The creation of place-image, as Kevin Lynch has argued, depends upon the visual clarity or "legibility" of the cityscape. The "imageability" of a city is based on certain "clues" and spatial elements, such as paths, edges, nodes and districts which help to orient the observer and facilitate distinct mental mappings of the environment<sup>31</sup>. Visual signposts in the city can thus be used to map the multiple layering of past and present forms and images, and decipher their meanings. This "spirit of place," what the Romans called the *genius loci*, is often linked phenomenologically to

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28. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA, 1991), p. 27-30.

29. Quoted in Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, (New York, 1989), p.81.

30. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.34.

31. Kevin Lynch, *Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA, 1960), pp. 8 - 9.

natural elements which are brought together, or “gathered,” through human intervention and experience<sup>32</sup>. Thus Heidegger, in his seminal essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” speaks of the bridge as “gathering” the landscape around the stream, forming a place of sacred “dwelling” between earth and sky, man and god<sup>33</sup>.

Visual elements of the natural and man-made landscape form a kind of kit of parts of signifying images that we draw upon to construct a collective phenomenology of place. As we have seen, the images of Times Square, as well as the structures of space and time through which they are perceived, have been consciously created and manipulated to form a universally recognizable commercial identity and aesthetic that has changed over time. One of the first images to be associated with Times Square was its namesake, the Times Tower. Built by the *New York Times* Corporation in 1904, the Italian baroque-style “campanile” was second tallest building in Manhattan and provided the symbolic focus for an increasingly national media and entertainment empire based in Times Square in the early 1900s (see **figs. 1.9** and **1.10**). The bridge and the skyscraper entered the American popular imagination of what Joseph Nye calls the “geometrical sublime” in the late-eighteenth and early twentieth century as industrialization permanently altered physical and mental landscapes of place.<sup>34</sup> The skyscraper provided both the literal and symbolic vantage point from which the modern city could be surveyed and imagined as an intellectual totality. Roland Barthes, in his essay “The Eiffel Tower,” speaks of the panoramic vision made possible by the Tower as constituting the power to remake the city into a new kind of natural sublime:

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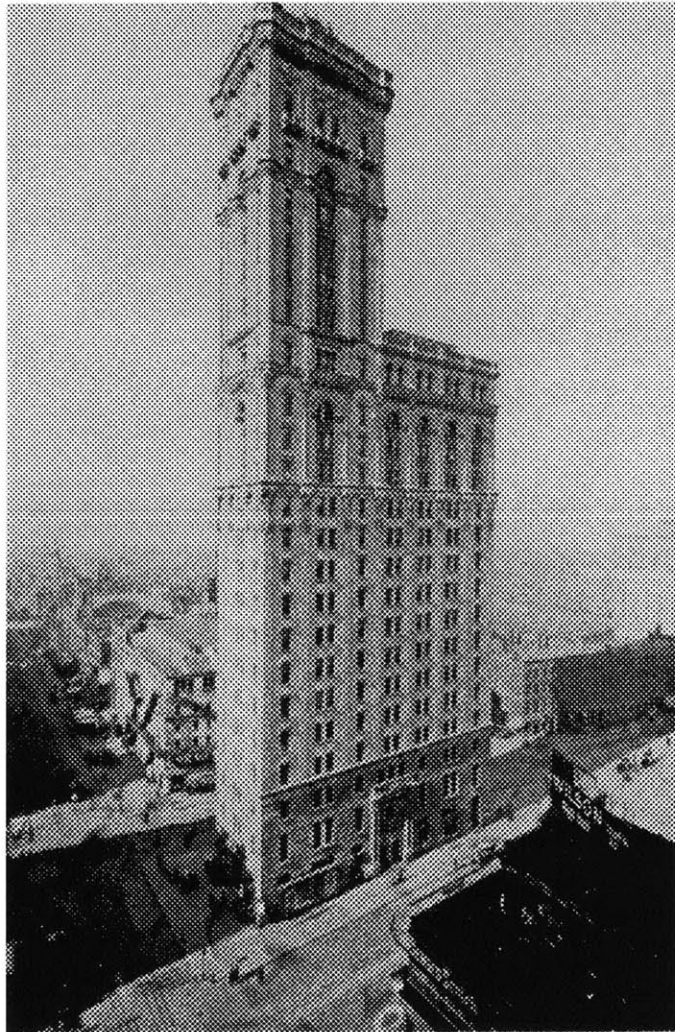
32. Christian Norberg-Schultz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York, 1979), p. 18.

33. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (New York, 1977), pp. 330 - 31.

34. On the notion and development of the “geometrical sublime” see Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, (Cambridge, MA, 1994) chap. 4.



## "Inventing" Times Square



**fig. 1.9**

The Times Tower completed in 1904 for the offices of the *New York Times*.  
New York Public Library  
(source: Stone, *Times Square: A Pictorial History*, p. 54.)



**fig. 1.10**

Broadway and the Times Tower at the end of the Roaring Twenties. New York Public Library  
(source: Stone, *Times Square: A Pictorial History*, p. 72.)

[B]y it, starting from it, the city joins up with the great natural themes which are offered to the curiosity of men: the ocean, the storm, the mountains, the snow, the rivers. To visit the Tower then, is to enter into contact not with a historical Sacred, as is the case with the majority of monuments, but rather with a new nature, that of human space<sup>35</sup>

The collapsing of the modern image of the city into the omniscient “human space” of the skyscraper has a corollary in the transformation of time through the use of electric lighting. The electronic cityscape of the Great White Way was at first associated with the colorful window displays along the Ladies Mile before it became synonymous with the neon commercial aesthetic of Times Square. By the 1920s, the identity of Times Square had fused almost completely with the spectacle of what tourist guides at the time called the “phantasmagoria of the lights and electric signs.”<sup>36</sup> The new city of lights altered the traditional rhythm of urban time by blurring distinctions between day and night, light and dark, work and leisure, and providing the visual backdrop for new forms of capitalist production and consumption. Walter Benjamin, in *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project), his massive unpublished study of the commodification of modern culture in Paris, uses the concept of the *phantasmagoria* (a backlit lantern) to describe how the spectacle of consumption in the Paris arcades is the projection, and not the mere reflection, of the social and economic relations of production. Thus, for Benjamin the

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35. Roland Barthes, *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* (New York, 1979), p. 8. Le Corbusier also described the panoramic, totalizing view from the Eiffel Tower in terms of the sublime: “...as the horizon widens more and more, one’s thought seems to take on a larger and more comprehensive cast: similarly, if everything in the physical sphere widens out, if the lungs expand more fully and the eye takes in vast distances, so too the spirit is roused to a vital activity.” (*The City of Tomorrow*, trans. Frederick Etchells, Cambridge, MIT, 1929, p. 186). Of course, for Le Corbusier the perception of the city from the automobile and the airplane became a prescriptive ideal for modern city form, which elided the details of time and place in favor of a uniform spatial order.

36. William Leach, “Commercial Aesthetics: Introductory Essay” in Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square*, p.236.

phantasmagoric images displayed in the arcades, like the spectacle of light in Times Square, had the power to both represent and reproduce the space of modern capitalism<sup>37</sup>.

Buildings, billboards and neon lights are the semiotic elements of the spectacle of space and time; but place takes on its full signified meaning only through the active body and imagination of the spectator. The nightly rituals of theater-going, shopping and cruising in Times Square engage the inanimate visual elements of space and reproduce them as part of living experience of place. In *The Poetics of Space*, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard provides an elegant description of this phenomenon in relation to the objects in a house: The inert objects and spaces of the house--drawers, chests, wardrobes, cellars, rooms--acquire an imaginative or figurative value as a result of their daily appropriation and use. "Phenomenology of the imagination," he writes, "cannot be content with a reduction which would make the image a subordinate means of expression; it demands, on the contrary, that images be lived directly, that they be taken as sudden events in life."<sup>38</sup>

We may extrapolate from Bachelard the idea of the city as a house, with collection of places or rooms whose identity is intimately associated with the myths and mysteries of our prosaic interaction with the spaces and objects contained within. De Certeau refers to the everyday strategies by which objective space is appropriated and inscribed with subjective meaning as "bricolage," or ways of making and operating.<sup>39</sup> The myriad ways in which people operate to make meaningful places in Times Square mark the lines of a human topography of its streets and public spaces. Take, for example, the fascinating phenomenon in which certain spaces in Times Square have become the makeshift "chapels" for soapbox preachers and prophets. In an extraordinary radio

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37. See Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), p. 227 -241; and Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), chap. 5.

38. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 47.

39. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley, CA, 1984), pp. xii - xx.

documentary, photographer Richard Sandler interviewed some of these preachers to find out who “The Gods of Times Square” are.<sup>40</sup> Above the din of bullhorn fire-and-brimstone gospels, Sandler detects a deeper symbiosis between the sacred and profane spaces and images of Time Square. Like a latter-day colossus, the sixty foot billboard of Marky Mark in Calvin Klein underwear stands astride the Square’s eastern gate, projecting Sandler says “an image of human physical perfection” and carrying “an ancient memory of times long ago when any human likeness this large was a representation of the deity.” (see **figs. 1.11** and **1.12**)

The interaction of space and image in Times Square creates what Sandler calls “natural cathedral-like structure” in which the divine light of kinetic neon pulses with the consumerist gospel and draws the believer’s gaze skyward. Within this secular cathedral, the congregates stake out smaller, more intimate spaces under marquees and near key pilgrimage sites for their chapels. On the corner of 44th Street and Broadway, the Korean prophets of doom hold daily mass, while the militant Hebrew Israelites preach the return of a vengeful Black Jesus at the triangular altar formed by the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue. The flock gather and listen, turning the sidewalk into an ephemeral choir, which constantly dissolves and reassembles itself from parts of the moving crowd.

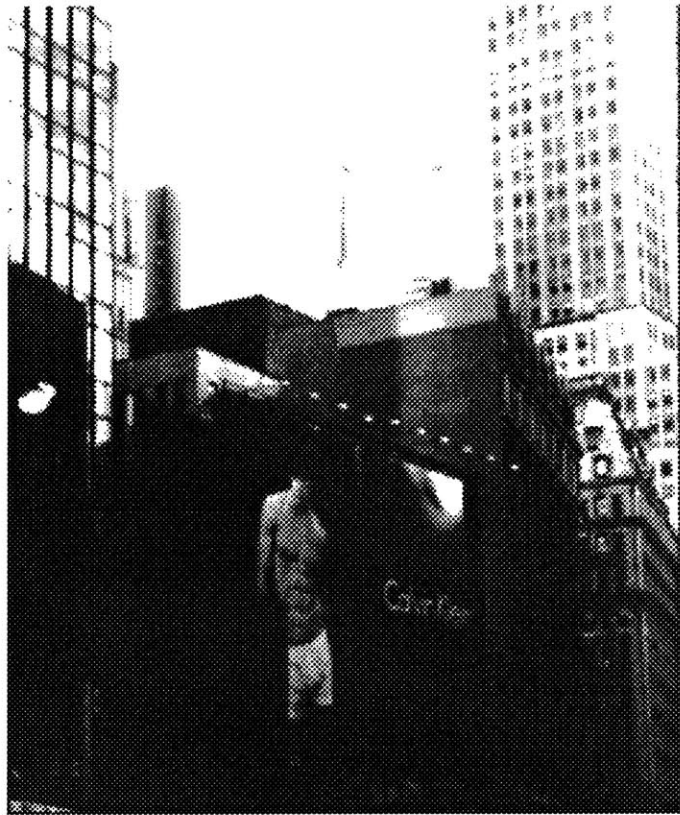
As Sandler’s radio documentary brilliantly illustrates, the social production of public space is a dynamic process in which spaces and images are reconfigured and re-encoded with new meanings through spatial practice. Although these practices profoundly influence the experience and perception of place as it is lived, the dominant space of political economy and representation lies mostly outside the nexus of these practices and relationships. Thus, de Certeau makes a distinction between the “users” and the “makers” of space and between the “production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of utilization.”<sup>41</sup> The difference between primary and

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40. Richard Sandler, “The Gods of Times Square,” produced by David Isay for “All Things Considered,” National Public Radio, Washington, D.C., December 23, 1994.

41. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. xiii.

**The "Gods of Times Square"**



**fig. 1.11**  
Calvin Klein billboard with spire of the Empire State Building visible in the background. A Latter Day "Apollo"?



**fig. 1.12**  
Dr. Seuss' "Cat in the Hat" mural on 42nd Street. A symbol of the new "family-oriented" Times Square.

secondary use, between the “exchange” and “use” value of space<sup>42</sup> has to do fundamental relations of power in society.

### The “Eye” and the “I” of Power

In an interview titled "The Eye of Power," originally published as a preface to *Discipline and Punish*, the classic study of the 19th century prison, Foucault marks Jeremy Bentham's conceptualization of the Panopticon as a key moment in the invention of modern space.

The principle was this. A perimeter building in the form of a ring. At the center of this, a tower, pierced by large windows opening on to the inner face of the ring. The outer building is divided into cells each of which traverses the windows, one opening on the inside, facing the windows of the central tower, the other, outer one allowing daylight to pass through the whole cell. All that is then needed is to put an observer in the tower and place in each of the cells a lunatic, a patient, a convict, a worker or a schoolboy. The back lighting enables one to pick out from the central tower the little captive silhouettes in the ring of cells. In short, the principle of the dungeon is reversed; daylight and the overseer's gaze capture the inmate more effectively than darkness, which afforded after all a degree of protection<sup>43</sup>

In Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon, therefore, the power of the eye is the ability to make the social and political relations of power transparent, visible and “knowable” through the manipulation of physical space. The assertion of modern disciplinary control over space begins with the fear of the unseen and unknown in nineteenth-century institutions like prisons and insane asylums and ascends upward to encompass the space of the city, nation and, ultimately, empire<sup>44</sup>. Bentham's panopticon

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42. Marx's theory of use value and exchange value in relation to the commodity form under capitalism is the critical starting point for the subsequent debate among Marxists and non-Marxists of the process by which space itself is commodified. This debate will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 3.

43. Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” in Colin Gordon, ed. *Power/Knowledge* (New York, Pantheon, 1980), p.147.

44. See Foucault, "Space, Knowledge and Power," in Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader* (New York, 1978) In *Orientalism* (New York, 1978) Edward Said, extends Foucault's notion of knowledge as a form of power from the metropole to the colony:

*What gave the Oriental's world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of its own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West. Oriental is depicted as something one judges, something one studies and*

has also cast a long shadow into the present. Over the last thirty years, as cities have become more socially fragmented and spatially dispersed, many communities have become walled and watched islands of security in the sea of urban fear. In his study of "Fortress Los Angeles," Mike Davis cites examples of how in panoptic shopping malls, walled residential enclaves and even public parks and squares people are increasingly subject to systematic surveillance and policing. For Davis the postindustrial "post-liberal" city has become a symbol of the fear and dystopia of modern urban life.<sup>45</sup> Gated and guarded communities, moreover, are no longer found just in wealthy suburbs. The ideas of Oscar Newman on designing "defensible space" in public housing have been recently rediscovered and applied as a method of preventing crime in innercity neighborhoods. In his controversial 1972 study of the relationship the physical environment and crime in public housing projects in New York City, Newman argues that "improvements in surveillance capacity--the ability to observe the public areas of one's residential environment and to feel continually that one is under observation by other residents...--can have a pronounced effect in securing the environment for peaceful activities."<sup>46</sup>

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*depicts, something one disciplines, something one illustrates. The point is that in each of these cases the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks.* (p. 40){PRIVATE }

45. See Mike Davis, "Fortress Los Angeles," in Sorkin, ed. *Variations on a Theme Park*. Davis elaborates on this theme in his *City of Quartz, Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, (New York, Verso, 1990). On L.A. as a (post)modern panopticon also see Edward Soja, "Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in CiteL-A," in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson, *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, (Cambridge, MA., 1995), pp. 28-29.

46. Newman, *Defensible Space* (New York, 1972), p. 79. For the recent interest in Newman's ideas see Ellis Close, "Drawing Up Safer Communities," *Newsweek*, July 11, 1994, p. 57. The extent to which his ideas have become official policy is evident in HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros' authoring of "Defensible Space: Detering Crime and Building Community" (January 1995). The origin of some of Newman's ideas on proprietary surveillance can be found in Jane Jacobs' classic study of the urban village, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, 1961). However, I think Newman's analysis lacks both the subtlety and humanity of Jacobs' notion of "eyes on the street." Whereas Newman paints all outsiders as potential criminals against whom proprietors must defend their territory tooth and nail, Jacobs' "eyes" belong to the widest variety of users who act more as public stewards of the street (pp. 35-41). Bill Hillier, in his scathing attack on Newman, makes this point in exposing his thinly veiled ideological agenda: "Newman also write the word "nation" with a capital "N", believes that police and courts represent the "corporate wisdom of society," and assumes that everyone has been doing his best in a situation made difficult by criminals who "victimise society." In addition, Hillier makes the critical connection that Foucault also makes between surveillance and nineteenth-century institutions of dominance and control:

The production and distribution of space and its image reflect and react back upon basic relationships of social and economic power embedded in the market. The dominant and largely privatized space of production and representation claims for itself locations which guarantee maximum market value and visibility. What's left over in the form of "public" space must then be fought over and "defended" by those who have no market control over the means of its production or representation. Rather, control is exercised through the myriad spatial practices, the "bricolage" of the body, by which people appropriate space. However, because the power of the market must ultimately be spatialized and localized, it is inextricably entwined with the shifting social and spatial relations of place. The power to control space is therefore never fixed or stable; rather, it must be continuously negotiated and legitimized. The "eye of power," in other words, must constantly contend with the power of the "I."

We can observe this struggle between the power "eye" and the "I" to claim the space of Times Square in recent efforts to reassert control over forms of streetlife that have given the area its "negative image." Until recently, teams of three-card monte dealers, lookouts and "shills" (plants) would gather daily on the Deuce, as 42nd Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue is known in local argot, and divide up the territory of the streets in search of the best place to hustle "marks" among the thousands of pedestrians that pass through the area. The game of the streets depends upon similar codes of artifice, spectacle and desire that operate within the "legitimate" market of commodified illusion and fantasy in Times Square. However, while the system of neon-lite words and images dominates the visual landscape of public space, the elements of the

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*[T]he whole notion of walling up the problem people in large fortresslike buildings surrounded by an open space barrier...was rooted in the eighteenth century, when the confinement of deviants became a central theme of social and political thought. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the forms of housing that architecture now aims at the underprivileged are similarly rooted in the nineteenth century attempt to answer the question: is there a spatial cure for being working class? ( Hillier, "In Defence of Space," RIBA Journal, November 1973, p. 543.)*



game directly claim the physical space of the street. Thus, as a Times Square cop wryly analyzed it, “First, they carve up the territory, then the players (i.e., suckers).”<sup>47</sup>

Another form of marking and delineating the public space of the street takes place in world of subaltern signs and images that exists parallel to dominant representations of Times Square. Interspersed with the commercial images of power, or often effacing them, is the stylized and cryptic *écriture* of the city’s many graffiti artists. Most often their graffiti takes the form of encoded “tags,” the signatures of individual artists or crews marking territory and announcing themselves to each other on walls of buildings on empty lots and in the subway tunnels<sup>48</sup>. With building and tunnel walls as their canvas, therefore, artists appropriate the public space of the subway by asserting the self-expressive power of naming, of announcing that “I am here.” (see **figs 1.13** and **1.14**)

The power to shape the semiotic commercial space of Times Square is based on the prerogative and imperative of exposure in the marketplace of consumer-oriented signs images. Thus the name brands that take on larger-than-life, electrified form in Times Square employ the serialized images of mass culture which serve to familiarize and orient the consumer. The McDonald’s “golden arches,” Calvin Klein’s blasé, gender-bending models, Benetton’s colorful fantasies of multiculturalism form the myth-imagery of mass consumption that connects the public space of Times Square to the private, domestic space of living rooms around the world (see **figs. 1.15** and **1.16**). By contrast, the power exercised by the monte dealers and graffiti writers is based on the direct appropriation that relies not on exposure and familiarity but just the opposite: concealment, deception and decentering. Their strategies of appropriation function within an interiorized and

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47. Quoted in Richard Perez-Pena, “3 Card Monte: Its Just a Shell Game,” *New York Times*, November 11, 1992.

48. On the sociological phenomenon of subway graffiti in New York see *Craig Castleman, Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*, (Cambridge, MA, MIT 1982). On the appropriation of territory through naming with slang, Stuart Hall in the 1970s observed among youth subcultures how the world is “marked out, linguistically, by names or an *argot* which classifies a social world exterior to them in terms meaningful only within their group perspective and maintains its boundaries.” See Hall, *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, (Boston, 1976), p. 47.

## Ma(r)king Place 2:

### Games and Names

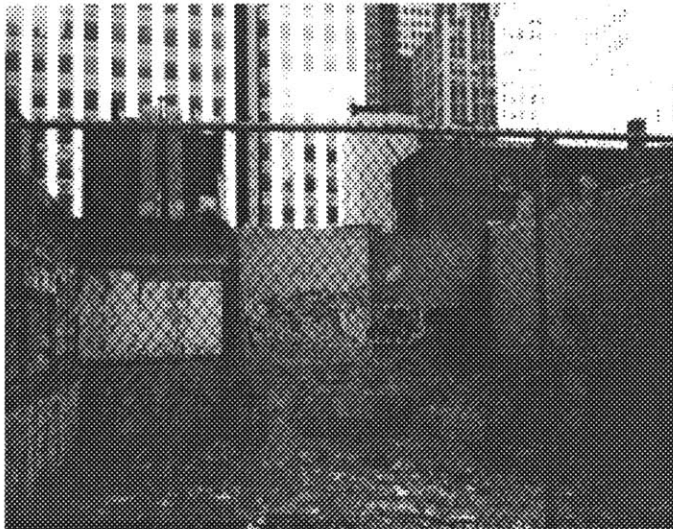
**fig. 1.13**

Doing the Hustle,,  
A 3 card monte game on the Deuce.  
Daniel Meltzer  
(source: Stone, *Times Square: A  
Pictorial History*, p. 158.)



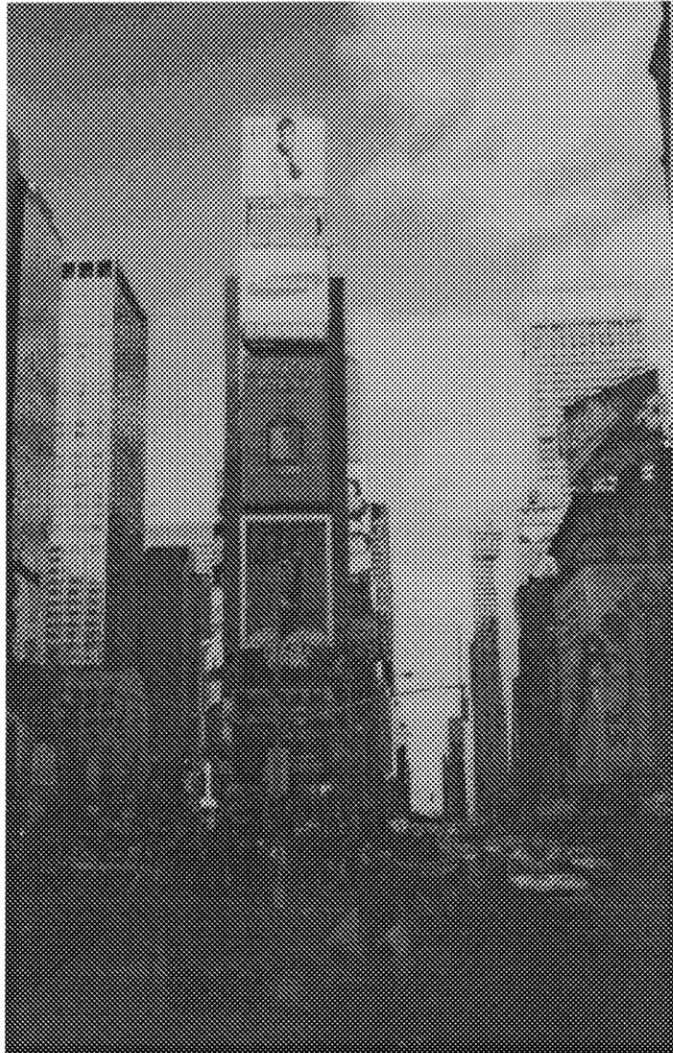
**fig. 1.14**

Writing on the Wall...  
Graffiti "tags" are spraypainted on  
the walls of buildings in an empty  
lot on 42nd Street.



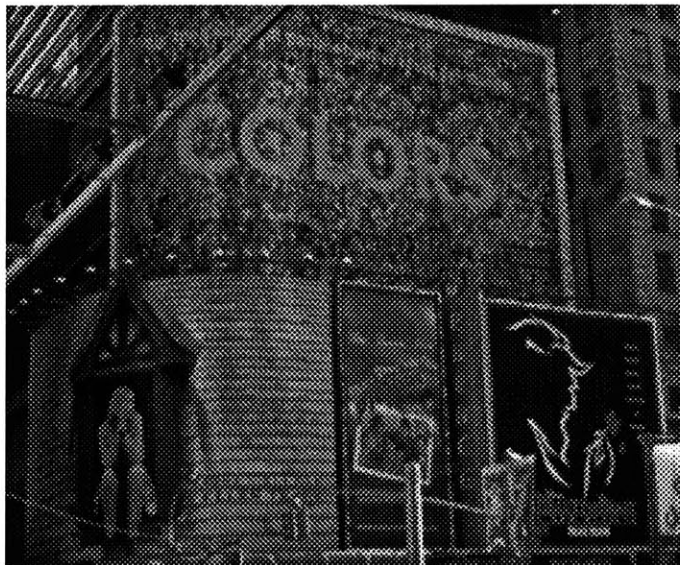
## Ma(r)king Place 2:

### Signs of the Times



**fig. 1.15**

View today of the signs looking north toward Duffy Square. First the first time in many years the number of new signs being built is on the rise.



**fig. 1.16**

The new players in Times Square: Disney's "Beauty and the Beast" has reversed the previous trend of shows going from the stage to the movies. Benetton image-maker M&Co has been hired to create an ad campaign for the new 42nd Street.

localized system of vernacular codes, knowledge of which is deliberately denied the viewer on the outside. The subjective encoding of space through the power of the “I” can thus result in the inversion of conventional power relationships of inside to outside, center to margin.<sup>49</sup> A 1978 study of the hustling subculture of West 42nd Street (the “Bright Light District”) confirmed that there exists of a larger world through which these activities are connected: “The street life of the Bright Light District forms a loosely connected society of people ‘in the life.’ The street hustlers manage a subterranean economy, have their own status ranking system, and develop their own language and value system.”<sup>50</sup>

The process of appropriating the streets, above and below ground, by Times Square’s monte players and graffiti artists not only marks social space but also transforms it. The flow of pedestrian space is interrupted and reshaped as eddies of activity form around the dealer; aural space is pieced by the calculated banter of the dealer--“just keep your eye on the red card, it isn’t that hard...;” and some are inevitably lured across the invisible boundary between concealment and exposure, safety and risk. Moreover, the transformation of social space by the power of the game and the name may also operate at the level of the signifier, which has a less tangible but real impact on people’s perception of space. In analyzing the phenomenon of graffiti writing in New York subways, for example, Richard Sennett cites the representative comments of a subway rider: “...[W]hile I do not find myself consciously making the connection between graffiti-makers and criminals..., the sense that all are part of one world of uncontrollable predators seems inescapable.”<sup>51</sup>

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49. Perez-Pena, “3 Card Monte.”

50. William Kornblum and Vernon Boggs, “The Social Ecology of the Bright Light District,” in City University of New York, “West 42nd Street: The Bright Light Zone” (unpublished study by CUNY for the Ford Foundation, July 1978), p.32

51. Quoted in Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, (New York, 1990), p. 206. Sennett interprets the phenomenon of subway graffiti as a quixotic and ultimately futile gesture of self-expression: “the walls of the “I” dominate others who had no choice in their making, who cannot participate in their form who can only submit to them--though with no awe (p. 209)” Although I agree with the larger, normative point he seeks to make here--that a humane city requires public expression to be based on generosity and reciprocity--I think he fails to consider the larger power

It is this association between subaltern forms of authoring space and the “world of uncontrollable predators” that has led to recent efforts by the city to control how or where it can take place. While the crackdown on the three-card monte dealers in Times Square has involved the direct intervention of the police to “take back” the streets, more indirect measures were undertaken to rid the city of graffiti. Almost at the same time that it was acquiring countercultural chic in SoHo art galleries in the early 1980s, there was a systematic campaign to suppress graffiti in subway trains and tunnels. As the city invested in new “graffiti-proof” trains more draconian measures were instituted, like banning spray paint and thick markers, the weapons of graffiti’s guerrilla war with the IRT. The redevelopment plans for Times Square, moreover, call for an overhaul of the subway station to replace the maze of passageways with a 10,000 square foot mezzanine.

Businesses concerned with the “negative image” of Times Square and its consequences for sales and property values have recently hired private security guards to act as “eyes on the streets.” The private guards assist the police in conducting periodic sweeps to break up three-card monte games and arrest dealers for illegal gambling. Furthermore, the Times Square Business Improvement District (BID), a non-profit business association sanctioned by the City, has launched an aggressive campaign to not only control of the space of the game but also to explode the “imagined” space of possibility that it creates. They have sought to expose and demystify the game by distributing thousands of leaflets showing people how it works and warning them not to fall victim<sup>52</sup>.

The campaign by the Times Square BID and city authorities to in reorder the space of the street *in the name of the public*, permitting (in both senses of allowing and regulating) certain activities and uses and preventing others, can be seen as lever in the discursive machinery of what Foucault calls the *dispositif*, the modern conjunction of

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relationship which privileges dominant forms of private, corporate expression while marginalizing and indeed criminalizing other forms of public expression like graffiti.

52. Perez-Pena, “3 Card Monte.”

knowledge, surveillance and space in the service of power.<sup>53</sup> The formally closed knowledge system of the game is forced open, rationalized, and *publicized*: the public thus becomes complicit in its own surveillance and regulation. The public space of the street in turn becomes, in Foucault's words, "gridded" or disciplined by a totalizing of knowledge.<sup>54</sup> The discursive process by which the forces of redevelopment have sought to transform Times Square has therefore recast the players as the *Public* and the *Other* in a new kind of power game, the stakes of which involve the reordering of space and the reconstruction of place.

### **Social Space, Representation and the Politics of Planning**

In an essay entitled, "Paris, 1850-1870," the Marxist geographer David Harvey takes us on a breath-taking journey, at times more like a forward advance, through the spaces, events and ideas that were Second Empire Paris, "The Capital of the Nineteenth Century."<sup>55</sup> His destination is Paris on the eve of the Commune and more generally the proposition that capitalism and consciousness became urbanized in the nineteenth century

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53. Foucault uses the notion of *dispositif* in several ways related to its meanings in the French: as a strategic act, as in a military manoeuvre or tactic; as a political activity within the purview of the law or state; and as a unified system of relationships between different discourses, institutions and ideas. (See Shields, *Places on the Margin, Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, New York, 1991 p. 44.)

54. Although Foucault allows for "discursive ruptures" in moments of transition between *dispositifs*, I think the theory is in some ways too much of an "iron cage" from which there is no counter-hegemonic escape. By contrast, Lefebvre's positing of a dialectic of "spatial practice" comes closer to capturing the full complexity of the relationship between space and power. For example, in the case of the three-card monte crackdown, the rationalistic assumption at work is of course that once the game is up, it will simply succumb to the market forces as an enlightened public recognizes that it can't win. This is clearly a strategy of projecting hegemonic (and paternalistic) power, a *dispositif* in Foucault's tactical sense. But how actually does it work in practice? Does simply possessing the knowledge of how the game may be rigged prevent people from playing, or does it in fact realign the relationship between dealer and "mark" so that the common knowledge becomes the basis for a new set of self-conscious social and spatial interactions with each other and *against* the authorities? The exasperated comments of the BID director Gretchen Dykstra seem to indicate the latter: "It isn't just tourists who get taken, you'd think New Yorkers are sophisticated but they fall for it, too." (quoted in Perez-Pena, *op cit.*)

55. This is the title that Benjamin bestowed upon Paris as the center of European culture under capitalist modernization.

city<sup>56</sup>. To demonstrate this he carefully traces the circuits of capital flow and accumulation through which the city was respatialized under Louis Napoleon and his redoubtable planning minister, Baron von Haussmann. Haussmann's project, relentless and ruthless, was to utterly transform the urban body of Paris, by opening its clogged Medieval veins to new flows of people, goods and capital, the vital fluids of modernity. As a result, the space and image of the pre- and post-Haussmann city was forever altered. "Paris," writes Harvey,

experienced a dramatic shift from the introverted, private and personalized urbanism of the July Monarchy to an extroverted, public and collectivized style of urbanism under the Second Empire...Public investments were organized around private gain, and public spaces appropriated for private use; exteriors became interiors for the bourgeoisie, while panoramas, dioramas and photography brought the exterior into the interior. The boulevards, lit by gas lights, dazzling shop window displays, and cafes open to the street, became corridors of homage to the power of money and commodities, play spaces for the bourgeoisie<sup>57</sup>.

What Harvey's mapping of Paris delineates, in broad theoretical brush-strokes,<sup>58</sup> is the transformation of space, from public to private, and its cultural representations, from exterior to interior, as a product of economic change and political conflict. Haussmann's wide boulevards were, after all, not only the urban theater for the promenading bourgeoisie, immortalized in Baudelaire's figure of the *flaneur*, but also the military theater of class war. As Benjamin reminds us, "the true goal of Haussmann's works was the securing of the city against city war...The width of the avenues was to prohibit the erection [of street barricades], and the new streets were to provide the shortest routes between the barracks and the working-class sections. Contemporaries christened the undertaking "'strategic beautification."<sup>59</sup>

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56. Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (Baltimore, MD, 1986), pp. 63 - 221. My interpretation of Harvey in this and following sections relies on many of the insights of Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), pp. 217 - 227; 349 - 414.

57. Harvey, *Consciousness*, p. 204.

58. Perhaps too broad: See Gregory's trenchant but sympathetic critique of Harvey's Marxian "meta-narrative" in *Geographical Imaginations*, pp. 219 - 222.

59. Quoted in Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p. 90.

Planning the "strategic beautification" of Paris was thus a political as well as economic project involving the rationalization of the function and aesthetic representation of urban space. The enchantment of the physical environment, in the "phantasmagoric" display of commodities in the arcades and the spectacle of the world exhibitions, masked underlying relations of power in the myth of universal progress.<sup>60</sup> Harvey observes further that Haussmann's (anti)revolutionary transformation of Paris began with a clear and total vision of the city as an object in space: "Urban space was seen and treated as a totality in which different quarters of the city and different functions of the city had to be brought into relation to each other to form a working whole." As evidence Harvey points to Haussmann's "passion for exact spatial coordination" which resulted the first accurate cadastral and topographical map of Paris in 1853<sup>61</sup>. Through the reduction of the space of the city to its "exact" two-dimensional representation, the power of the eye thus become paramount.

It is here, in the "eye" of Haussmann's Paris, where the spatial critiques of Harvey, Lefebvre and Foucault all begin to converge. Harvey charts a more orthodox materialist course, ideal representations of space are more or less one-directional reflections of the economic "base," but Lefebvre and Foucault map a larger, more complex field of possibilities. For Lefebvre, "social space" is the product of a mosaic of dialectical forces that are not reducible to mere economic relations of production. For example, the disciplines of architecture, urban planning as well as state bureaucratization create what Lefebvre calls "abstract" space:

[Thought] soars up into the abstract space of the visible, the geometric. The architect who designs, the planner who draws up master-plans, see their 'objects,' buildings and neighborhoods from afar...they pass from the "lived" to the abstract in order to project that abstraction onto the level of the lived<sup>62</sup>.

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60. See Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, pp. 90 - 91.

61. Harvey, *Consciousness*, p. 74.

62. Quoted in Gregory, *Geometric Imaginations*, p. 404.



But Lefebvre is not content to accept the domination of abstract space and its representations as inevitable or foreordained by materialist forces. Rather, abstract space, he argues, "carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space," namely, "differential" space. Differential spaces are those that are appropriated through spatial practice and reinserted as "analogous places" at the margins of abstract space.

Lefebvre's formulation of abstract and differential spaces within the overall production of social space closely parallels Foucault's notion of "utopic" and "heterotopic" spaces. Planning the utopian city, according to Foucault, begins in the mind and on the body as a series of disciplinary mechanisms of seeing and knowing. A model for how this works is outlined by Foucault in his discussion of the transformation of a plague-stricken town:

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the center and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead -- all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism.<sup>63</sup>

But within the elusive utopia created by the "political dream of the plague," other spaces appeared. They were the spaces of liminality and transgression, in which "bodies mingled together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized."<sup>64</sup> Thus Foucault recognizes that the disciplinary mechanism is never total. The road to utopia is chimerical; its bends and byways form spaces of opportunity for its binary opposite, what Foucault refers to as "heterotopias."<sup>65</sup> He defines them as "counterarrangements, of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements ... are at one and the same

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63. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Seridan (New York, Vintage, 1979), p. 197.

64. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 197.

65. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, Vintage, 1970), xviii.

time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable.”<sup>66</sup> Cemeteries, mental institutions, prisons, circuses, honeymoon motels, exotic resorts: these spaces and institutions are very familiar to us, and yet they seem somehow strange and hidden. Foucault identifies this curious paradox of exposure and concealment, of openings and closings, of banality and fantasy as a key principle governing the existence of such heterotopic places<sup>67</sup>

Now let us turn Foucault's gaze toward disciplinary mechanisms that functioned as part of politics of planning Times Square, which created both utopic and heterotopic spaces. Beginning around the turn of the century, the spatial and sexual economy of Times Square was reordered within changing structure of the city's politics and culture. In the late nineteenth century the Tenderloin, as it was known then, was characterized by the “rough masculinity,” sexual promiscuity and social class transgression of the male “sporting life.”<sup>68</sup> The sporting man was a cultural figure very similar to Baudelaire's *flâneur*: he tended to be educated and middle class and asserted a sexual and moral autonomy in opposition to prevailing Victorian social norms<sup>69</sup>. However, the prostitution, pugilism, gambling and hard drinking that were hallmarks of the sporting life based on male privilege cut across class lines and blurred boundaries between high and low culture. Thus wealthy male theater-goers at the Metropolitan Opera House, Broadway Theaters shared the public space of the street as well as the bar and brothel with working-class and immigrant pleasure-seekers.<sup>70</sup>

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66. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias” in Joan Ockman, ed., *Architecture Culture 1943 - 1968* (New York, Rizzoli, 1993), p. 420.

67. Foucault, “Other Spaces,” p. 425.

68. See Timothy J. Gilfoyle, “Policing of Sexuality” in Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square* (New York, 1991), p. 303.

69. There is a large literature within feminist criticism on the “male gaze” of the flâneur as a privileging of the masculine “eye of power” in modernity. For a recent synthesis see Elizabeth Wilson, “The Invisible Flâneur,” in Watson and Gibson, *Postmodern Cities*, pp. 59 - 79. It should also be noted here that the male gaze was also belonged to the *white* “sporting man” in American urban culture. Times Square did not become racially integrated until the 1960s.

70. Gilfoyle, “Policing of Sexuality,” p. 306.

By the turn of the century, however, the disorderly and fluid underworld of the Tenderloin came under the increased scrutiny of Progressive social reformers, police and city planning authorities and real estate developers. The forces of reform and redevelopment coalesced in 1905 to form the notorious Committee of Fourteen, a private “citizen’s organization” which over the next twenty-five years was able to marshal the full powers of the state to impose a new spatial and moral order on Times Square. The Committee assumed centralized control of a whole apparatus of policing and surveillance power over every aspect of public and even private sexuality. Responsibility for the investigation and booking of prostitutes was largely usurped from what was seen as a corrupt and arbitrary police force. The regulation of prostitution, moreover, did not stop at the door of the theater or saloon; even private property was “subject to the proper exercise of police power.” Thus the commercial infrastructure of the sporting life was systematically dismantled to make way for a new moral and economic regime. Gradually the name and identity of the Tenderloin faded under bright lights of the Great White Way to be replaced by a more orderly and disciplined Times Square.<sup>71</sup>

With the U.S. entry into World War One, Prohibition supplied a further array of disciplinary social and political controls under the guise of wartime sobriety and sacrifice. By the 1920s, therefore, Times Square had been restructured to reflect, on the surface at least, a utopic order of corporate rationality and social respectability. Below the surface of the utopian construction of Times Square, however, oppositional heterotopic spaces opened up at the same time and often within the same social space. The bar and restaurant, the theater and the street formed the contested terrain in which the boundaries of utopic spaces and heterotopic spaces were contiguously being drawn and redrawn. As Times Square became the premier theater and entertainment district in the 1920s and 30s, a gay subculture was created by the large numbers of homosexual men who worked in the theaters, restaurants and hotels. Moreover, as historian Timothy J. Gilfoyle argues, this gay subculture was not merely inserted anonymously within the dominant cultural space of

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71. Gilfoyle, “Policing of Sexuality,” pp. 308 - 9.

Times Square. Rather, gay men appropriated the spaces which comprised a “gay world,” with its own language, codes and norms of behavior.<sup>72</sup>

Ironically, this parallel gay world was relatively unthreatened by Prohibition because the culture of the speakeasy tended to shield both gay and straight male sexuality within the same illegal underworld. With the Depression and repeal of Prohibition, however, the social and spatial geography of gay life in Times Square changed radically. The post-Repeal establishment of the State Liquor Authority (SLA) proved to be a much more effective instrument of social and sexual regulation than legal Prohibition had been. Bars that served gay men or lesbians could be ruled “disorderly” and have their liquor licenses revoked. According to Gilfoyle, a variety of extralegal strategies were thus devised by homosexuals in response to SLA and police campaigns to “clean up” Times Square. Bars and restaurants that tolerated a gay clientele were identified through an extensive informal social network. The area's many cheap cafeterias and Automats gained a reputation for allowing a more open expression of gay identity, and some were well known for their spectacles of flamboyant exhibition and public sight-seeing. To escape detection by authorities in more exclusive venues, elaborate spatial and sexual encodings were created to preserve gay spaces within what were otherwise heterosexual bars. Theaters too would be transformed into gay spaces during certain performances even while the rest of the audience may not have been aware of it<sup>73</sup>

The politicization of sexual identity and space in Times Square during the Depression was linked to changes in spatial economy of commercialized leisure and entertainment. The repeal of Prohibition unleashed new forces of regulation and control that reinforced certain social and economic patterns and undermined others. As Gilfoyle

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72. George Chauncy, Jr., “The Policed: Gay Men’s Strategies of Everyday Resistance” in Taylor, ed., *Inventing Times Square*, p. 317.

73. Chauncy, “The Policed,” pp. 324 - 327.

demonstrates, the respatialization of the social economy of Times Square involved a whole series of tactical accommodations and negotiations by gay men that loosened the boundaries between public and private space. At various points in its history, during moments of crisis like the Depression or over long periods of incremental change, the forces of political and economic reform have converged on Times Square and invented something new without ever completely erasing the traces of its the past. The layering of places, moreover, is not confined within the immediate social space of its enactment. Its representation, in the form of images and "reputation," sets off another series of transformative actions and events. The bureaucratic modes of planning social space, for making it conform to some normative order, create spaces of slippage and rupture in the configuration of social power through which new spaces assert themselves.

Drawing upon theories of how space is produced and represented, we can begin to develop a conceptual framework within which to analyse the phenomenon of place-image. The basic outlines of this framework incorporate three interrelated social processes. The first is the way in which people's everyday uses of place--living, working, exchanging, performing--create over time a changing set of rituals and myths that give a place its particular identity in the city. Lefebvre, as we have seen, gives us the clearest insight into how these elements of a "spatial practice" are represented as "place-myths." As both Lefebvre and Foucault argue, however, the people who create these rituals and myths are not entirely free agents. Rather, their actions are constrained by the structure of competing demands on the use of urban space and the ability to shape its image. Thus, the second process encompasses the contested social claims to place and the power to represent it. Redevelopment through public-private partnerships has created the mechanisms of a sophisticated media-based marketing of places for specialized consumer uses, while also providing the necessary public authority needed to regulate other "less desirable" uses. But in Foucault's formulation of utopic-heterotopic dialectic we begin to see the limits to the power of public or private authority to totally control the use of places and interpret its symbolic meanings. Finally, as Harvey reminds us, the manipulations of place-images

reflect deeper changes in the structure of production and consumption in an increasingly global economy.

### DESIGNING DESIRE: THE 42ND STREET DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

#### *An Urban Drama in Three Acts*

In the most recent in a long history of attempts to change Times Square from what it is into what it “could (once again) be,” the current vision of 42nd Street Development Project looks to the future with an exuberant sense of millennial optimism:

42nd Street has always been the place where Americans celebrated, and by an extraordinary stroke of luck our project coincides with the biggest celebration of our lifetime: New Year’s Eve, 1999. Five billion pairs of eyes will focus on Times Square, for a celebration which will make previous celebrations look like Tupperware parties. The event presents an important incentive for advertising, sponsorship, and of course, for us to create the appropriate setting. December 31, 1999 is the best catalyst we could hope for.<sup>74</sup>

The ritualized spectacle of marking time in space by which Times Square was first invented in the public imagination is to be the vehicle for its reinvention ninety five years later. Now, as before, the desire to experience, to celebrate and to consume Times Square must be designed in the architecture of the spectacle and in the incentives for private development. But “designing desire”<sup>75</sup> also implies designing out that which is “undesirable,” and those whose desires cannot be designed. The image of desire need only be given an appropriate frame, the dramatic performance a stage. But for what picture and what play? And for what audience?

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74. UDC, “42nd Street Now!” *Executive Summary* (Preliminary), 1993, p. 21.

75. I am indebted to Lia Kiladis for first putting these two words together into such an evocative and useful phrase in her paper, “42nd Street Now!, The Evolution of Privatized Public Space,” December 1994, unpublished paper.

This chapter, presented as an urban drama in three acts, attempts to answer these questions by examining the evolution of the 42nd Street Development Project since its inception in the early 1980s to the present. The origins of the plan can in some respects be traced all the way back to the first attempts by Progressive social reformers to break the hold of vice on Times Square. If nothing else this legacy reveals a deep and abiding anxiety about this most amoral of urban market-places. More importantly, the redevelopment plan, and its motivating vision and ideology, provides a map by which we can trace the lines of force operating in and upon urban social space to basic structures of economic and political power.

The chapter is organized into three main acts which correspond to the major turning points in the planning process. They are: Act I. *Making the Case for Redevelopment*; Act II. *Unveiling the Plan and Veiling the Process*; and, Act III. *Reimag(in)ing Times Square*. Each of these acts are further organized into thematic scenes which focus on the specific issues emerging out of the 42nd Street Development Project's impact on the planning process, built environment and social space of Times Square.

### ***Act I. Making the Case for Redevelopment***

When Mayor Koch announced in the City's plans to launch a major new redevelopment effort for Times Square in 1980, his words seemed to echo down the long empty corridor of good intentions come and gone. Times Square's sleaze and blight had become an unseemly eyesore and embarrassment for the world's greatest city. Investors weren't investing and tourists weren't coming. Something had to change.

The most recent plan to wrest control of Times Square from the forces of evil and unprofitability took its place in line behind reform efforts dating back to the Progressive era, but with one major difference. As we have seen, most of the previous efforts to impose a more rational social and sexual order on Times Square were led by at least nominally



private business and civic groups with the City mainly providing the tools of legal enforcement. What the City was proposing in 1980, however, was a publicly led and financed urban renewal project on an unprecedented scale. Over six million square feet of new office, hotel and retail space on the single block of 42nd Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue promised at long last to thoroughly reinvent Times Square in the image of corporate rationality and middle-class respectability.

But before the promise of a new Times Square could be delivered on, the private developers and the tax-paying public had to be convinced that what was being promised was worth their investment. The first act in this urban drama therefore begins with the project's opening invocation to the muse of history and money, then follows the evolution of its ideological rationale through the debate on the appropriate use and image for the new Times Square.

### **Designs on Times Square**

The genealogy of the 42nd Street Development Project can be traced back to the City's economic development policies for Midtown Manhattan since the 1960s. Three basic themes emerge from this lineage: 1) the linkage between public cultural amenities and private economic development; 2) the need for the City to "guide growth" toward west Midtown; and 3) the "negative image" of Times Square as an obstacle to business investment. These three themes were first articulated as part of an overall redevelopment strategy by the City in 1969 Master Plan. The prescriptive vision of the plan, however, depended for its realization on a coalescence of social, political and economic forces that has proved elusive until only recently.

With the increasing suburbanization and the spread of television in the 1950s, the lights went out over many Broadway theaters and Times Square fell into general disrepair. During the 1960s, however, Midtown Manhattan benefited from a boom in new office development that by the end of decade the City Planning Commission was heralding as the "engine" of New York's postwar renaissance. Planners during this

period identified the economic linkages between the City's preeminence as a corporate capital and its cultural image as national and international center for art and theater<sup>76</sup>. Thus the goal of preserving the theaters and other public cultural amenities was hitched onto to the well-fueled train of private sector development. This basic belief, that the private engine could be harnessed to pull the public caboose, emerges as a consistent theme in the economic development policies of the City right up to the present. It was first forged into a zoning tool to in 1967 when the City Planning Commission proposed creating Special Zoning Districts which would contain incentives for private developers. The Special Theater District, for example, offered developers a floor area ratio bonuses of up to 20% to build a new theater as part of a larger project. The policy of “capturing the public value” of private development, in terms more rewarding than barren plazas and arcades-to-nowhere, was enacted in the 1969 Master Plan which predicted that Special Theater District zoning would revive the “lively, exciting and slightly garish” quality of Times Square<sup>77</sup>.

Even by the late 1960s the City foresaw the problem of overdevelopment looming on the horizon of Midtown east of Sixth Avenue and recommended guiding any future growth westward. To initiate this policy of guided growth, the second Regional Plan proposed building an office cluster near the westside waterfront which would “divert the gradual creep westward of office buildings already threatening to overpower the theater district and cover much of midtown with an undifferentiated ‘slab city.’”<sup>78</sup> The explicit tie-in of new development to preserving the theaters raised the issue of Times Square's “imageability” as a desirable location for new office development. Forty-second Street was singled out as a key element in the plan both in terms of its importance as a transportation hub and as a highly symbolic cultural landmark. “Forty second Street connects several midtown districts,” the Second Regional Plan pointed out, “which are

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76. See Norman Marcus, “Zoning from 1961-1991,” in Todd W. Bressi, ed. *Planning and Zoning New York City: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1993).

77. NYC Planning Commission, *Plan for New York City*, (New York, 1969), p. 7

78. *Urban Design Manhattan: A Report of the Regional Plan*, (New York, April 1969) p. 96

now almost internationally imageable, and which collectively, mean Manhattan to many people.”<sup>79</sup>

The special zoning provisions in the 1969 plan achieved some notable successes including five new theaters at the northern end of Times Square. More sweeping proposals for luring growth toward west Midtown with cheap new office space were stillborn in the deep financial crisis that engulfed the City in the early 1970s. Concern was refocused away from recapturing value, since there was very little to be had, to the more pressing problem of recapturing the street itself. Increasing rates of crime and prostitution in Times Square led in 1976 to the establishment of the Office of Midtown Enforcement, a federally funded anti-crime task force. The task force staged a series of high profile raids on sex-related establishments that were found in violation of strict new health and building code regulations. But, as a 1973 expose of the highly lucrative sex industry revealed, the political economy of sleaze in Times Square had deep roots connecting in some cases "Hell's bedroom" to the boardrooms of influential businessmen and politicians<sup>80</sup>.

Although the anti-crime campaign of the Office of Midtown Enforcement had little long-term impact, it established an important precedent for using legal controls on building use as a tool to reshape the physical and social environment. One of the problems with the City's efforts to target crime in Times Square in the 1970s, however, was that they were not conceived as part of an overall strategy of economic recovery and redevelopment. This changed in the late 1970s with the formulation of a plan to revitalize West 42nd Street and the successful redevelopment of 42nd Street block between Ninth and Tenth Avenues. The 42nd Street Redevelopment Corporation, a public-private partnership under the leadership of Fred Papert, financed the rehabilitation of several small theaters and restaurants that formed Theater Row in 1977. In addition,

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79. *Urban Design Manhattan*, p. 86.

80. Gail Sheehy, "The Landlords of Hell's Bedroom," *New York*, November 20, 1972.

the Redevelopment Corporation renovated studios and an apartment building to provide work and living space at reasonable rents to theater workers in the area<sup>81</sup>.

The precedent for redevelopment set by the 42nd Street Redevelopment Corporation generated interest in implementing changes in the physical and social environment on a larger scale. The Ford Foundation commissioned a comprehensive study of 42nd Street in 1978 with the goal of “integrating planning information which will be the basis of revitalization, development and preservation in the area.”<sup>82</sup> The primary objective of the study was to propose an integrated urban design framework and economic development strategy that would “strengthen and revitalize legitimate businesses, stimulate growth potential, and improve the physical conditions in the area to prevent economic and physical decline.”<sup>83</sup>

The 42nd Street Study marked an important turning point in integrating various past plans and putting forth what the report described as a “total approach” toward the redevelopment of 42nd Street. Within a year of the study, the 42nd Street Redevelopment Corporation gave bold expression to the study's recommendations in the form of a 6,000,000 square foot mixed-use development project known as “The City at 42nd Street.” The plan envisioned large-scale redevelopment of the area from 40th to 43rd Streets between Broadway and Eighth Avenues with new office, hotel and retail facilities anchored by a massive theme park-like entertainment center. Although “The City at 42nd Street” had the backing of a number of major corporations, it failed to win the political support of City officials. Mayor Koch dismissed the plan as “Disneyland on 42nd Street,” adding in his irrepressible style that, “New York cannot and should not compete with Disneyland--that's for Florida...We've got to make sure we have seltzer instead of orange juice.”<sup>84</sup>

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81. Susan Fainstein, “The Redevelopment of 42nd Street: Clashing Viewpoints,” in *City Almanac*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Summer, 1985), p. 4.

82. Urban Design Group, *42nd Street Study* (Department of City Planning, January 1978), p. 9.

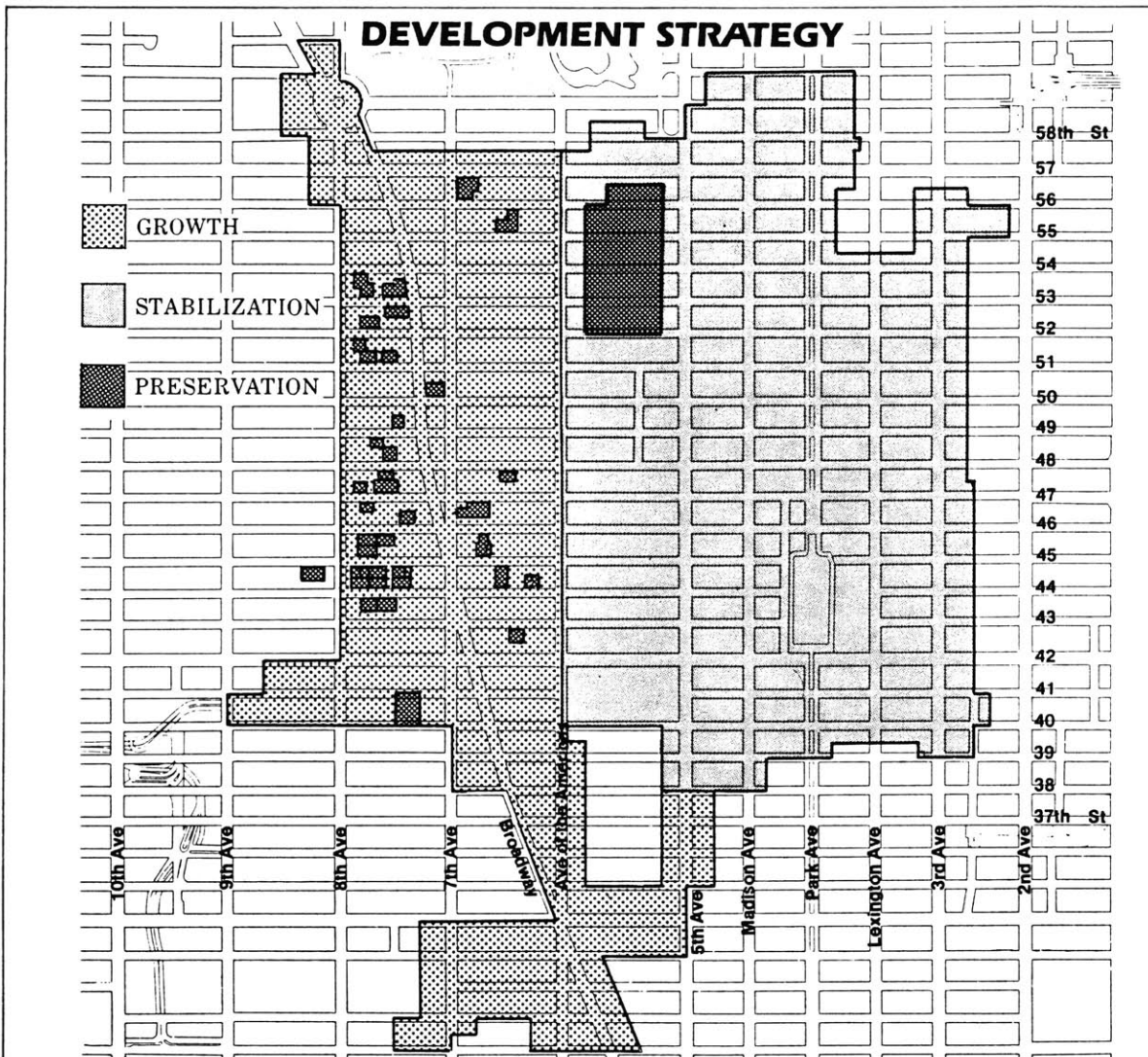
83. *42nd Street Study*, p. 9.

84. UDC, “42nd Street Development Project,” Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), August 1984, p. 1.21-22.

The City at 42nd Street Plan signaled an important shift in the earlier strategy of incrementally nudging undesirable uses out of the area to one of transforming the physical and social environment through large-scale public and private intervention. Despite the improvements at the edges made during the 1970s, physical blight and crime at the core of 42nd Street were seen to be a persistent obstacle to private investment in the area. The lesson that city officials thus derived from the failed efforts of the past was that only an urban renewal project of unprecedented size and scope could uproot the deep-seated culture of crime on 42nd Street and reverse the area's long-standing physical and economic decline.

During the late 1970s and early 80s, real estate developers in Manhattan clamored to take advantage of the lucrative bonuses being offered by the City to build new office space. The result was an intensification of the process of overdevelopment in east Midtown that had begun in the 1960s, so that by the 1980s wind-swept canyons of bland office towers were carved out along densely developed corridors like Fifth and Sixth Avenues. Eastside residents feared that the low-rise residential character of areas on Park and Lexington Avenues would be destroyed by the unchecked spread of development eastward. The City responded by enacting new zoning regulations in 1982 designed to shift development away from the East Side toward the less congested west Midtown area. The framework for guiding future development in Midtown consisted of three principal strategies: growth, stabilization, and preservation (see **fig. 2.1**). Special incentives were created in the area west and south of the Avenue of the Americas to lure new development, while allowable densities were reduced in the already overbuilt East Side office core. Meanwhile, areas with particular cultural assets like the Broadway theaters and the Museum of Modern Art were designated special preservation districts.

The special incentives built into the 1982 zoning resolution--tax exemptions, site assemblage and development assistance, increased FARs, and bonusable amenities--were seen as necessary but insufficient preconditions to activate growth in west Midtown. What was needed was a magnet for investment and a symbol of change, and planners



To encourage Midtown to grow west and south, special incentives are proposed. They include an ICIB as-of-right tax exemption for pioneer builders, site assemblage assistance through a new NYC Economic Development Corporation, and projects to turn the area around such as the 42nd Street Development Project, the Portman Hotel and Broadway Plaza. In addition, to stimulate the West Side and protect and stabilize the East Side office core, we propose higher West Side than East Side zoning densities: West Side avenue frontages upped to FAR 18 as-of-right with midblocks remaining at FAR 15; East Side avenue frontages kept at FAR 15 with midblocks lowered to FAR 12.

To assist appropriate development throughout Midtown, help stabilize land costs and shorten the approval process, we propose direct and predictable as-of-right zoning regulations. Bonusable amenities would be reduced and emphasize midblock open space and subway station connections. Planning features to ease sidewalk congestion and protect Midtown streets would be required without bonus. In the Special Theatre District, to preserve existing theatres we propose to require a special permit for their demolition; to bonus their reconstruction; and to facilitate shifting their air rights to avenue development sites.

**Fig. 2.1. 1982 Midtown Zoning Development Strategy.** (source: NYC Dept. of City Planning, *Midtown Development*, June 1981, p. 10)

turned once again to the idea of casting Times Square in that role. It was argued, however, that the pernicious blight and sleazy image of 42nd Street between Times Square and Eighth Avenue, exerted a “depressing influence on a much larger area” and discouraged private development.<sup>85</sup> The plan thus proposed the 42nd Street Development Project as one of four so-called “Turn-Around” Projects. Financed by public investment, these projects were intended to demonstrate the City’s commitment to revitalizing important landmarks on West Side and creating a favorable environment for private development.

According to the "Discussion Document" released in 1981, the goals of the project were as follows:

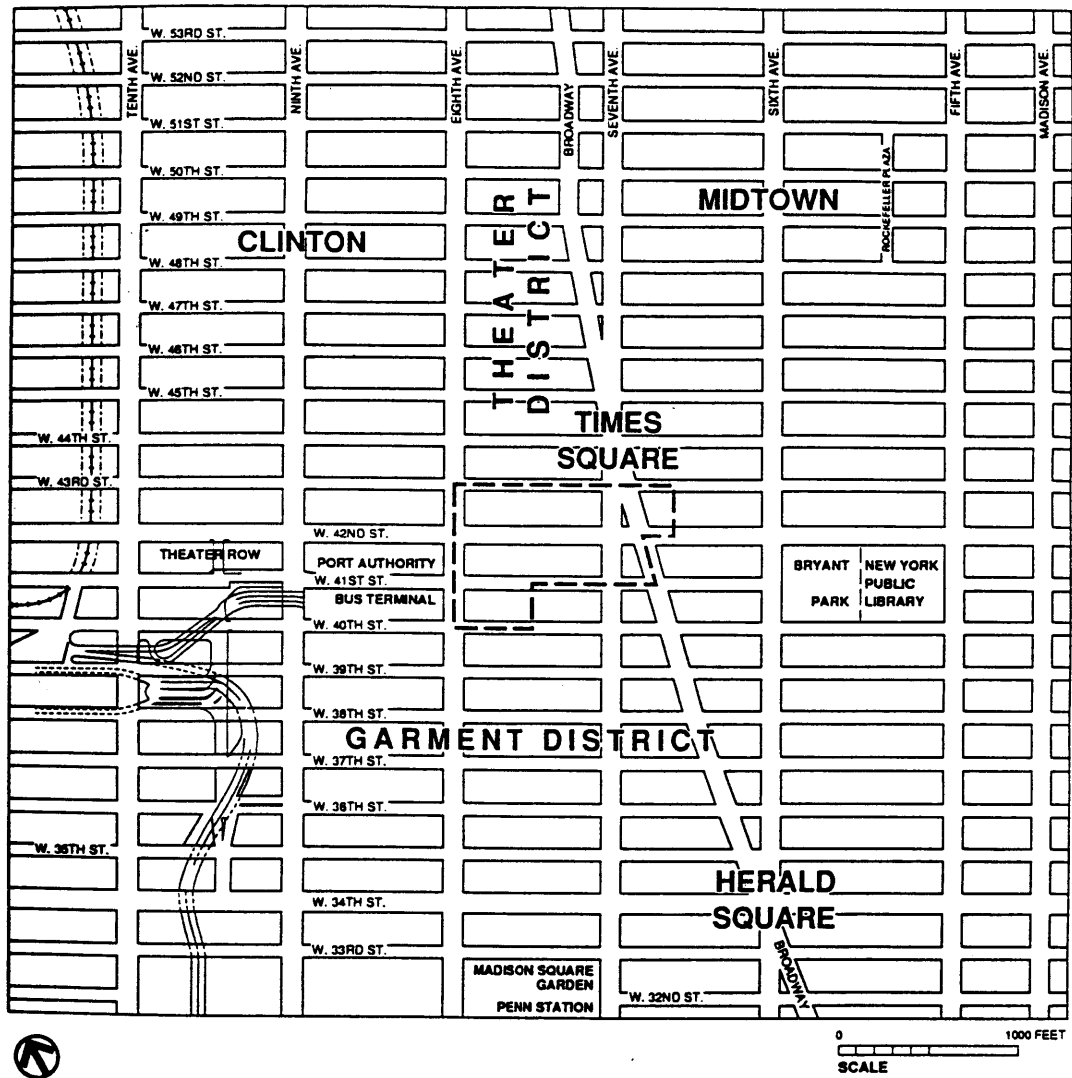
- Eliminate blight, physical decay and crime
- Preserve and restore the area's theaters
- Develop the project area's commercial potential
- Upgrade the Times Square subway complex
- Increase the area's economic contribution to the city
- Restore the project area's role as a positive influence on the adjacent communities.<sup>86</sup>

The area designated for redevelopment consists of the two blocks facing 42nd Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, the Eighth Avenue half of the block immediately to the south, the "crossroads" and Times Tower blocks and the northeast corner of Broadway and 42nd Street (see **fig. 2.2**). The project proposed constructing six major new buildings as a means of maximizing the commercial and retail potential of the area (see **fig. 2.3**). Four new office towers were envisioned for sites 1,3,4, and 12, while developers were encouraged to propose modifications to the landmark Times Tower. The specifications for site 8 call for a wholesale mart containing 2.4 million square feet of exhibit, retail and office space and a skyway bridge to Port Authority Bus Terminal.

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85. NYC Department of City Planning, *Midtown Zoning*, 1981, p.17

86. UDC, *42nd Street Development Project, Discussion Document*, 1981, p. 2.

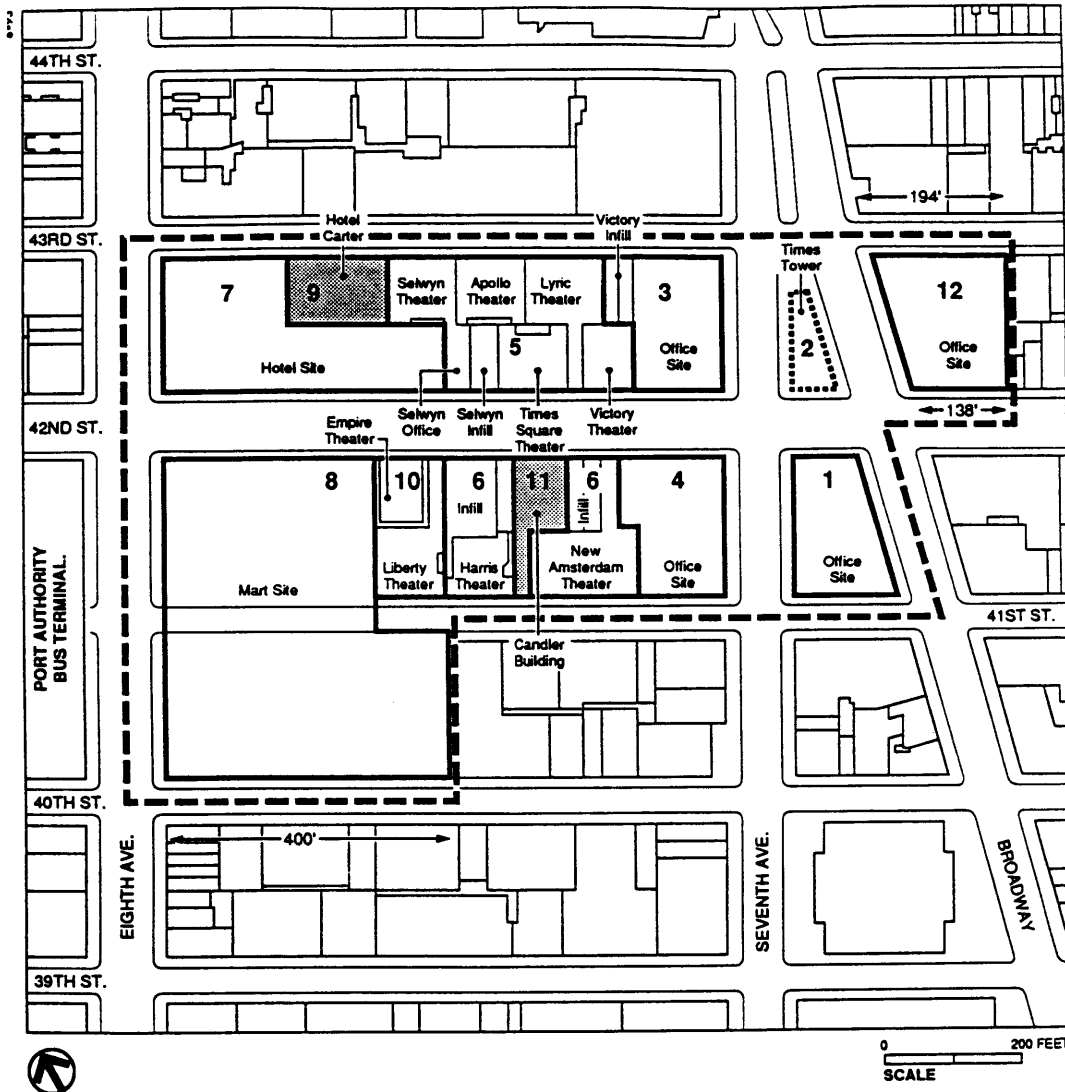


--- 42nd Street Project Area Boundary

**Project Area Location**  
Figure I-1

**Fig. 2.2. Project Area Location.** (source: UDC, *Draft Supplemental EIS*, Aug. 1993)





**8** Site Number  
 - - - 42nd Street Project Area Boundary  
 [Hatched Box] Excluded Parcel  
 [Dotted Box] Project Parcel Unaffected by Current Proposed Actions

**Project Area Development Sites**  
**Figure I-2**

**Fig. 2.3. Project Area Development Sites.** (source: UDC, *Draft Supplemental EIS*, Aug. 1993)

Another 625,000 square feet of hotel, residential and retail space could be built as an anchor at the western edge of the block on site 7.<sup>87</sup>

The Design Guidelines developed for the project use a variety of design controls to shape the form of the new buildings and their relationship to the streets and character of Times Square. In the mid-block area of 42nd Street wall continuity and setback requirements are designed to maintain the low-rise character of the street and its historic theaters. Regulations governing building density and use, bulk, coverage and circulation were carefully drawn up to preserve the overall scale and public life of the area. In addition, "special features" incorporated in the design guidelines emphasize construction materials, facade expression, signage, and lighting which enhance the "lively visual quality of the street."<sup>88</sup> (see **fig. 2.4**)

The vision of 42nd Street put forth in the project proposal and design guidelines foresees both preservation and new development as the means of reestablishing the area around Times Square as the crossroads of commerce and culture. In order to accommodate the more than seven million square feet of new construction for the project area, the 1982 zoning resolution calls for increasing the FAR of the West Side growth area to 18, and with certain bonusable amenities up to 21, the highest allowable density in the city. The specter of sixty story office towers engulfing Times Square, however, cast a long shadow over the city's vision for 42nd Street and raised questions about whose interests were being served by the planning process.

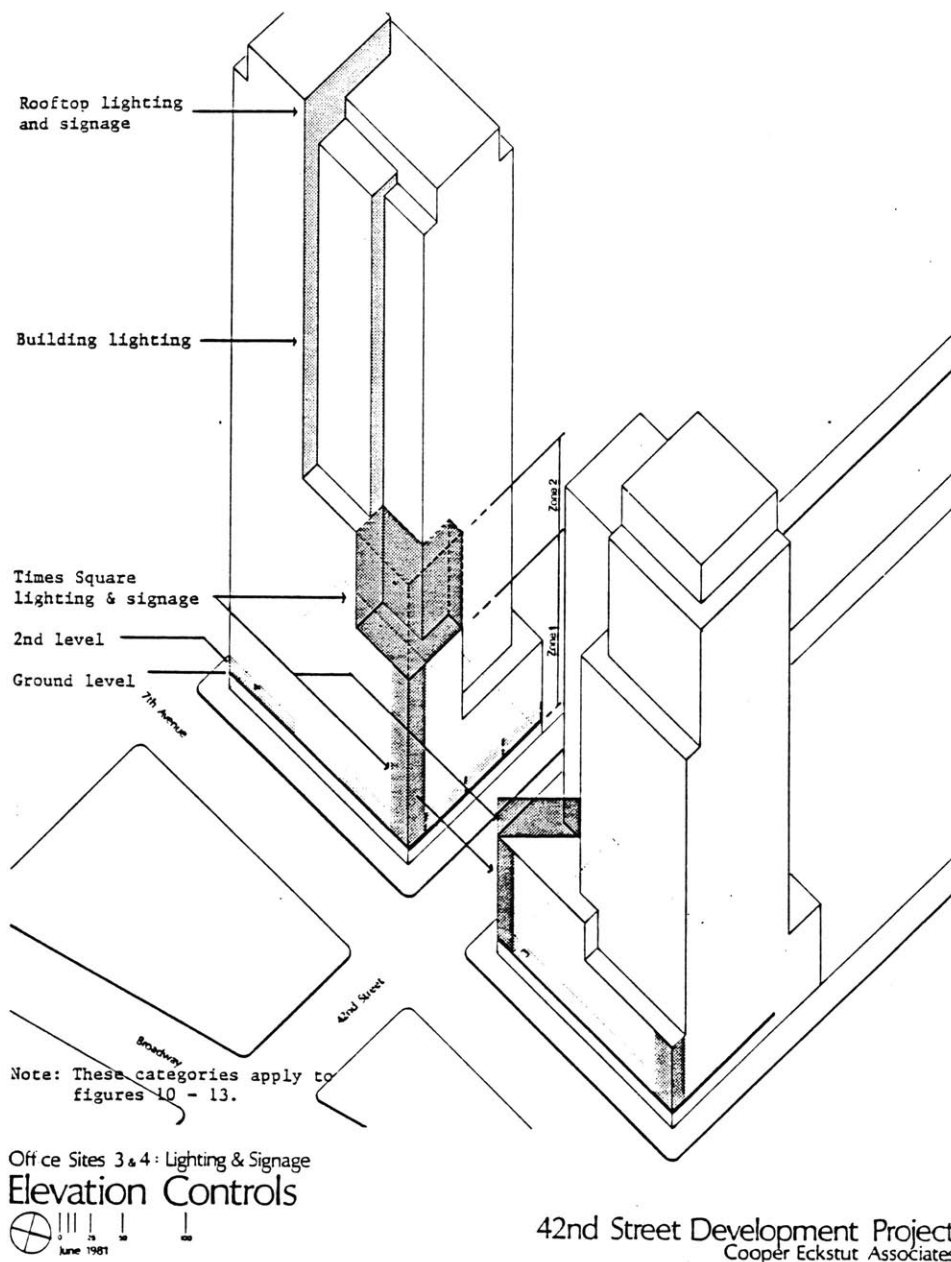
### **The Politics of Image and Use**

A consistent assumption, stated or unstated, which runs throughout the redevelopment plans for Times Square since the 1960s is that the negative image of the area

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87. UDC, *Discussion Document*, p. 3.

88. UDC, *Discussion Document*, p. 11.



**Fig. 2.4. Cooper-Eckstut Design Guidelines.** Elevation controls for the Times Square Center tower site #3. Compare to Johnson-Burgee scheme on p. 70. (source: UDC, *42nd Street Development Project Design Guidelines*, 1981, p. 12)

was a major cause of the underdevelopment of West Midtown. The goal of cleaning up Times Square was thus conceived as part of a larger strategy of improving the marketability of west Midtown real estate for private investment. In the terminology of the surgeon and planner, the "unhealthy" organ must be removed to save the body. Code words like "blight," "underdevelopment" and "underutilization" are employed throughout the redevelopment plans for Times Square as part of the neutral vocabulary of what is in reality a highly politicized discourse defining acceptable uses and users. The question of what type of business or social activity is legitimate or desirable is removed from the realm of public debate and subsumed within facile and uncontested notions of the "public good."<sup>89</sup>

The 1978 42nd Street Study, conducted by the Urban Design Group of the Department of City Planning, explicitly frames the problem of redevelopment in terms of the conflict between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" uses. It proposes as one of its goals to "strengthen and revitalize legitimate businesses, stimulate growth potential, and improve physical conditions in the area to prevent economic and physical decline."<sup>90</sup> Later in the report, what is meant by "legitimacy" is graphically illustrated in a diagram of "healthy" and "unhealthy" areas within the project area. The "Existing Problem Area" is rendered as an ominous ooze threatening to engulf designated "healthy areas." We can infer from the accompanying text that the dark mass represents problems "inhibiting new investment in the area," including "business decline, building deterioration, underutilization of buildings and land, concentration of pornography, high crime rate, and aesthetically displeasing street environment..."<sup>91</sup> (see **fig. 2.5**)

The 42nd Street Development Project, as Susan Fainstein has observed<sup>92</sup>, inherited many of the assumptions of environmental determinism and the use of design as a tool of

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89. For an illuminating analysis of how different notions of the "public" and "public interest" were "constructed" for specific political purposes, see Susan P. Conrad, "Times Square in Transition: Constructing the 'Public' at the Crossroads of the World," unpublished B.A. Thesis, Hampshire College, 1993. See also Fainstein, "The Redevelopment of 42nd Street: Clashing Viewpoints," in *City Almanac* (Summer 1985).

90. *42nd Street Study*, p. 9.

91. *42nd Street Study*, pp. 16 - 17.

92. Fainstein, "The Redevelopment of 42nd Street: Clashing Viewpoints," p. 4

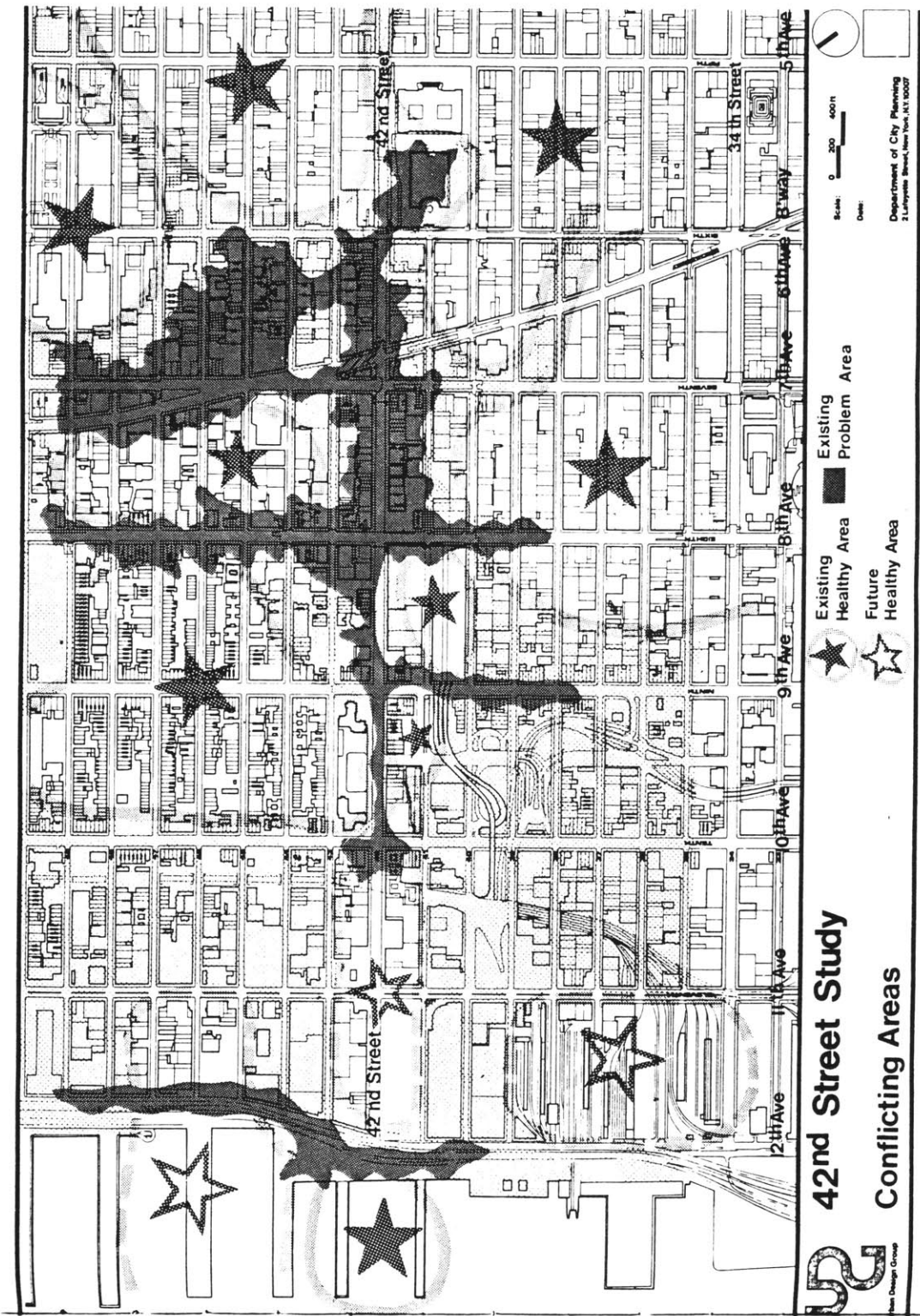


Fig. 2.5. 42nd Street Study: Conflicting Areas. (source: Urban Design Group, *42nd Street Study*, 1978, p. 17)

social engineering that motivated earlier plans. "The City as 42nd Street" was the first to propose a wholesale transformation of the physical environment of 42nd Street as a means of administering a kind of shock therapy to the ailing social body and image of Times Square. In the description of the 42nd Street Development Project the importance of reconstructing the image of Times Square as a rationale for redevelopment is unequivocal: "Forty-Second Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues stands out more than any other as a symbol of the areas glitter and tarnish, and it is the blighted conditions on that block today that have given rise to the 42nd Street Development Project." Moreover, the description continues, half-hearted attempts at ameliorating these conditions have proven ineffectual as "blight, decay and crime continue to thwart the renaissance of an area that is the symbol of New York to most of the world."<sup>93</sup>

The project attributes the problem of Times Square's negative image and its consequences to several factors related to patterns of commercial and social use. First, there is the chicken and egg issue of underutilization: Do vacant buildings create the conditions for "blight" or does a general impression of decline lead to high vacancy rates? Of course, the simple answer is that underutilization is both a cause and effect of blight. But in the case of Times Square the problem may have more to do with types than degrees of use. If we look at total rates of utilized zoning capacity at the time the project was proposed, then buildings in the project area appear to be only one-quarter to one-third utilized. Moreover, vacancy rates for certain land uses like office and loft space are well above 25%. However, in comparison to the business district to the north of Times Square and the garment district to the south,

offices and small manufacturing establishments have never had a significant presence on 42nd Street. The project analysis concedes that the area is predominantly a retail and entertainment district, and vacancy rates for these uses are only between 0% and 10%. The problem, as defined in the project impact statement, is thus not the underutilization of retail

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<sup>93</sup> UDC, *42nd Street Development Project*, Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), August 1984, p. 1.1.

OCCUPANCY OF PROJECT AREA LAND USES  
(MAY 1984)

	<u>Total Area</u> (Square Feet)	<u>Occupied Area</u> (Square Feet)	<u>Percent</u> <u>Vacant</u>
Office/Commercial	943,700	623,800 <sup>1</sup>	33.9
Loft	164,200	120,700	26.5
Retail	101,600	91,600 <sup>2</sup>	10.0
Sex-Related Retail	67,300	67,300	0
Movie Theaters	160,500	160,500	0
Theaters	43,900	0 <sup>3</sup>	100.0
Hotel	337,600	337,600	0
Restaurant/Fast Food	59,800	59,800	0
Institutional	54,100	54,100	0
Residential	6,200	6,200	0
Parking Garages	114,700	114,700	0
<u>Total Development</u>	2,053,700	1,636,300	20.3
Surface Parking	70,400	70,400	0
<u>Total Land Use</u>	2,124,100	1,706,700	19.7

Fig. 2.6. Project Area Vacancy Rates, 1984. (source: UDC, *Final EIS*, Aug.1984)

uses: “Altogether, the movies and sex uses occupy more than half of the blockfronts, and they help attract to the area the collection of drug dealers and other loiterers, which has contributed to the stagnation and deterioration of 42nd Street. This combination of physical conditions and people hanging out makes blight within the project area of a particularly intractable kind.”<sup>94</sup>

The explicit association of blighted physical conditions with the activities that characterize the street life of 42nd Street extends the scope of legitimacy from the use of space to the users themselves. This subtle shift of focus marks a critical juncture in the construction of a discourse that frames the fundamental problem of redevelopment in terms of controlling social space. The mechanisms of control penetrate the structure and imagery of social space as well as the means by which it is produced. So, for example, the project assesses the disproportionate impact of “loitering” in terms of the perceived threat posed by “ownership of the street.” The public “room” on the sidewalk created by the overhanging marquees of many 42nd Street theaters is transformed into contested social space through the actions of the crowd. The spectacle of sex and violence splashed across posters and video monitors lends what the report calls “a carnival atmosphere” to the street and encourages loitering and “hanging out.” In addition, the opaque facades of the theaters and porn shops do not allow for surveillance of the sidewalks, leaving them “unclaimed, and thus available to those hustling and hanging out.”<sup>95</sup>

The regime of meaning and power which structures the language of planning is clearly revealed in the above analysis. The problem is not that the public space of 42nd Street is “unclaimed” since the report itself refers to it as “the loiterer's turf,” but that the claim made

by those particular users is illegitimate and must therefore be denied. The “surveillance” and “claiming” of the street is understood to be the disciplinary prerogative exercised by private property. The enactment of specific design controls to maximize surveillance of the

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94. UDC, 1984 FEIS, p. 2.13.

95. UDC, 1984 FEIS, p. 2.58.



street by businesses was in fact an important component in the project guidelines. The 42nd Street Design Guidelines prepared in 1981 by the respected architectural firm of Cooper, Eckstut Associates, who had also developed the guidelines for Battery Park, proposed the elaborate controls for the use of signage, lighting, facade expression and construction materials to “enhance the visual quality of the street.”<sup>96</sup> The guidelines mandate a maximum use of transparent glass on all storefronts to allow visual access both to and from the street. The theater marquees, moreover, are to be reduced in size and made more transparent to “offer less opportunity for off-hour loitering.”<sup>97</sup>

The case for the redevelopment of Times Square was based on a ten year record of largely unsuccessful efforts to eradicate what many saw as the deep-rooted social pathologies of 42nd Street. The City pointed to promising alternatives like the revitalization of 42nd Street west of Eighth Avenue and the vision of “The City at 42nd Street” to support its argument that what was needed was a radical transformation of the physical and social environment. The 42nd Street Development Project was thus conceived as the instrument of this transformation. At the time of its inception few could argue with the project's general proposition that Times Square was in need of change. But what kind of change? And what cost to the public and to the spirit of Times Square?

## *ACT II. Unveiling the Project and Veiling the Process*

After the 42nd Street Development Project was proposed in 1981, the planning process proceeded along two separate tracks, one open and public and the other behind closed doors. Since the original plan called for such a massive amount of new development in the symbolic heart of City, much of the early public review process focused on how the architecture could be made to conform to the unique character of Times Square. However,

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96. UDC, *42nd Street Development Project Design Guidelines*, May 1981, p. 11.

97. UDC, *Design Guidelines*, p. 1. 14.

the actual process by which the developers were chosen and designs approved was conducted with virtually no public oversight.

When the official plans were unveiled in 1983 many saw a cynical sleight-of-hand at work, especially since key provisions of the design guidelines were ignored. Amid rising public criticism, the UDC nevertheless pressed ahead with the environmental impact review, further alienating and dividing the project's varied constituencies. Although the it was ultimately approved unanimously by the Board of Estimate in 1984, the project remained mired in controversy until its fate was largely decided by economic forces in the late 1980s. This second act therefore examines the contested symbolic meanings of urban form and space as part of the politics of the planning the 42nd Street Development Project.

### **The Architecture of Artifice**

Of the twenty-six developers who bid on the project, the UDC chose Park Tower Realty to build the four office towers. Its president, George Klein, hired postmodernist *enfant (now vieux) terrible* Philip Johnson as the master planner for the project and John Burgee as the chief architect. The Johnson-Burgee designs for the towers were unveiled amid much fanfare in December 1983. To the dismay of almost everyone except the Mayor and the head of the UDC the plan envisioned four neo-classical skyscrapers up to 56 stories tall that guarded the gates of Times Square like great brooding sentries. Times architectural critic Paul Goldberger dismissed the buildings as “cookie cutter” architecture that possessed the uniquely unflattering distinction of “looking utterly out of date before it was even started.”<sup>98</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable mocked the “mansarded postmodern costumes” of the “dressed to kill” Johnson-Burgee towers.<sup>99</sup> (see **figs. 2.7** and **2.8**)

What was even more alarming about the plan was that it clearly violated the spirit and letter of the project's design guidelines, which up to that point had been the only mechanism through which anything like a public will and vision for Times Square had been

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98. Goldberger, “Times Square: Lurching Toward a Terrible Mistake?,” *NYT*, February, 19, 1989.

99. Huxtable, “Reinventing Times Square,” in Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square*, p. 363.

**Johnson-Burgee Scheme for  
Times Square Center, 1983**

**fig. 2.7**

Postmodern Rockefeller Center?  
Model of four office towers at intersection  
of Broadway and Seventh Ave. The Times  
Tower does not appear.

(source: *Philip Johnson/John Burgee,  
Architecture, 1979-1985, New York, 1985,*  
p. 159.)



"Will Times Square become a Grand  
Canyon?" - Paul Goldberger

**fig. 2.8**

Towers in context looking east long 42nd  
Street.. The hotel and retail mart in white  
are shown in the foreground.

(source: *Philip Johnson/John Burgee,  
Architecture, 1979-1985, New York, 1985,*  
p. 158.)



expressed. In the months after the project was first proposed the city had held discussions with a wide range of civic groups including community boards, unions, theater people and architects to solicit suggestions on how the project could be designed to enhance the visual quality and street life of the area. This process resulted in the widely praised Cooper, Eckstut Associates Design Guidelines. Although narrowly focused on specific design controls related to density, circulation and aesthetics, the wider non-discretionary mandate of the guidelines is clearly stated: to preserve the “bright lights and open air feel” of Times Square through large signs and building setbacks and to preserve the Times Square Tower “as the focal point for Times Square.”<sup>100</sup>

But where the Cooper Eckstut designs rendered carefully sculpted building forms with elaborate setbacks, the Johnson-Burgee towers delivered sheer granite walls rising straight up from the street. The stodgy and stolid towers were devoid of any trace of the bright lights and neon signs that gives Times Square is unique visual character. And even more mysterious was the void where the Times Square Tower should have been; it was sacrificed for yet another urban plaza. When these glaring discrepancies were pointed out to Mayor Koch, he quipped that he “never felt it necessary to explain why we improve something.”<sup>101</sup> Both the UDC and George Klein of Park Tower Realty defended the changes on economic grounds. The UDC's vice president for public affairs argued that “the only deviations were to make the project more marketable.” Klein dismissed the guidelines requirements for building bulk and shape as economically unfeasible since the anticipated tenants--banks, insurance companies, law firms--required large open floor space.<sup>102</sup>

The statements of Klein and UDC officials notwithstanding, architectural form and style is only partly determined by the purely economic calculations of floor area ratio and cost per square foot. Architecture functions within in a larger social and symbolic context as both the capital of economic power and culture. Certainly Johnson and Burgee, who since the 1970s have collectively defined the opportunistic postmodernism of corporate

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100. UDC, *Design Guidelines*, May 1981, p. 1.1.

101. Quoted in Carter Wiseman, “Brave New Times Square,” *New York*, April 2, 1984, p. 32.

102. Wiseman, “Brave New Times Square,” p. 33 - 34.

capitalism, understood full well the social and cultural meaning the Times Square towers. “We wanted it to look like a center,” Johnson reportedly commented, “it’s no accident.” Burgee identified which center the architects had in mind: “When you’re building a Rockefeller Center, you have to have a unity. We’re giving Times Square an identity it doesn’t have now.” Klein was even more explicit about the social purpose the buildings were intended to serve. “A total feeling has to be engendered,” he stated, “What Rockefeller Center did for New York in the 1930s, this has the potential for doing in the 1980s and ‘90s. You cannot build these buildings one at a time because you cannot displace the garbage that way.”<sup>103</sup>

This vision of what Times critic Herbert Muschamp called “a dated Victorian notion of authority”<sup>104</sup> was the antithesis of the spirit of the Cooper-Eckstut Design Guidelines. The formalist unity of Rockefeller Center may have provided a much needed symbol of corporate stability in the depths of the Depression, but critics wondered what it had to do with Times Square in the 1980s. In an critical assessment of the redevelopment plans of Times Square, Ada Louis Huxtable refers to a series of photographs commissioned by the Municipal Art Society in the mid-1980s and concludes that architecture plays almost no role in constructing the unique image of Times Square. Instead, she argues, the chaotic melange of signs and displays dematerializes the architecture, creating the paradox of a “non-architecture of place, with one of the strongest images of place in the world.”<sup>105</sup>

Although the formal architecture of Times Square has largely been a backdrop to the ephemeral spectacle of place, I would argue that the Johnson-Burgee scheme had everything to do with the more important politics of image that were foregrounded in the 42nd Street Development Project. As Klein’s indelicate statement about “displacing the garbage” clearly reveals, the architecture of the project was being called into service to achieve manifestly non-architectural social ends. Johnson and Burgee’s imagery of

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103. Wiseman, “Brave New Times Square,” p. 34.

104. Muschamp, “For Times Square, A Reprieve and a Hope for a Livelier Day,” *NYT*, August 6, 1992.

105. Huxtable, “Reinventing Times Square,” p. 358.

Rockefelleresque unity and authority simply translated into form the underlying social agenda of the project. For the last thirty years, attempts to clean up Times Square's social "garbage" in isolation from the city's larger problems of deep-rooted economic and racial inequality have proved futile. Therefore, in an era of shrinking budgets and a fraying social contract, private development could be refashioned into an instrument of social policy and remarketed as a public good. But many in the public were not buying what the city and developers were selling in its name.

### **The Facade of Public Participation**

The redevelopment project was placed under the joint auspices of the New York State Urban Development Corporation and the City's Public Development Corporation. The participation of the state UDC meant that the project would not be subject to the city's lengthy land use review process. The UDC brought with it special statutory powers that were considered critical to the success of the project. These included the ability to assemble land through the powers of condemnation and eminent domain, to set payments in lieu of real estate taxes, and to control use and design throughout the project area. The City required developers to assume the land acquisition costs up to a specified level and to make annual payments in lieu of taxes. In addition to the new jobs and tax revenues expected to be generated by the project, other public benefits to be paid for by developers included the renovation of nine historic theaters and improvements to the Times Square subway station.

In exchange for these contributions to the city, developers were offered handsome incentives mainly in the form of longterm tax abatements. The actual amount of the public subsidies was a matter of some controversy. According to one analyst, the payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) to the city over the fifteen period of the abatement would amount to \$480 million compared to the \$1.13 billion that would be owed without the exemptions. In other words, the public was investing \$650 million over fifteen years in forgone taxes in the project. In addition, the public would have to pick up the bill on any land acquisition costs

above \$150 million. The real cost was estimated to be as much as twice that amount.<sup>106</sup> In addition, as *The Village Voice* pointed out, there was a catch in how the land would be paid for. Every dollar the developer paid for land above the fixed “offset” amount he was entitled to claim back from the city with interest from the sales tax fund or by eliminating up to half of his PILOT payments. Thus, given the rising land values in the mid-1980s, *The Voice* concluded that the project might not generate much more in revenue than if the block were simply left alone.<sup>107</sup>

Even looking just at the bottom line, many critics concluded that the project was a bad deal for the city, and another case of the public being asked to underwrite the profits of private developers. Other groups took a look at the project's four million square feet of new office space and instead of seeing jobs and tax revenues saw only disaster for Times Square. Foremost among these were members of the theater community. The city's major theater owners, led by the Schubert and Nederlander Organizations, were early supporters of the project calculating that any improvement to Times Square would mean higher theater attendance. Small theater owners and workers, however, were wary of the city's commitment to preserving the 42nd theaters in the face of the general decline in attendance and profits on Broadway. The city's credibility on this issue was severely damaged by the debacle that resulted in the demolition of the Helen Hayes and Morosco Theaters in 1982 to make way for the Portman's fortress-like Marriott Hotel.<sup>108</sup>

The fear that the theater restoration was little more than a sideshow to the major production of office development was expressed in the hearings on the draft EIS in 1984. Civic groups, led by the Landmarks Conservancy, criticized the project for failing to develop a adequate preservation and reuse plan for the 42nd Street theaters. Questions were unanswered on how the rehabilitation of the theaters would be financed and operated over

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106. John Mollenkopf, “The 42nd Street Development Project and the Public Interest,” in *City Almanac* (Summer 1985), p. 13.

107. D.D. Gutenplan, “Debacle on 42nd Street,” *The Village Voice*, May 7, 1985, p. 14.

108. Goldstein, “Development and the Threat to the Theater District,” *City Almanac* (Summer 1985) p. 23.

the long term. Moreover, the civic groups expected that the removal of development rights from the midblock buildings was the quid pro quo for the large-scale development at the corners. However, the plan only included a clause in the operators lease not to convert a theater to other uses, which was felt to be an insufficient guarantee against future redevelopment. Therefore, the theater community insisted on landmarks designation of the theaters as a condition for its approval of the final plan.<sup>109</sup>

Like the controversy over the design of the towers, the debate over the restoration of “legitimate” theater on 42nd Street reveals the deeper social and ideological undercurrents of the project. The analysis of existing conditions in the final EIS lists over half of the 42nd Street theaters as movie houses that showed mainly violent action features and not pornography. The movie house’s large seating capacity, low ticket prices and round-the-clock shows attracted large audiences and established what the EIS calls a “unique entertainment district” in the city. The conversion of the theaters to grind movie houses actually began in the 1930s as Times Square was “democratized” by larger numbers of working-class and immigrant patrons. The sheer longevity of this form of entertainment on 42nd Street attests to its profitability. The EIS estimated the audience at the three largest theaters to be as much as 60,000 per week, a volume nearly as high as the first-run theaters in Times Square.<sup>110</sup>

The problem with these movie theaters, therefore, was not that they were an economic liability for the city. The problem had much more to do with the “image” that the theaters created and the demographics of the audience they served. What distinguished the 42nd theaters from the first-run theaters in Times Square, according to the EIS, were their explicit enticements to the unseemly in which “themes of sex and violence [rarely] give way to family entertainment.”<sup>111</sup> The other factor that apparently made these theaters unfriendly to families was the nature of the clientele. A pedestrian survey revealed that the movie-goers along with “hustlers” and those “hanging out” were predominantly male (89%

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109. McCloud, “Preserving the Core of the Big Apple,” *City Almanac* (Summer 1985), p. 9.

110. UDC, 1984 FEIS, p. 2.57.

111. UDC, 1984 FEIS, p. 2.57.



to 100%), Black and Hispanic (over 60%) and young (75% under 35 years old). The inability to distinguish “legitimate” from “illegitimate” users led to a perception of “ominous” and undifferentiated otherness on the street.<sup>112</sup> The sociologist Herbert J. Gans, in a critical commentary on the project’s projected impacts, unmasked the project's thinly veiled social motives:

The project area is already very lively and attracts many people, including tourists. In actuality, the de facto goal of the project is to displace the mainly low and moderate income young male adults who are attracted to the area in favor of more affluent New Yorkers of all ages and sexes. If this is accomplished the project will still not be serving all New Yorkers, since the former users would now be excluded.<sup>113</sup>

The other important constituency whose interests were not adequately considered in the planning process were the residents of the Clinton. Like the theater workers, the Clinton neighborhood were given a consolation prize in the form of a vague promise to “restore the project area's role as a positive influence on adjacent communities.” The Clinton neighborhood, formerly known notoriously as Hell's Kitchen, occupies the blocks between the mid-30s and the upper-50s west of Eighth Avenue and has been described as the “last old-fashioned polyglot neighborhood in midtown.”<sup>114</sup> Since the 1970s, however, Clinton had borne the brunt of both collateral Midtown gentrification and the spillover effects of drugs and prostitution from Times Square. Although originally supportive of efforts to clean up the area, opposition to the project began to solidify as residents came to see a greater threat in the increased property values and social dislocation that would likely result from the redevelopment. The complaints of the Clinton community fell on deaf ears leading up to the Board of Estimate hearing when the Governor finally intervened to force an agreement between the UDC and the Clinton Community Board. In a take-it-or-leave-it offer, Clinton was promised \$25 million over five years in publicly allocated funds to offset any negative effects from the project.<sup>115</sup>

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112. UDC, 1984 FEIS, p. 2.73.

113. Gans, UDC, 1984 FEIS (Vol. 2), p. 10.44

114. Martin Gottlieb, “Times Square is Dividing People in Adjacent Clinton,” *NYT*, May 5, 1984.

115. Brendle, “Negotiating for Clinton,” *City Almanac* (Summer 1985), pp. 25 - 26.

Despite the criticisms of these and other groups, the 42nd Street project plan remained basically unchanged until two weeks before the Board of Estimate hearing in October 1984. At that point, under strong pressure from politicians unwilling to be blamed for dropping the Times Square ball, the City Planning Commission began to make some last minute concessions. The Board of Estimate resolution included, in addition to the Clinton deal, the designation of a separate committee to decide the fate of the Times Tower and new signage and lighting requirements for any new buildings in the project area. These token gestures only served to confirm to the project's critics that the whole ostensibly public and open planning process was in fact an elaborate shell game to conceal the real objectives of redevelopment. To some seasoned observers this was obvious from the start. Herbert Gans pointed out in the EIS hearings that "the project goals and the program are poorly related; at times the goals seem to be merely an after the fact justification for the project."<sup>116</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable argues even more unequivocally that "the linkage to public purpose in the preservation of the theaters was tenuous, and the cleanup was a convenient cover for conventional development." And she concludes on an ominously portentous note:

It is hard to believe that no one understood that the combination of city and state incentives meant wipeout, rather than salvation, for Times Square, that the sheer size and bulk of the new office buildings would turn it into just another big business district. It is easier to believe that this is exactly what everybody involved really wanted. It is certainly, eventually, what Times Square will get.<sup>117</sup>

*Or is it?*

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116. Gans, 1984 FEIS, p. 10.43.

117. Huxtable, "Reinventing Times Square," p. 364.

### ***Act III. Reimag(in)ing Times Square***

When the 42nd Street Project was officially approved in 1984, its supporters heralded the dawn of a new Times Square while opponents predicted imminent doom. Few, however, had foreseen what was actually to follow: namely, nothing at all. For the next four years the project was embroiled in a series of legal battles arising out of the planning and development process. The most serious of the claims made in the law suits were that the city's extensive participation in the project did not permit it to bypass the land use review process and that the bidding process was tainted by favoritism and exclusion. By the time the legal issues were finally settled in 1988, the fate of the project had already been substantially sealed by the downturn in the real estate market a year earlier. In the meantime, however, the new visions for Times Square began to emerge within the changing economic and cultural landscape of the city. This third act thus looks at how, by the early 1990s, the 42nd Street Development Project was recast as an alternative vision of place began to take center stage.

#### **Rediscovering Place**

The struggle to define an appropriate symbolic expression for the new Times Square buildings was part of a more fundamental crisis of representation. In spite of its *pret-a-porter* postmodernist style, the Johnson-Burgee scheme, as they fully admitted, was inspired by a tradition of high modernist urbanism that denied the historical particularities of place. But, of course, this was exactly what the 42nd Street project itself sought to do. The problem with Times Square was that the dead (and still very much live) weight of the last fifty years of its history would not easily yield to the forces of redevelopment. The reconstructed Freudian super-ego of Times Square was trapped inside its unreconstructed id.

One solution to this bind was to disentangle the symbols and images of Times Square from the dense mesh of social space which generates them. In other words, distillate

place down to its essential (and essentialist) visual representations. The Cooper-Eckstut *Design Guidelines* provided one model of how this might be done. They made no pretense to addressing the underlying social or economic conditions that necessitated the project, despite the fact the input into the guidelines came from many of the groups who were most directly affected by these conditions. Their purview was restricted to “preserving the unique character of the Times Square area,”<sup>118</sup> defined almost exclusively in terms of its visual quality. But, as the subsequent Johnson-Burgee scheme demonstrated, even this supposedly non-discretionary mandate was not enough to ensure that the new Times Square would look anything like the old one they sought to recreate.

The approval of the final plan, however, did not close debate on whose vision for Times Square would ultimately prevail. If anything the controversy over the plan expanded and invigorated the dialogue on the contested meanings of place. The major voices in this dialogue were brought together under the leadership of the Municipal Art Society (MAS). The Society, the traditional guardian of New York’s art and architectural heritage, was generally supportive of the project’s goals of preserving the theaters and revitalizing the area. With the unveiling of the Johnson-Burgee scheme, however, the Society joined the Landmarks Conservancy and other preservationist-minded civic groups in condemning the decision to eliminate the Times Tower. The Society responded by sponsoring an open design competition to present alternative visions for the Tower which would retain and redefine its “vital urban function” in Times Square. The competition provoked a public discussion that led to an agreement in principle by the City Planning Commission to reconsider the basic zoning allowances for Times Square.<sup>119</sup> (see **figs. 2.9** and **2.10**)

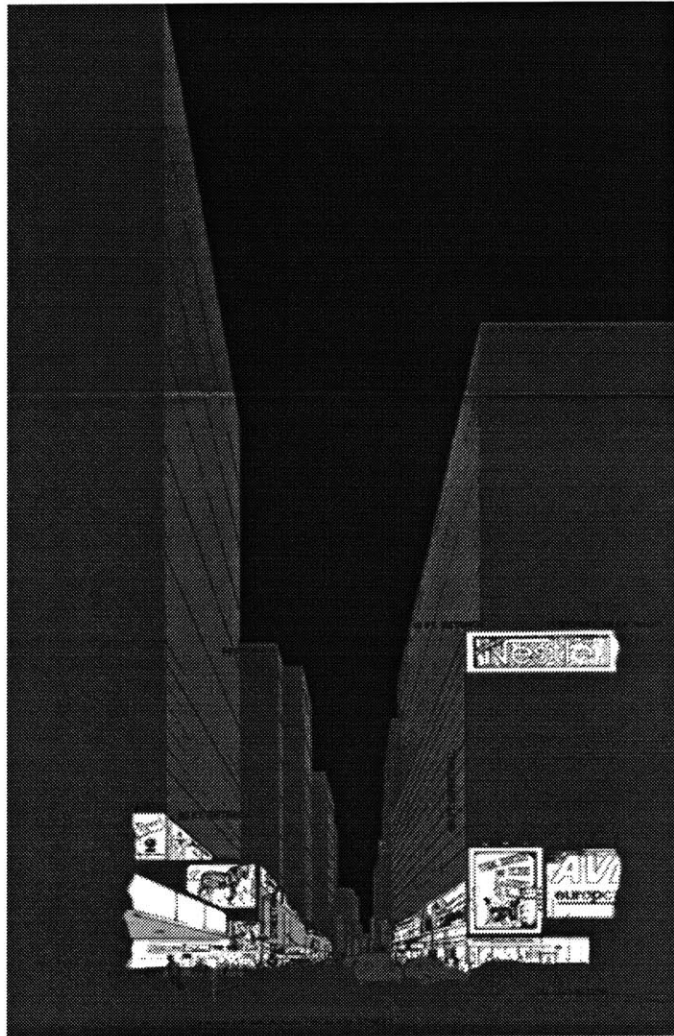
In addition to saving the Times Tower, The Society sought to launch a broader campaign to raise awareness of the threat posed to Times Square by the new development in the area. What was ironic about the controversy that raged over the potential impact of

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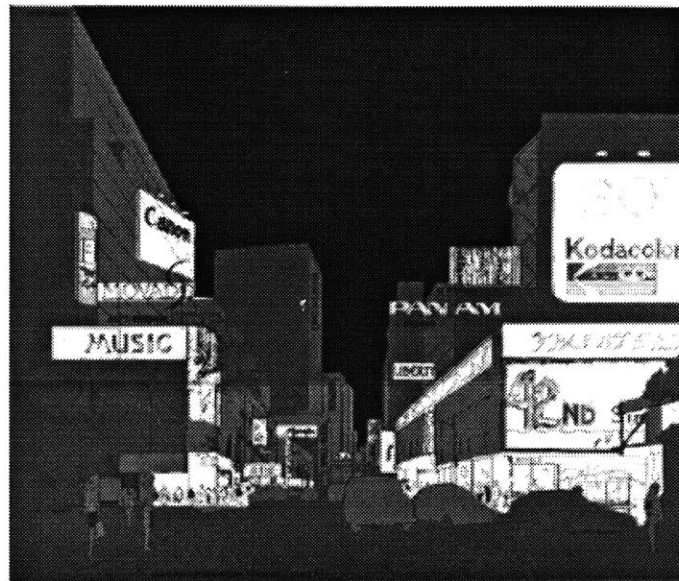
118. UDC, *Design Guidelines*, p. 2.

119. Municipal Art Society, *The Livable City*, No. 10/1 (October 1986), p. 1-3.

**Alternative Visions 1:  
Design Controls**



**fig. 2.9**  
Section through Times Square under allowable density conditions of the 1982 Midtown Zoning.  
(source: MAP, *The Livable City*, Oct. 1986, p. 4)



**fig. 2.10**  
Proposed alternative under revised design guidelines advocated by the MAP.  
(source: MAP, *The Livable City*, Oct. 1986, p. 4)

the 42nd Street Development Project was that it ended up diverting attention from the actual transformation of Times Square that was brought about by the 1982 Midtown zoning changes. By the mid-1980s, at least eight of the 17 possible development sites in the Times Square area were spoken for as developers rushed to take advantage of the zoning incentives before the “sunset provision” took effect in 1988. Several of the new buildings that went up made the Johnson-Burgee towers look positively contextual and sensitive to the “unique character” of Times Square.<sup>120</sup> Alarmed by the “Sixth Avenuing” of Times Square, the Municipal Art Society hired the Environmental Simulation Lab at Berkeley to build a detailed model of the entire area between 42nd and 53rd Streets on Seventh Avenue to demonstrate the effects of the new zoning if the full-build trend continued. The extraordinary film-studio like model recreated in miniature every detail of the area down to real electronic signs and street lamps. A series of before and after analyses based on allowable zoning demonstrated with compelling and realistic visual force the literally bleak future awaiting Times Square.<sup>121</sup> (see **figs. 2.11 - 2.13**)

In 1985 the MAS commissioned a film using the model to make their case to the public and, more importantly, to city officials. The film's narrative is drawn primarily from the ideas and insights of author Tony Hiss, who was a consultant on the project. In his book *The Experience of Place*, Hiss takes us on a full-sensory walking tour of Times Square to discover the phenomenological essence of place and the lessons of place-making. What he finds is extremely revealing of the shifting parameters of the discussion on what Times Square is as a place and what it “wants to be” in the landscape of the postmodern city. Hiss casts a wide gaze over the area's special configuration of buildings and spaces and concludes that “in their old unity, the small buildings created a bowl of light, a mixture of natural light and the bright lights of Broadway.” “So many signs, in so many places,” he adds, “[seem] to band together and surround the area with an unbroken ring of light.”<sup>122</sup>

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120. See Goldberger, “Will Times Square Become a Grand Canyon,” *NYT*, November 6, 1985.

121. Peter Bosselmann, “Times Square,” *Places*, vol. 4, no. 2., p. 59.

122. Tony Hiss, *The Experience of Place* (New York, 1990) p. 71.

## Alternative Visions 2: Modeling the Future

### From "Bowl of Light" to "Grand Canyon"?

Times Square's "Bowl of Light"

- Tony Hiss

#### fig. 2.11

Berkeley SimLab model of Times Square  
as it looked in the mid-1980s.

(source: Bosselmann, "Times Square,"  
*Places*, p. 61.)



"Will Times Square become a Grand  
Canyon?"

- Paul Goldberger

#### fig. 2.12

SimLab model of Times Square looking  
north on Seventh Ave. at full-build  
conditions of 1982 Midtown Zoning.

(source: Bosselmann, "Times Square,"  
*Places*, p. 59)



#### fig. 2.13

SimLab model of "preferred alternative"  
with amendments to 1982 Midtown Zoning.

(source: Bosselmann, "Times Square,"  
*Places*, p. 61)



Hiss's description is reminiscent of the wondrous accounts of the sublime spectacle of light on the Great White Way at the turn of the century.

Hiss's attempt to (re)discover the meaning of place in Times Square is not merely an academic exercise. He seeks not only to uncover but also to recover a unique essence of place that he fears is slipping away. The challenge, he argues, is about "banding together to become the guardians of an experience, rescue it, and convoy it through rapid or long-term changes."<sup>123</sup> In this sense Hiss speaks for a generation of architects, planners and activists who since the 1970s have sought to reassemble the fragments of the place into a more humane vision of the modern city. This vision was in fact present in the conceptualization of 42nd Second Street Project, but largely as a subtext within the dominant discourse of conventional urban renewal.<sup>124</sup> Towards the of 1980s, however, latent reimaginings of what Times Square "wants to be," which reflected much of Hiss's thinking on the experience of place, moved from the margins to the center of the project's self-representation.

The first evidence of an official rediscovery of place in Times Square was reflected in the amendments to the Special Midtown Zoning in 1987 to "ensure that the unique and valuable sense of place of Times Square will be retained and nurtured as new development occurs."<sup>125</sup> Written as a series of specific "performance standards" related to building density, setbacks and signage, the new design controls incorporate almost point by point the recommendations of the Municipal Art Society study. Although this was clearly a vindication for the civic groups who had fought to "save" Times Square, the new controls did not apply to the buildings that were part of the 42nd Street Development Project since it fell under the legal control of the state.

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123. Hiss, *The Experience of Place*, p. 72,

124. Despite earlier efforts by the UDC to avoid the stigma of "urban renewal," the current press packet released by the UDC in fact describes the project as "the largest development effort ever undertaken by the State and City of New York, and one of the largest urban renewal programs launched in the country."

125. *Times Square Urban Design Controls*, quoted in Huxtable, "Reinventing Times Square," p. 365.



By 1988 the soft market for new office space had put the towers on hold, and the 42nd Street Project began to search for alternative visions for Times Square. They refocused attention on the potential of the 42nd Street theaters to serve as the symbols of a new Times Square remade in the “populist” image of the 1930s and 40s. Enter Robert A. M. Stern. Described by Times critic Herbert Muschamp as a “persuasive mythologizer of the city's past glories,”<sup>126</sup> Stern was hired by the UDC to recreate a “populist” vision for five historic theaters on 42nd Street. The restored theaters, according to the sponsors, would feature everything from concerts to avant-garde plays and even circuses to draw a “wide and reputable” range of audiences.<sup>127</sup> In Stern's renderings the commercial aesthetic of 42nd Street is recaptured in airbrushed images of romance and nostalgia. The dazzling electronic model built by his office meanwhile attempts to do for 42nd Street what the Berkeley Sim Lab model did for the rest of Times Square. It distills and reduces the character of place down to a visual essence that can be reconstructed and reconveyed through future manipulations of the physical environment (see **figs. 2.14** and **2.15** )

Finally in 1989, the Johnson-Burgee scheme for the postponed towers was given a stylistic makeover to reflect the project's new “populist” image. Stiff neo-classical formalism gave way to a more fashionable deconstructivist version of what Johnson referred to as “something we call the new modern.”<sup>128</sup> The building's hefty bulk remained the same, to avoid a second planning review process, only now it was visually broken up by setbacks, asymmetry and neon signs. (see **figs. 2.16** and **2.17**) Although the skin-deep stylistic changes did nothing to address public criticisms of the project's misguided goals, the move did represent an important change in the image that was now being conveyed. The *Times* reported that, according to officials, “the bright lights up and down Times Square, as

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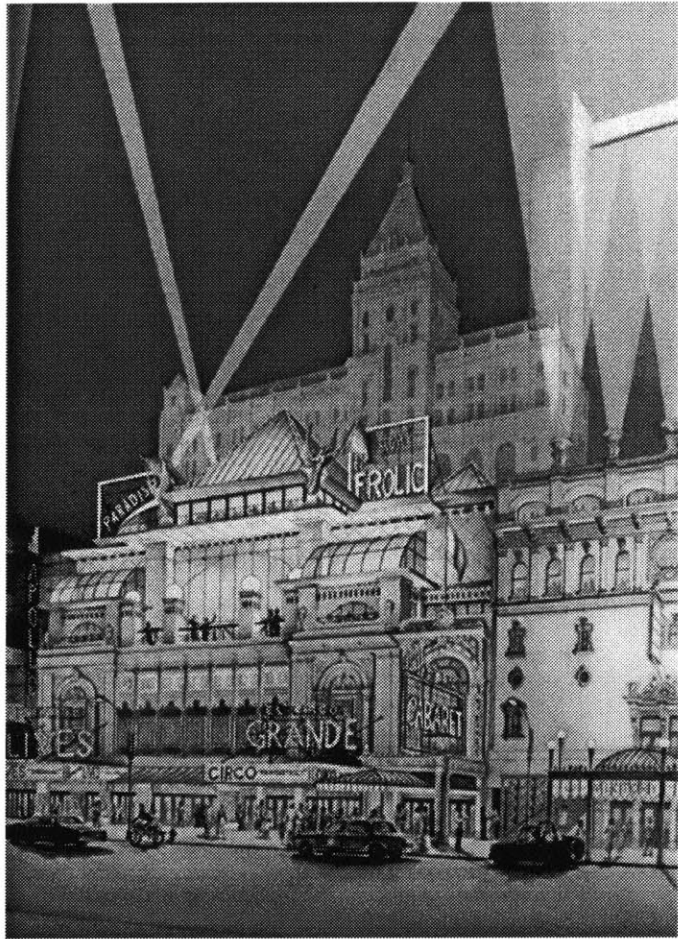
126. Muschamp, “Time to Reset the Clock in Times Square,” *NYT*, November 1, 1992. Stern's paeans to New York's architectural past include *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1980 - 1915* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983) and *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism between the two World Wars* (New York, Rizzoli, 1987)

127. See Thomas J. Lueck, “Six Times Square Theaters Go Populist,” *NYT*, Sept. 18, 1988; and, “Populist' Plans for 42nd Street,” *Progressive Architecture*, November 1988.

128. Johnson quoted in Susan Chira, “New Designs for Times Square Try to reflect Neon Atmosphere,” *NYT*, Aug. 31, 1989.

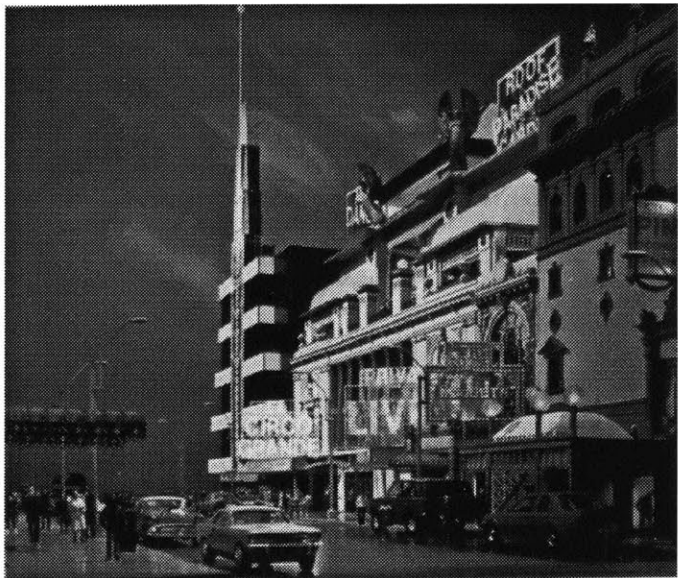
**Alternative Visions 3:  
Back to the Future**

**Plans for the 42nd Street  
Theaters, 1987**



**fig. 2.14**

Robert A. M. Stern's rendering of restored Times Square Theater on 42nd Street re-creates the glamour of the 1920s.  
(source: *Robert A. M. Stern, Buildings and Projects, 1987-1992, p. 87*)



**fig. 2.15**

Model of restored theaters on north block of 42nd Street facing Eighth Ave.  
(source: *Robert A. M. Stern, Buildings and Projects, 1987-1992, p. 86*)

**Johnson-Burgee Re-Visions for Times Square Place, 1989**

**fig. 2.16**

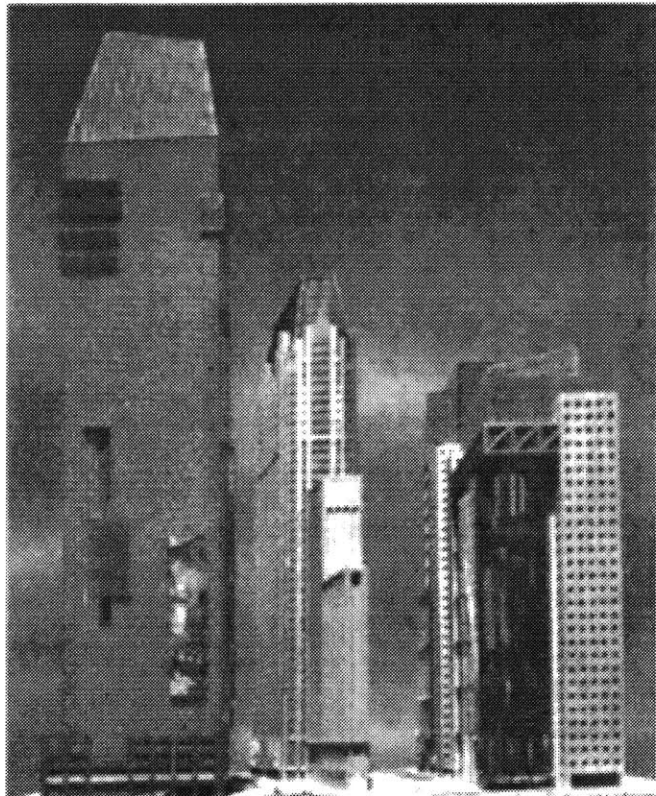
Original 1983 plan four office towers at intersection of Broadway and Seventh Ave. (source: Herbert Muscamp, "Times Square, Belief and Hope in a Livlier Day," *New York Times*, Aug. 6, 1992.)



The "New Modern" or "slipcover architecture"?

**fig. 2.17**

Revised 1989 plan for office towers in accordance 1987 Zoning Amendments. Note the return of the Times Tower. (source: Herbert Muscamp, "Times Square, Belief and Hope in a Livlier Day," *New York Times*, Aug. 6, 1992.)



well as on 42nd Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, were central to their plan for redeveloping the area. While they wanted to drive out the real riffraff--such as drug dealers and pornographers--the planners intended to maintain Times Square's raffish identity as a center of entertainment, social diversity and around-the-clock vibrancy.”<sup>129</sup>

### **Speculating on the Spectacle**

With no recovery in the Midtown real estate market in sight entering the 1990s, the "populist" redirection of the 42nd Development Project culminated in a new set of amendments to the official redevelopment plan in 1992. The amended plan puts on hold the development of the office towers and merchandise mart “until market conditions improve” (estimated in the supplemental EIS to be 7 to 10 years) and eliminates some of the previously committed public improvements including the renovation of Times Square subway station. Instead the plan proposes as its centerpiece a fast-track interim project, called “42nd Street Now!,” which is designed to revitalize the area with tourist and entertainment-related activities. Specifically, the goals of 42nd Street Now are to:

- Enhance the energy of Times Square as a magnet for tourism and entertainment;
- Produce a lively, healthy street ambiance; and
- Support the entertainment and entertainment-related uses programmed for the midblock.<sup>130</sup>

The project is to be financed on the cheap with a \$20 million advance from the Times Square Center Associates (TSCA), a partnership between the Prudential Insurance Company and Park Tower Realty which took over the lease for the four office tower sites in 1988. By 1990, the UDC had acquired almost all of the midblock sites through the condemnation process and a non-profit entity, The New 42nd Street, Inc, was set up to manage and operate the theaters.

Thus, with most of the project sites fully under UDC control, the 42nd Street project was finally ready to proceed. Although revised plan emphasizes the continuity between the

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129. Thomas Lueck, “Six Times Square Theaters go ‘Populist’,” *NYT*, September 18, 1988.

130. UDC, *42nd Street Development Project, Draft Supplemental EIS*, August 1993, p. I.13

goals of the interim project and the original 1984 project, what is significant is the change in the means by which they were to be achieved. The original goal of eliminating blight and revitalizing the area is now to be achieved not with new office buildings and workers but with entertainment activities that would “build on Times Square's universal tourist appeal as well as the district's multicultural character.”<sup>131</sup> The shift in proposed uses from offices to tourism and entertainment is the exact same prescription that civic groups concerned with preserving the identity of Times Square had advocated in the mid-1980s. The 1985 movie made by the Municipal Art Society focuses on the important role of tourism for Times Square and the City and speaks of transforming the area using the “open collar” instead of “white collar.”

But what is even more telling of the vision for Times Square that is being projected is the curious reference to its “multicultural character.” Although the previous plan had made obligatory remarks about maintaining the area's “diversity” in the abstract, the true economic and ethnic diversity of the streets was encoded as the “undesirable” social elements who would be the main casualties of the project. In the current plan, as the *Times* had foreseen in 1988, the “raffish identity” of Times Square without the real riffraff is ideologically recoded as an alluring spectacle of what one writer called “sanitized danger.”<sup>132</sup> Herbert Muschamp captured the commodified aura of this spectacle in urging project sponsors to look at what Times Square “wants to be,” which is “the great maw of pleasure, desire and fear, opening itself wide for our entertainment like hell's mouth in a medieval morality play.”<sup>133</sup> The spectacle of “pleasure, desire and fear,” in other words, becomes a fetishized commodity of display and entertainment that substitutes illusion for reality.

The Executive Summary of the *42nd Street Now!* Project provides the critical ideological context within which the spectacle of the new Times Square is being constructed and deserves to be quoted at length.

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131. UDC, 1993 DEIS, p. I.13.

132. See Conrad, “Times Square in Transition,” p. 68.

133. Muschamp, “For Times Square, A Reprieve,” *NYT* August 6, 1992.

For almost a century 42nd Street's theater block has defined razzle-dazzle the world over. A testament to the energy of the entrepreneur, whose confidence and brash commercial instincts created one of the world's most stimulating man-made environments, its mix of high-style and utilitarian architecture, offices and theaters, small stores and towering billboards makes 42nd Street a living symbol of American culture and democracy. It is like no other place on earth...

42nd Street Now! calls for the restoration of New York's quintessential entertainment district, our most democratic good-time place. The renewed 42nd Street will be an enhanced version of itself--not a gentrified theme-park or festival market. The focus of the renewed 42nd Street will be theaters and all that goes with them: restaurants and retail establishments related to entertainment and tourism. Once again 42nd Street will be able to take its rightful place among the world's great urban entertainment destinations. The street's distinct character, with its unique tradition of bold signage and lighting displays, will be retained and enhanced with ever-evolving signage adding to the daily drama of the street...

On December 31, 1999, Times Square and 42nd Street will be the focus of the entire world. As the millennium approaches, 42nd Street Now! is working to provide New Years Eve 1999 with the best stage New York, and the world, has ever seen.<sup>134</sup>

The contrast in both style and substance between the Interim Plan and its predecessor is striking. The principal rationale for the project has shifted from conventional office development to tourism and entertainment, as in the MAS's prescient words the "white collar" gives way to the "open collar," the history and spirit of place have become a symbols of democratic populism instead of blighted anachronisms, and in place of visionary architectural unity there are preservationist paeans to "Learning from Times Square." The about-face in the design objectives of the project could not be signaled more clearly in the following statement: "If at the end of our project, 42nd Street looks like 42nd Street, we will have achieved our goal."<sup>135</sup> To supply the plan with an appropriate architectural image and imagination, the UDC hired the prestigious advertising firm of M&Co, and in an encore performance Robert A. M. Stern has returned center stage as the project's master planner.

The design strategy as outlined in the *42nd Street Now!* Executive Summary is based on six principles: "layering, unplanning, contradiction and surprise, pedestrian experience, visual anchors, and aesthetics as attractions." Together these principles form

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134. UDC, "42nd Street Now! Executive Summary," pp. 1 - 2.

135. UDC, "42nd Street Now!," p. 16.

the mantra of postmodernist architecture and urbanism. Robert Venturi's celebration of the vernacular kitsch and idiosyncrasy of Los Vegas and Main Street can be found in the designers' realization that just maybe "42nd Street is almost all right."<sup>136</sup> All that it needs is a continuation of the process of vernacular "unplanning" and "layering" that is the "natural result of a thousand entrepreneurs, designers and sign companies inventing and reinventing the street, over nine decades." (p. 17) In a Times article, Stern explained that

We want it to be a dazzling place to shop, to go to the theaters. We don't want to make it so gentrified that there is no sleaze or sensationalism. We want big signs--all those things--but not in a way that looks as though we've recreated the past...There has to be a little edge to it. We're not doing Disney. You have to have a sense of threat, excitement, derring-do, a sense of adventure.<sup>137</sup>

Although Stern is careful to avoid the label of "Disneyfication," his language and imagery is based on similar economy of representation. Disneyland's "national" pavillions are the epitome of Baudrillard's *simulacra*, replicas that are so "authentic" that they become more "real" than the original.<sup>138</sup> The the synthetic and simulated environments at Disneyland and other popular themed resorts is premised on the ability to create and control the total experience from a blank slate, on which there can be no contradictory meanings. This ground-zero condition would of course be impossible to replicate in a place as thick with pre-existing symbolism as Times Square.<sup>139</sup> However, as Michael Sorkin argues, Disney "imageering" functions on another principle, that of "creative geography," a cinemographic montage that creates a new recombitant visual reality out of fragments of the old.<sup>140</sup> Stern's concept drawings are laden with such "creative geographies." They present an ethereal montage of past and present images from 42nd Street and elsewhere (namely,

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136. Venturi's classic *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, written in 1968, is most often cited as the manifesto of postmodernist architecture. His and Denise Scott Brown's *Learning From Los Vegas* helped to redefine a vernacular-inspired aesthetic against the "form follows function" orthodoxy of high modernism.)

137. Quoted in David Dunlop, "New Times Square Plan: Lights! Signs! Dancing! Hold the Offices!" *NYT*, Aug. 20, 1992.

138. Baudrillard, *Selected Writings* (Stanford, CA, 1988).

139. I was informed anecdotely that Walt Disney was in fact approached in the 1960s to propose a redevelopment plan for Times Square, and he turned it down for precisely this reason.

140 Sorkin, "See You in Disneyland," in Sorkin, ed. *Variations on a Theme Park*, p. 226 - 227.

the 1964 World's Fair) to recreate the aura of place with juxtaposed and recombined elements. The goal is allegory rather than authenticity, place as myth rather than machine, but both are equally unreal. (see **figs. 2.18 - 2.20**)

The allegorical reimagining of Times Square represented by Stern may in other ways be as total and as artificial as the Disney creations he eschews. The power to control and represent place is no less potent when it is withheld than when it is wielded, in fact it may even be more so. In the context of the scale of redevelopment envisioned in the 42nd Street Development project, the decision not to eradicate all traces of "sleaze and sensationalism" becomes as integral a part of the planning strategy as the gentrification itself. It is, after all, only through the elimination of the real threat that the "sense of threat" can be made part of the attraction and spectacle. This is precisely the principle by which Foucault's concept of the *dispositif* operates. The power to control behavior is much more effective when the disciplinary mechanisms are internalized and self-regulating, so that, for example, the 3-card monte games and other street hustling scams are controlled through the public's knowledge of how they work. The street peddler, prostitute or porn shop owner is more likely to curb his or her own illegal or semi-legal activities if his or her potential customers can be convinced not to buy. This is the basis of crime prevention strategy being pursued by the Times Square BID and police. Of course when the velvet glove fails, there's always the iron fist: according to the BID's 1994 promotional brochure, "Monte players and illegal peddlers continue to try to carve out a place for themselves in Times Square, but are having a tougher time. In May we moved 344 monte games and 1657 peddlers. We are tenacious, but still need the on-going back-up of the police."

The extent to which the real threat has already been reduced to the safe "sense of threat" is evident in the announcement by none other than Disney to renovate the landmark New Amsterdam Theater on 42nd Street for "family-oriented" entertainment. The decision in February of last year, was widely hailed as the catalyst that would bring about the long-awaited renaissance of 42nd Street. With no apparent sense of irony, Mayor Giuliani called the deal a "match made in heaven." UDC chairman, Vincent Tese, announced at the same

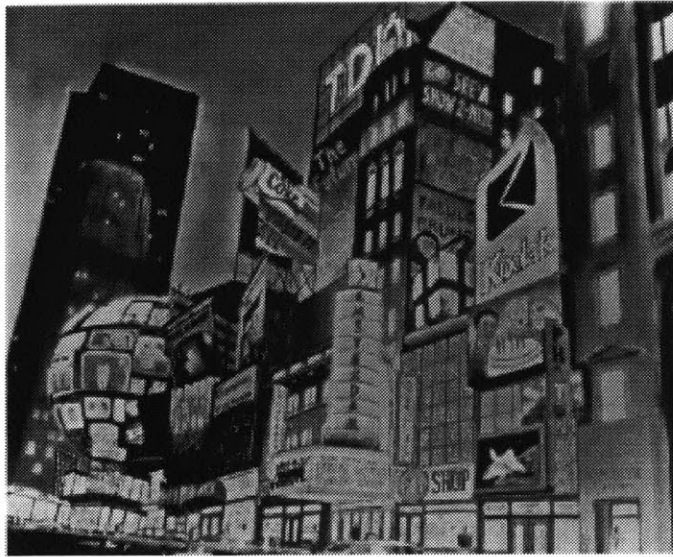


*42nd Street Now!...and then:*

**Architecture as allegory**

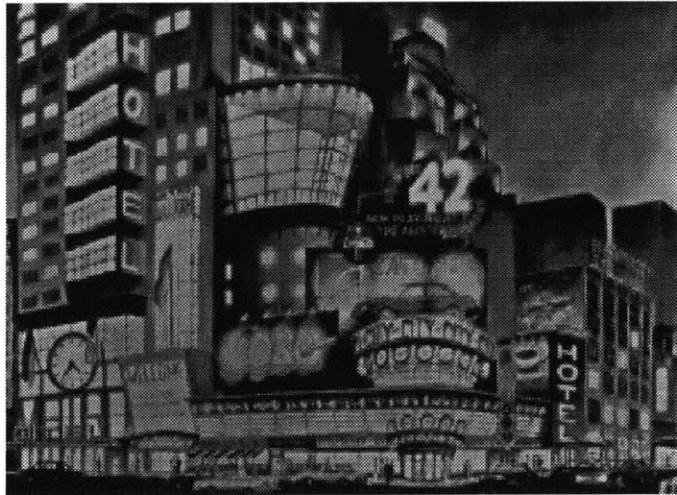
**fig. 2.18**

Rendering of southern block of 42nd Street facing Times Square. Robert A.M. Stern Architects and M&Co, 1993.



**fig. 2.19**

Rendering of hotel site at Eighth Avenue and 42nd Street. Robert A. M. Stern Architects and M&Co., 1993.



**fig. 2.20**

42nd Street as really looked in the 1930s. Museum of the City of New York (source: Taylor, ed. *Inventing Times Square*)



meeting that Time Warner and Madame Tussaud's were also interested in locating in the project area. "Forty-second," said Tese "has the potential to be a major, major tourist attraction in the United States." Governor Cuomo candidly assessed what that would mean for the old 42nd Street. "You're going to get rid of the filth," Cuomo predicted, "It's the beginning of a whole new era."<sup>141</sup>

Over the course of the more than ten year urban drama of redevelopment in Times Square, predictions of a "whole new era," like the apocalyptic visions of bullhorn preachers, have come and gone, and come again. What is different about the current *42nd Street Now!* Plan, however, is not only its possibility of success but how it defines success and the means to achieve it. The 1984 Plan sought a radical reordering of the physical and social environment of 42nd Street and, by extension, Times Square and West Midtown. The means for achieving this objective were pinned to the market for new office development in Manhattan and backed up by the full legal powers of the state and a generous public writedown. The project vision, best exemplified in the Johnson-Burgee Tower designs, was bottom-line corporate facadism that had little to do with the spirit or image of Times Square. The "public" benefits in terms of the theater restorations, Clinton revitalization or other amenities, while an important rationale for the project, were never central to the initial planning process.

Two things happened in the late 1980s which drastically altered the landscape of Midtown and the horizon of possibility for the project. The first was that in 1988 the "sunset" provision of the 1981 zoning resolution eliminated the incentives that had in fact succeeded in promoting growth in West Midtown. The problem for the project was that the largest area of new office development was the area just north of Times Square, effectively pulling the office rug out from under the project. The second factor was the downturn in the real estate market in the late 1980s. Thus with no hope of office towers on the horizon, the project sponsors went back to the drawing board for alternative visions. As it turned out,

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141. Douglas Martin, "Disney Seals Times Square Theater Deal," *NYT*, Feb. 3, 1994.

they did not have to look very far. "Populist" preservation schemes for the theaters, as well as new visions for Times Square that sought to retain its "sense of place," signalled a important shift in the focus of redevelopment from one of rationalizing the use of space to enhancing the image of place. Most significantly, due to economic restructuring and changing patterns of consumption in the 1980s, the latter had by the early 1990s also become a viable strategy for maximizing economic value of urban space. With the recent announcement that Disney along with the Tishman Urban Development Corporation will develop the hotel site in addition to the new Amsterdam Theater, it seems likely the stunning success of the *42nd Street Now!* in attracting deep-pocketed family entertainment giants to Times Square has all but eliminated the economic rationale for the office towers. Thus, we are perhaps now witnessing the final act of the drama in which the image of Times Square as a commodified fantasy has emerged triumphant.

## CHAPTER THREE

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### SOFT CORE: POSTINDUSTRIAL RESTRUCTURING AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF TIMES SQUARE

Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mold them in our images: they, in turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them. In this sense, it seems to me that living in a city is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the peculiar relation between man and material that exists in the continual creative play of urban living. The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate in maps and statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture.

David Harvey uses the above account of London in the late 1970s from Jonathan Raban's *Soft City* as the entry point into an analysis of the "condition of postmodernity." Harvey interprets the appearance of Raban's book as evidence of a critical moment in the 1970s when a postmodern "structure of feeling" began to emerge from the "chrysalis of the anti-modern." "To the thesis that the city was falling victim to a rationalized and automated system of mass production and mass consumption of material goods," writes Harvey, "Raban replies that it was in practice mainly about the production of signs and images."<sup>142</sup> For Harvey, the distinction that Raban makes between a "hard city" of material goods and the "soft city" of signs and images is a false dichotomy. They are, in reality, one and the same, both representing stages in a continuum of "late" capitalism.

The most recent stage of restructuring has involved a shift in the urban economy away from "hard" types of industrial and office production toward "soft" service and consumer-oriented functions. Architects, planners and developers have rethought the value of historic places in the city in terms of their potential to fulfill new consumer tastes

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142. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 3.

and lifestyles. This chapter investigates how Times Square has been revalorized within the larger context of the postindustrial transformation of New York City since the mid-1970s. The first section relates postindustrial economic and social changes to the transition toward postmodern architecture and urbanism. The next two sections examines how certain use values of Times Square have been destroyed and other higher value uses created in a process of uneven urban development. The final section considers the changing identity of Times Square as a function of its role as a formal and informal marketplace within the overall economy of the city.

### **Postindustrial/Postmodern New York**

At the height of the economic boom of the 1980s, Mayor Koch brought together a blue-ribbon panel of prominent business and civic leaders to make recommendations on how New York City could best meet the challenges of the 21st century. The Commission on the Year 2000 captured the triumphant spirit of the times in the report's title, "New York Ascendant." "Ours is an era of New York ascendant," reported the Commission,

The city's economy is stronger than it has been in decades, and is driven both by its own resilience and by the national economy; it is the driven both by its own resilience and by the national economy; New York is more than ever the international capital of finance, and the gateway to the American economy; it is the country's center of creativity in just about every field--music, theater, publishing, advertising, communications, painting, dance; neighborhoods that were slums ten years ago are now crowded with small, newly born, dynamic enterprises.<sup>143</sup>

New York's ascendance, as it turned out, fell short of the year 2000 mark by about a dozen years. Only five months after the report come out, the collapse on Wall Street sent shock waves through the overspeculated Manhattan real estate market, and a general downturn in the U.S. economy followed soon thereafter. Despite its failure to predict the future, however, the commission did accurately gauge New York's growing importance as a center of national and global finance. Also significant is that fact that new forms of

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143. Commission of the Year 2000, "New York Ascendant," (New York, June 1987), p. 6

cultural production and neighborhood revitalization are included with, if explicitly linked to, this process of economic and spatial restructuring.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, a new international economic regime was established in which U.S. dominated institutions were able to write the rules of the game. The result was three decades of robust economic growth in which the U.S. was the major workshop of the world, but by the 1970s cracks were forming in the system. The combination of industrial respatialization, technological innovation and the rise of mobile capital created conditions in which production was no longer dependent upon the labor or resources of any single place. This transformation has given rise to what Saskia Sassen terms "Global Cities." Since the 1980s, she argues, cities like New York, London and Tokyo became major "command centers in the organization of the world economy." The new "postindustrial" economy is based on the production of information and services instead of manufactured goods. The postindustrial transformation has resulted in a "complex duality," according to Sassen, in which capital is mobile and spatially dispersed and yet control is highly concentrated at key points in the global economic system. These global cities thus "concentrate control over vast resources, while finance and specialized service industries have restructured the urban social and economic order."<sup>144</sup>

The shift toward service-based production has had a profound impact on the economic and spatial structure of New York City over last twenty-five years. New York is by and large no longer a blue collar industrial city. This is not a new phenomenon: manufacturing employment has declined from 30% of the city's total employment in 1950 to just 10% at the end of the 1980s. However, the trend accelerated rapidly in the 1980s with the expansion of a wide range of business services related to the finance and investment banking. Between 1977 and 1985 employment in manufacturing declined by 22% while business and legal services increased by 42% and 62% respectively. (See **fig. 3.1**). The rapid growth in the service sector in the 1980s created a large demand for new

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144. Sassen, *Global Cities*, p. 3 - 4.

Employment in Nonagricultural Establishments, New York City Annual Averages, 1950–1989 (in thousands)

Industry	1950	Percent	1970	1977	1980	1989	Percent
Construction	123	3.5	110	64	77	121	3.4
Manufacturing	1,040	30.0	766	539	496	360	10.0
Nondurable	(810)	(23.3)	(525)	(376)	(351)	(265)	7.3
Apparel	(341)	(9.8)	(204)	(153)	(140)	(100)	2.8
Printing	(119)	(3.4)	(121)	(90)	(94)	(88)	2.4
Durable	(230)	(6.6)	(241)	(163)	(145)	(95)	2.6
Transport	232	6.7	203	157	150	134	3.7
Communications	66	1.9	95	76	82	59	1.6
Utilities	34	1.0	26	26	25	23	0.6
Wholesale	322	9.3	302	248	246	228	6.3
Retail	433	12.5	434	372	368	402	11.1
Finance, insurance, and real estate	336	9.7	460	414	448	530	14.7
Services	507	14.6	785	783	894	1,147	31.8
Government	374	10.8	563	508	516	602	16.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,469</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3,745</b>	<b>3,188</b>	<b>3,302</b>	<b>3,607</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: New York State Department of Labor. 1950 Transportation, Communications, Utilities and wholesale and retail employment figures estimated. 1989 Communications figure depressed by labor dispute. Columns may not add to total due to rounding.

Fig. 3.1. Employment trends in New York City, 1959 - 1989. (source: J. Mollenkopf, *A Phoenix in the Ashes*, Princeton, NJ, 1991, p. 54)

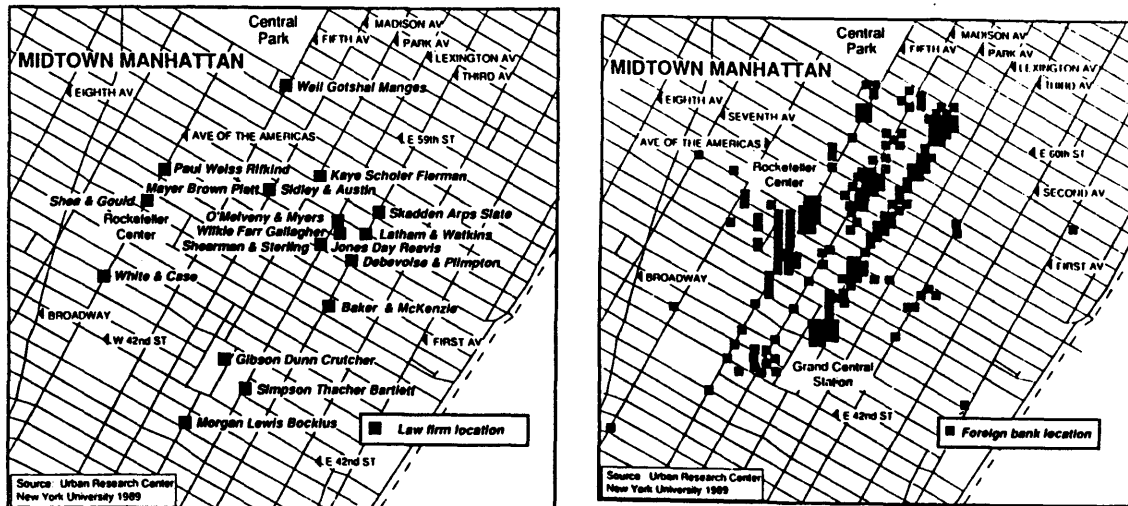


Fig. 3.2. Concentration of Law Firms and Foreign Banks in Manhattan. (source: M. Moss, "The Information City in the Global Economy," in Brotchie et al., eds., p. 158)

office space. In Midtown Manhattan alone 56 new buildings added 24.2 million square feet of space to the office market during the 1980s.<sup>145</sup> New York continued during this period to be the leading center for corporate headquarters in the U.S. The spatial concentration of top law firms and foreign banks in East Midtown illustrates the continuing importance of propinquity in an era of mobile capital. (see **fig. 3.2**)

The spatial restructuring of older American cities has been driven by the new demands of service-based production and new patterns of consumption and leisure. Norman Fainstein and Susan Fainstein have argued that there are four general characteristics in the postindustrial conversion process: 1) change is spatially uneven and occurs "in fits and starts, now here now there;" 2) the fabric of the built environment at the core is reconstructed for office and upper-income residential use and specialized consumption; 3) there is large-scale displacement of the poor from the strategic urban core and gentrifying areas; and 4) housing is consumed by the middle and upper classes through the conversion to cooperative and condominium forms of ownership.<sup>146</sup> The transformation of New York City has followed this model so closely that it has led some observers to speak of social "Manhattanization" as a general urban phenomenon. "The direction of this change" according to Peter Williams and Neil Smith, "is toward a new central city dominated by middle-class residential areas, a concentration of professional, administrative and managerial employment, and upmarket recreational and entertainment facilities that cater to this population (as well as to tourists)." <sup>147</sup>

The postindustrial transformation of cities has also influenced cultural production and the aesthetics of representation in "postmodern" architecture and urbanism. Harvey

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145. John Mollenkopf, *A Phoenix in the Ashes: The Rise and Fall of the Koch Coalition in New York City Politics* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), p. 51.

146. Norman I. Fainstein and Susan S. Fainstein, "Restructuring the American City: A Comparative Perspective" in Fainstein and Fainstein, eds., *Urban Policy Under Capitalism* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982), pp. 166 - 168.

147. Williams and Smith, "From Renaissance to Restructuring: The Dynamics of Contemporary Urban Development," in Smith and Williams, eds., *Gentrification of the City*, (Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1986). p. 217.



argues that the "condition of postmodernity" is the cultural reflection of new systems of capital accumulation in the postindustrial economy. The transition from Fordist industrial production to capital mobility and "flexible accumulation," according to Harvey, has led to a "time-space compression" in the production of culture as well as goods and services. The result has been an acceleration in the "volatility and ephemerality of fashions, products, production techniques, labor processes, ideas and ideologies, values and established practices."<sup>148</sup> Postmodern urbanism and architecture have been untethered from modernist social moorings and function within free-floating systems of aesthetics and semiotics. Through the free play of architectural symbols and styles, the postmodern city can be reconstructed in the image of any number of different places and periods. (see **figs. 3.3 and 3.4**)

With the increasing globalization of space and elision of time, notions of historical place and place-based identity have found a new role in postmodern architecture and urbanism. Witness, for example, the explosion of interest in the last twenty years in historical preservation and landmarking as a means of reweaving the historic fabric of neighborhoods into the city, or in some cases creating heritage enclaves from whole cloth. Christine Boyer has referred to this phenomenon as "instrumental memory" and traces its origins to a coalescence of diverse public and private interests in the 1970s and 80s that sought to establish patrimonial control over the civic heritage of older American cities.<sup>149</sup> The instruments of instrumental memory were landmark laws and regulations which provided the framework for rational and minimum risk reinvestment in exchange for public encroachment on the sanctity of private property. Although private development has at times chafed under restrictive preservation controls, the interests of private capital have in recent years recognized the economic potential of historical reconstructions of place. "Historic preservation and architecture," Boyer argues, "became the two directors of [a] spectacular performance: they constantly rebuilt,

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148. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 285.

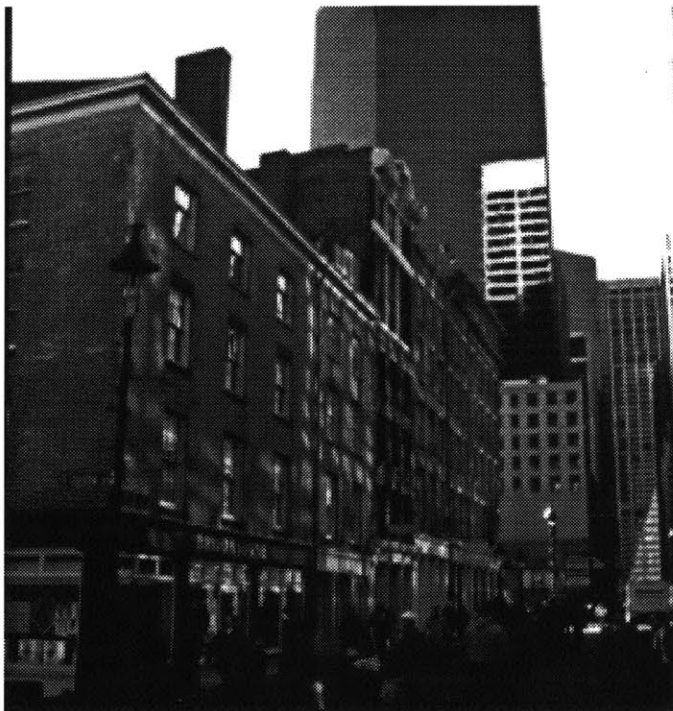
149. M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), pp. 384 - 420.

## Postindustrialism/Postmodernism



**fig. 3.3**

David Harvey uses this picture to show the contrast between 1980s style glitz modernism of Trump Tower (left) with the 1970s postmodern icon AT&T building (right). However, a third postmodern "style" goes unnoticed: historic preservation. (source: Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 57)



**fig. 3.4**

The "old" city meets the "new."  
The new historic preservation/re-creation of South Street Sea Port confronts the older modernist buildings on Wall Street.

restored, relocated, recycled and revalued what was once redlined and abandoned, neglected and ignored, inefficient and nonfunctional."<sup>150</sup>

The results of this reawakening of architectural patrimony are by now a familiar part of the postindustrial/postmodern urban landscape: festival marketplaces, historic "ethnic" neighborhoods, reconstructed riverwalks and waterfronts. And I would argue that we are witnessing the creation of a similar place in the particular postmodern landscape of New York City, the redeveloped Times Square. The triumph of the "instrumental memory" paradigm of redevelopment in Times Square is evident in the shift that I have identified in the planning process of the 42nd Street Development Project from the earlier vision of a new corporate dominated order to one of historicized commercial pastiche in the current plan. The evolving configuration of preservationist forces motivating this change reflected the broader trend toward development based on restoration and rehabilitation in New York in the 1980s. The legal precedent for protecting architectural landmarks was in fact established just at the other end of 42nd Street. In 1978 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), which sought to prevent the construction of a skyscraper in the air space over the landmarked Grand Central Train Station.<sup>151</sup>

The Landmarks Preservation Commission was one of the strongest voices of opposition to the 42nd Street Development Project in the form in which it was initially proposed. An umbrella organization of 11 design-oriented civic groups including the LPC and the Municipal Art Society reacted with alarm at the project's bulk and density, its lack of a detailed restoration plan for the theaters and its elimination of the Times Tower. Brendan Gill, the chairman of the LPC, spoke for many of the preservationist-minded civic groups in his statement at the hearings on the draft EIS:

We are concerned about losing Times Square as we know it: as a lively and dazzling entrance to the theater district. We have seen no evidence...that the addition of four million square feet of conventionally dreary office space is necessary to achieve that

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150. Boyer, *City of Collective Memory*, p. 411.

151. Boyer, *City of Collective Memory*, p. 402.

stated goal of the project; on the contrary it will drastically affect the character of the area, not for the better but for the worse.<sup>152</sup>

Partly in response to the LPC's complaints, the UDC subsequently reclassified several of the 42nd Street theaters into more restrictive landmark categories. In the 1993 draft supplemental EIS, every theater is classified as category 1, 2 or 3, designating them as at least "worthy of preservation." In addition, their expanded range of allowable uses makes them the key cultural and economic attraction in the current plan. This has clearly been borne out by the fact that almost all of the theaters are now under contract for restoration and reuse by some of the largest corporations in the entertainment and communications industry.

The linkages between the postmodern aesthetics of historic preservation/re-creation and postindustrial economic restructuring can also be seen in Times Square. Fredric Jameson has argued that postmodernism can be understood in terms of the "cultural logic of late capitalism." What has occurred, he contends, is that "aesthetic production has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods, at greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation."<sup>153</sup> The enchantment of the built environment through the historical montage, the spectacle and the simulacra are all part of the surface and image manipulations of place as an economic commodity. Jameson explains further that we are now in "intertextuality as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of "pastness" and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces real history."<sup>154</sup>

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152. Quoted in Fainstein, "The Redevelopment of 42nd Street," p. 6

153. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ., 1991) pp. 4 - 5.

154. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 20.

The deliberate contraction of "pastness" and "intertextuality" as a form of postmodern place packaging is evident the reimagining of Times Square. A consciously "intertextual" representation of Times Square that was ahead of its time actually was envisioned as part of the "City at 42nd Street" plan in 1979 that Koch dismissed as "Disneyland" on 42nd Street (ironically given the present plan for the theaters). The central focus of the plan was a 750,000 square foot entertainment complex that would have featured a "museum of museums," showing exhibits from all the city's museums, and a simulated ride through different parts of the city, including Times Square itself. The intertextual references thus form a chain of signifiers with no referent other than to other equally unreal representations of the city and history. A similar intertextuality reappears along with the evocation of a "pastness" over ten years later in Stern's 42nd Street Now! Plan. The design strategy is based on a self-referential concept of looking and learning from 42nd Street. The original is not really an original at all, however, but rather a ideally reconstructed montage of images of "pastness."

### **Places as Commodities**

In his analysis of postmodernism, Jameson further explicates the conflation of aesthetic production with commodity production in terms of Debord's notion of the "society of the spectacle." "The culture of the simulacrum," he argues, "comes to life in a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced, a society of which Guy Debord has observed...that in it "the image has become the final form of commodity reification."<sup>155</sup> The penetration of exchange value into urban space has been deepened and generalized in the commodification of the images and historical associations of place. Thus Times Square, as we have seen, is being reconstructed in the commodified image of "Times Square" to increase its locational and symbolic value to investors. This has occurred by and large

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155. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 18.

independently of any actual spatial restructuring or transformation of the built environment, since the market has failed to deliver the new construction called for in the redevelopment plan. Rather, the reconstruction of Times Square has taken place in the abstract but no less "real" realm of the images, symbols and myths of place.

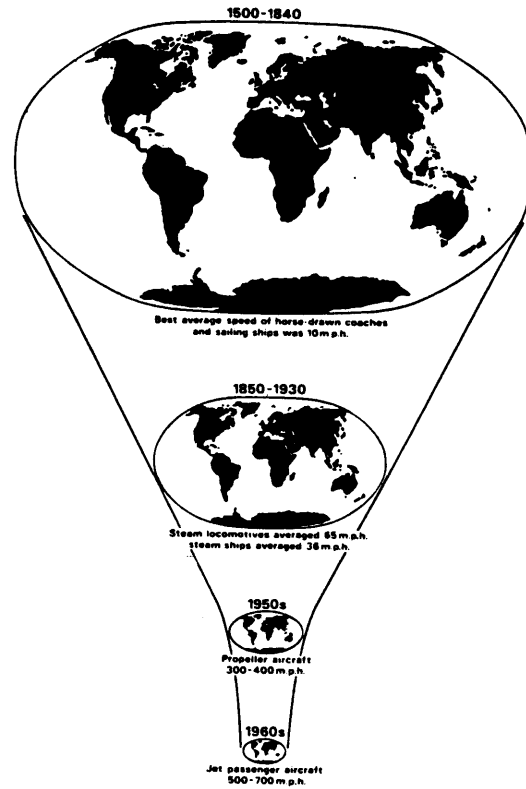
The conflict between the exchange and use value of places lies at the heart of the urban development process. The basic tension arises, according to Harvey, "within the geography of accumulation between fixity and motion, between the rising power to overcome space and the immobile structures required for such a purpose."<sup>156</sup> At this point we may also bring Lefebvre and Foucault back into the story. Harvey's distinction between of the dispersal of power over space and its agglomeration in place, as Gregory points out, parallels Lefebvre's formulation of "abstract" and "concrete" space. Abstract space is constituted by social and economic relationships mediated through the market's distribution of exchange values. The modality of power in abstract space is the ability to dominate place and its representations through the direct ownership of property and the image-making machinery of marketing and advertising. Concrete space, on the other hand, is produced by the everyday social practices through which space is appropriated and acquires use value outside and often in opposition to formal market mechanisms. (see **figs. 3.5 and 3.6**)

Under postindustrial economic restructuring and postmodern cultural production, however, the boundaries between motion and fixity and space and place have become increasing fluid and ephemeral. Gregory draws parallels between Harvey's conception of a "time-space compression" and Lefebvre's "time-space colonization." Although Gregory contrasts the directionality in the forces of spatial transformation in each case, inward (Harvey) versus outward (Lefebvre), the larger point is that through flexible accumulation the long arm of capital now reaches deep into process by which place is constructed, both at the level of social space and representation. To this I would add

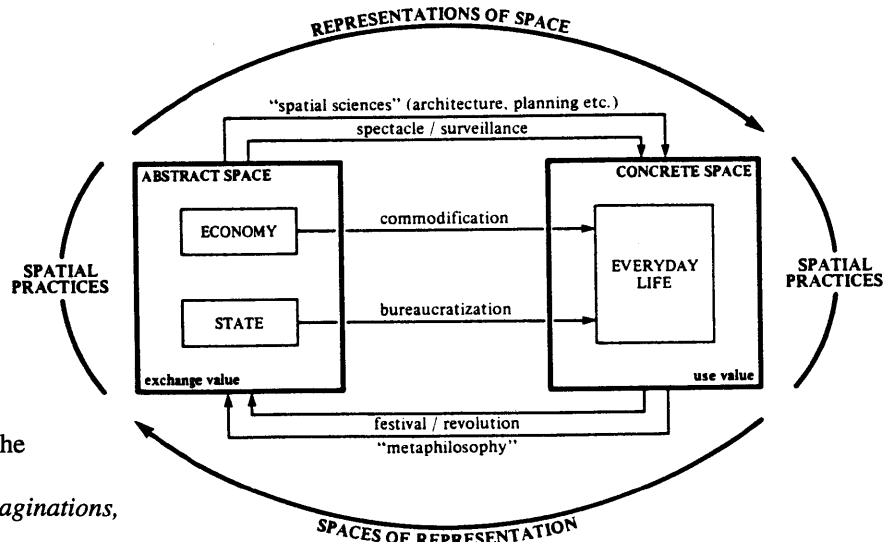
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156. Quoted in Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*, p. 399.

**Time-Space Compression/  
Production of Space**



**fig. 3.5**  
Diagram of "shrinking map of the world through innovations in transport which 'annihilate space through time.'" (source: Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 201)



**fig. 3.6**  
Schematic of Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. (source: Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*, p. 401.)

Foucault's formulation of a discursive ascending power. The "infinitesimal mechanisms" of power, he argues, are "invested, colonized, utilized, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended, etc. by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination." <sup>157</sup>

The common thematic thread running through all three theories of how power is deployed in space is the instrumental redrawing of the lines of force between spaces and places, between private and public spheres and between exchange values and use values. The key field on which these lines of force operate is the market. The mobility of capital under postindustrialism has meant, however, that the market for places as well as the places themselves are constructed in postmodern "landscapes of power." In analyzing the process of gentrification in SoHo, for example, Sharon Zukin has shown how the creation "loft lifestyle" and culture in the 1970s by pioneering urban artists constructed from the bottom up a market and a place. The structural context of this transformation can be found in the postindustrial devaluation of loft space for traditional light manufacturing uses and in postmodern cultural values of historical preservation and aestheticism. "The legitimation of loft living in downtown Manhattan," Zukin explains, "marked a symbolic as well as a material change in the landscape. Cleared of "obsolete" manufacturing uses by an investment flow apparently unleashed "from below," downtown space demanded a visual, sensual and even conceptual reorientation." <sup>158</sup>

The demand of "conceptual reorientation" in downtown space that Zukin describes in the gentrification of SoHo is, I would argue, part of the same phenomenon of postindustrial/postmodern transformation that is reconstructing place in Times Square. Like in SoHo, the main actors in this process initially pushed for the preservation and enhancement of the aesthetic "experience of place" if not "from below" at least from the sidelines of development process. With no new buildings to act as the instruments of renewal, the balance tipped in favor of the preservationist approach that emphasized

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157. Quoted in Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 45.

158. Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power, From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California, 1991), p. 190.



"symbolic capital" over fixed capital.<sup>159</sup> It must be stressed that these were simply two different strategies of redevelopment and were in no sense incompatible with the overall objective of increasing the commodity value of Times Square to investors and to the City. The principal difference between the two was that the preservationist strategy relied to a much greater extent on a symbolic reconstruction of place through the distillation and manipulation of seemingly value-neutral, essentialist images. Thus, Hiss's "bowl of light" analogy, Stern's "dazzling and garish" allegorical montage and the UDC's millennial spectacle form the essential symbolic bricks and mortar of a reconstructed image of Times Square. Of course, the aesthetic representation of place serves as an ideological filter for that which is deemed visually and socially undesirable and masks the deeper structures of social and economic power. (see **figs. 3.7 - 3.9**)

The efforts of the UDC and the City to reconstruct the image of 42nd Street and Times Square received a huge boost in the early 1990s with the establishment of the Times Square Business Improvement District (BID). The Times Square BID was formed in 1992 under a city law which permits BIDs to operate as not-for-profit organizations funded through fees paid on the assessed value of property by businesses in specially designated districts. The BID's mandate is broadly defined in terms of "ensuring that the Times Square neighborhood continues attracting millions of people from around the world each year--and every day."<sup>160</sup> The critical phrase here, which appears deceptively self-evident, is "the Times Square neighborhood." This phrase appears as new and somewhat contradictory category in the discourse of planning and development on Times Square for the simple

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159. The concept of "symbolic capital" is developed in Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic anthropology in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. He defines it as the "collection of luxury goods attesting the distinction and taste of the owner." The sense in which I am using it relates to its function as the symbolic reflection of material forms of capital which also conceals their underlying relations of production. I therefore do not mean to imply that symbolic and material capital are two separate things, but rather two manifestations of the same process of capital accumulation.

160. Excerpted from "What is the Times Square Business Improvement District," informational brochure published by the Times Square BID, 1994.

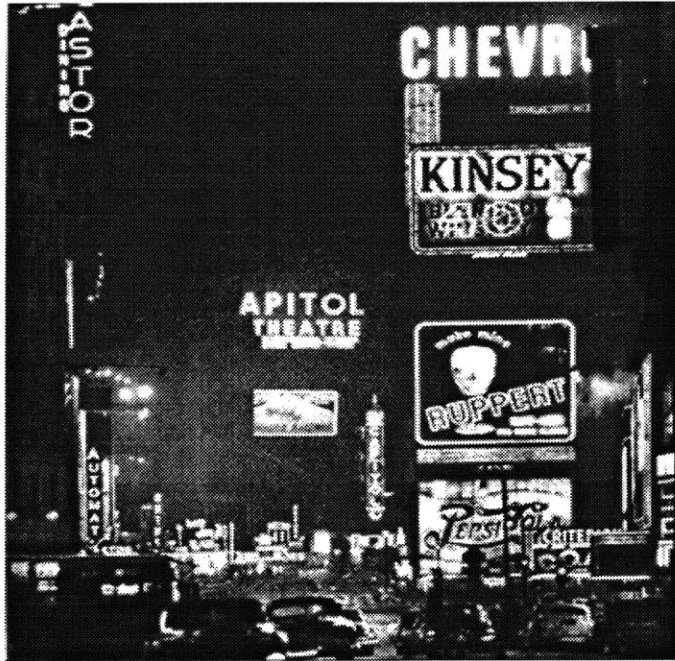
## Imag(in)ing Times Square

**fig. 3.7**

Times Square as a "bowl of light."

Andreas Feininger photo from the 1940s. Its caption reads: "Times Square in the 40s was clean in every respect....In this fresh atmosphere, the Hotel Astor flourished for the rich and powerful while the less exalted dined at the Automat."

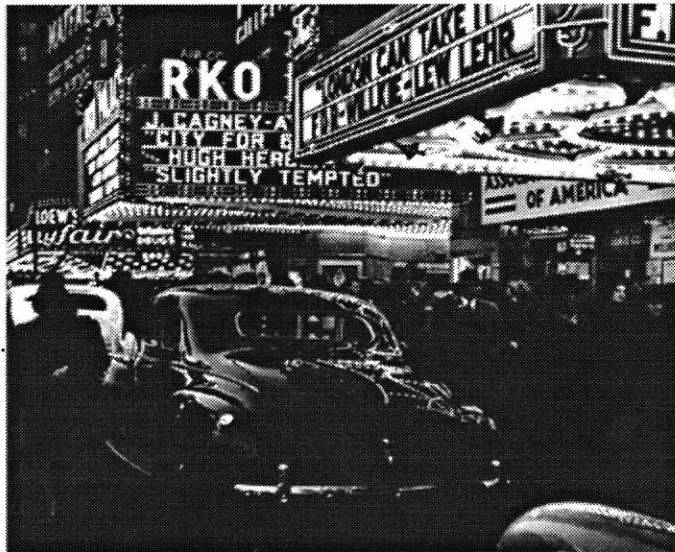
(source: *Andreas Feininger, New York in the 1940s*, text by John von Hartz, New York, 1978, p. 91)



**fig. 3.8**

Feininger photo of the 42nd Street marquees. The caption reads: "Times Square was a restrained carnival that supplied mass entertainment both day and night."

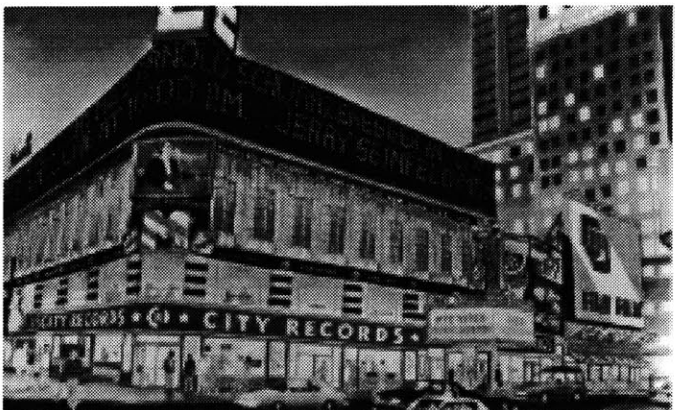
(source: *Andreas Feininger, New York in the 1940s*, text by John von Hartz, New York, 1978, p. 92)



**fig. 3.9**

Stern's rendering for *the 42nd Street Now!* Plan captures the "dazzling and garish" vernacular of the 1940s and 50s while the plan attempts to reconstruct its myth of unity and populism.

(source: Robert A. M. Stern Architects and M&Co., 1993)



reason that one does not normally associate a commercial "crossroads of the world" with the insular image of a residential neighborhood.

But this, I would argue, is precisely the point. The BID's director, Gretchen Dykstra states that the challenge is to "prove the Crossroads of the World is also a real neighborhood, where people have a deep sense of place."<sup>161</sup> The main thrust of the BID's public relations campaign on behalf of Times Square is the construction of "neighborhood" through the infusion of new instrumentalist images and rituals of place into the social landscape of Times Square. (see figs. 3.10 and 3.11) Since the area by and large lacks the sense of community derived from residential stability and most of its population of "illegitimate" users have been systematically removed, there is a vacuum at the center of place waiting to be filled. The BID has filled it by re-presenting Times Square to the world as the setting for public spectacle through which a new "sense of place" can be constructed on old foundations. For example, in addition to organizing the New Year's celebration the BID produces the annual "Broadway on Broadway" review of musical shows in the middle on the square. (see figs. 3.12 and 3.13) And in a brilliant public relations coup, the BID has attached the celebrity of David Letterman to the image of Times Square in a public ad campaign featuring variations on the theme, "215,326 light bulbs, 3,537 lawyers, and 1 Dave. Times Square--everything you want in a neighborhood."<sup>162</sup>

The reimagining, repackaging and marketing of Times Square as a commodity is designed first and foremost to attract new consumers and investors to the area in order to

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161. Quoted in Neal R. Peirce, "With a lot of help, Times Square is bouncing back," *Washington Post*, Feb. 27, 1994.

162. "Times Square Minus the Sleaze," *NYT*, Feb. 6, 1994. The decision to relocate the David Letterman Show to the Ed Sullivan Theater at Broadway and 53rd Street has also helped to improve the image of Times Square. Each night in seemingly spontaneous "external camera" vignettes Letterman makes Times Square its cast of colorful, good-natured the star of the show. *Times'* theater critic Frank Rich contends that these stunts have had an unexpected impact:

*Whether through luck or coaching, the neighborhood regulars, many of them immigrants, come across as such good-humored and hard-working souls that Mr. Letterman's neighborhood seems a benign and intimate community that anyone would want to visit. It's not that the "Late Show" whitewashes New York City...but the urban ills only seem to add raffish local color to the picturesque presentation of the Broadway environment. "Wonderful Life," NYT, May 15, 1994.*

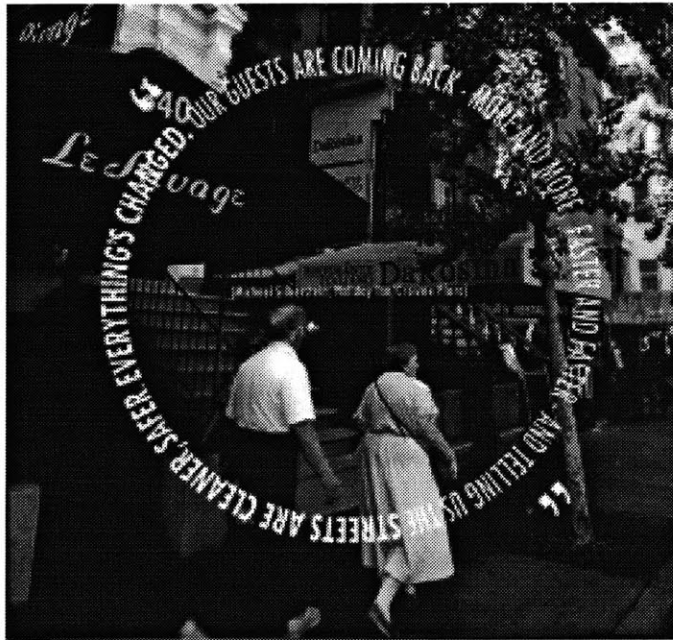
## Marketing Times Square

"Times Square--everything you want in a neighborhood...and getting better."

- Ad campaign, Times Square BID

**fig. 3.10**

Times Square as a "neighborhood."  
"...the streets are cleaner, safer. Everything's changed."  
(source: "Times Square,"  
Times Square BID brochure, 1994.)



**fig. 3.11**

"A new spirit of community..."  
Times Square BID brochure, 1994)



**Reconstructing Place through  
Public Events:**

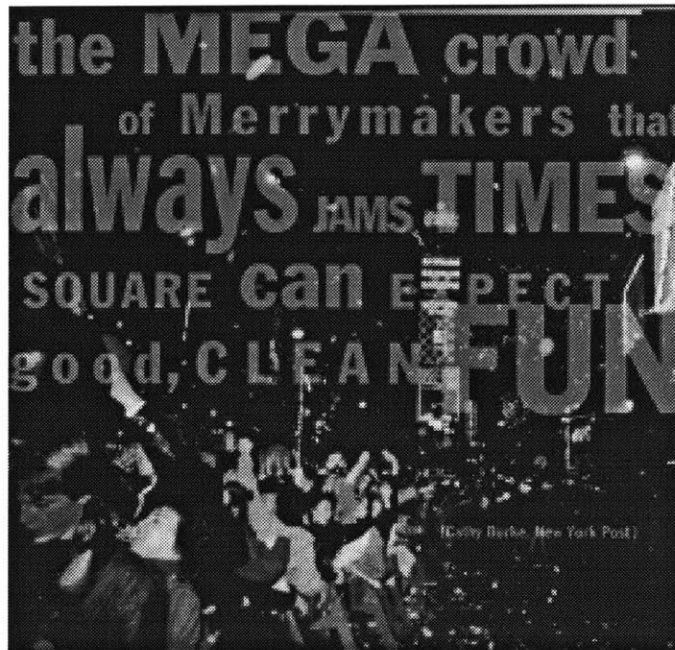
**New Years Eve &  
*Broadway on Broadway***

**fig 3.12**

"...good clean fun."

Among its other promotional activities, the Times Square BID now organizes the famous New Years Eve event.

(source: "Times Square," Times Square BID brochure, 1994.)



**fig 3.13**

The BID also sponsors "Broadway on Broadway," a public event that brings the Broadway shows to the streets of Times Square. The caption for this picture in the BID brochure reads: "From an all-time high of 140, the number of porn shops in Times Square has declined by nearly three-quarters. To encourage that downward trend and keep up the momentum, the BID has taken a leadership role in promoting permanent solutions....and creating positive, image-boosting events."

(source: "Times Square," Times Square BID brochure, 1994.)



increase profits and property values. The penetration of capital, in both symbolic and material form, into the social space of Times Square lends compelling evidence to both Harvey's and Lefebvre's thesis that capital under flexible accumulation has "compressed" and "colonized" urban space to the point where notions of "neighborhood" and "community" are themselves constructed as commodities. I would argue further that we can see this transformation manifested in a Foucauldian system of ascending mechanisms of spatial and social power. Let us begin in the lobby of a single building at 1540 Broadway between 45th and 46th Streets in Times Square. The 46-story glass tower was built by the high-risk developer Ian Bruce Eichner in 1990. Plans were announced in 1989 for the Metropolis Timesquare Mall, a six-level shopping mall at the base of the building featuring a 90-by-120 foot wall of lights and signs in the atrium. The architect, Jon Jerde, stated that "the whole conceptual idea was to do a distillate of Times Square." "We wanted to bring in the light, excitement and signs," added the developer, "as if Broadway came into the atrium."<sup>163</sup>

But there was a catch. The 140,000-square-foot mall was to be entirely private to afford the operators maximum control over how, when and by whom the mall could be used. The distillate Times Square contained in the glass atrium differed from the real one outside in one key respect according to Jerde: "You're guaranteed safety." The mechanism of control, in other words, was direct and absolute, effectively sealing off the mall from the specter of the public in Times Square. The strategy was similar to that of Portman's Marriott Marquis Hotel located directly opposite the 1540 Broadway building. Built as a federally subsidized urban development project in 1985, the Portman building had to provide a new publicly accessible theater to replace the two historic theaters that were destroyed to make way for it. But the City and civic groups could not control how it would be designed. To the dismay of many officials and activists, what the public got was a brutalist concrete bunker with the theater hermetically sealed inside with no direct access from the street.

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163. David W. Dunlap, "Mall to Evoke Memories of Times Square," *NYT*, Feb. 24, 1989.



The ownership of 1540 Broadway changed hands at the beginning of the 1990s and the developer of the mall pulled out leaving the building vacant for the next two years. During that time, I believe a critical mass of symbolic capital had been amassed in Time Square, with the vital image-based infrastructure now being laid by 42nd Street Development, the BID and private investors, to redirect developers' strategies and respatialize Times Square. 1540 Broadway was bought by the Bertelsmann A. G. Corporation, the German entertainment giant whose holdings include Bantam Doubleday Dell publishing house and the RCA, Arista and Ariola record labels. In September 1994, plans were announced to open a massive new commercial and entertainment complex in the space where the Metropolis Mall was to have been five years earlier. The critical difference is in the types of commercial uses and attitude towards the public Times Square. The largest tenant will be Virgin Records, who in addition to opening the "largest music-entertainment megastore in the world," will have a cafe featuring live entertainment. The other major tenants will be Sony Theaters, with a 1,400 seat movie theater, and a 35,000-square-foot sports bar and restaurant that will occupy most of the street level.<sup>164</sup>

Unlike the Metropolis Mall's withdrawal from public space, the development principle underlying the new complex clearly seeks to create synergies between the entertainment-oriented activities inside and the new public life of Times Square. This change was possible, I would argue, because Times Square is no longer perceived as a threatening public environment that needs to be completely walled in and privatized. On the contrary, its "sense of danger" without real danger, as represented in Stern's scheme for 42nd Street, is now seen as an positive marketing opportunity. More importantly, to return to Foucault's conception of ascending power, the site of absolute social control in the private mall was diffused and generalized into the managed public space of Times Square. The instruments of interior private control have been transferred to external and public or semi-public police powers. The public-private BID has taken on quasi-police powers in

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164. David W. Dunlap, "A Disk Store, Not Compact, And More for Times Square," *NYT*, Sept. 22, 1994.

providing surveillance and supplemental law enforcement on the streets. And a new theater district police force has been established to keep the public space in front of the theaters safe and free of loiterers and the homeless.

### **Uneven Development**

The commodification of place in American cities has occurred in the context of the postindustrial spatial and social restructuring of many core urban areas. But the process of downtown redevelopment has not proceeded evenly over the last two decades but in spatially fragmented fits and starts. The spectacle of glittering luxury housing or office complexes rising up out of a sea of squalor has become so familiar in New York that one observer has described the "ascendant" postindustrial city as a "phoenix in the ashes."<sup>165</sup> Moreover, the economic development policies of cities that have encouraged downtown "revitalization" based on white collar service jobs, tourism and luxury housing have reinforced patterns of spatial and social inequality.

The structural logic underlying uneven urban development can be found in the fundamental conflict between the use and exchange value of places to different social groups in the city. Logan and Molotch have identified the dual function of place as a necessary social setting for carrying out life and as a economic commodity to be bought and sold in the property market. Neither of these roles of place is more "natural" than the other; both are social constructions out of which cities take shape. Each, however, comes with a special set of values and attachments. Logan and Molotch argue that the special use value of place compared to other commodities is related to the "sentiment" derived from "the sense that a particular place uniquely fulfills a complex set of needs."<sup>166</sup> The exchange value of place in the form of rent is also unlike other commodities because land markets are inherently monopolistic yet owners operate under particular constraints due to the relational

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165. John Mollenkopf, *A Phoenix in the Ashes: The Rise and Fall of the Koch Coalition in New York City Politics*, (Princeton, NJ, Princeton Univ., 1992), p. 47.

166. John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California, 1987), p. 20.



value of property. Thus, they argue, "property prices do go up as well as down, but less because of what entrepreneurs do with their own holdings than because of the changing relations among properties." <sup>167</sup>

This latter condition, according to Logan and Molotch, accounts for the dynamic of uneven development since "place entrepreneurs strive to increase their rent by revamping the spatial organization of the city." The relational factors that affect the exchange value of place form a "web of externalities" that property owners seek to control and manipulate in their favor to maximize rents. The construction of place-image, as I have suggested, is an effective method of increasing property values on the basis of the cultural meanings attached to highly symbolic places like Times Square. This strategy goes back to the beginning of Times Square in the act of renaming Longacre Square and associating its new image with the Times Tower and the new subway line. The translation of locational image into economic value can be seen in the design calisthenics that architects went through in the 1920s to assure theaters had prominent entrances and addresses on 42nd Street. The same phenomenon occurred in the 1970s and 80s on the East Side of Manhattan when developers shoehorned "sliver" buildings into the dense streetscape to take advantage of fashionable Madison or Fifth Avenue addresses.

The establishment and manipulation of the boundaries of place, as well as the social and symbolic meanings they delineate, is another important way in which the exchange value of place can be influenced according to who's in and who's out. Urban planning plays a crucial role in the process of uneven development not merely in rationalizing and redistributing its costs and benefits but in shaping place value by drawing regulatory boundaries. Cities have increasingly relied on the establishment of special zoning and historic preservation districts as a means of both capturing and creating value in urban "frontiers" where private development might not otherwise go. The redevelopment strategy for Times Square is a prime example of this approach to planning. As we saw in the long

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167. Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, p. 24.

evolution of redevelopment plans for Times Square, the City has sought since the late 1960s to guide growth toward the "underdeveloped" westside of Midtown. The regulatory mechanisms for accomplishing this were zoning incentives, transfer development rights (TDRs) for the preservation and restoration of the theaters, and finally direct public urban renewal in the form of "turn-around" projects like the 42nd Street Development Project. Each strategy was contingent upon the drawing of boundaries within which the various zoning carrots and sticks would apply.

Although zoning regulations may sometimes function as a public check on unrestrained development, in the case of Times Square the City's pro-growth policies in the 1980s were clearly designed to use preservation as a tool for promoting private development. The 1982 Midtown Zoning resolution states this explicitly, declaring the "Theatre Preservation District" as "not only a protector and preserver of special and valuable heritage of New York, but an integral component of a growth program."<sup>168</sup> This growth strategy, with its combination incentives and "sunset" time limits, began to bear fruit soon after the new zoning was implemented. But it was strange fruit, growing both ripe and rotten at the same time. Land values in west Midtown received an immediate boost, doubling from 1983 to 1984 alone, as developers speculated on the prospect of higher rents from larger buildings allowed by the new zoning. But the redevelopment of Times Square itself proceeded in classically uneven fashion since property owners saw the same zoning incentives as a disincentive to sell or improve their properties while market values were all but guaranteed to keep going up.<sup>169</sup>

This is where both the 42nd Street Development Project and the Times Square BID come in. The 42nd Street project was conceived at the start as a cleanup operation in which urban design was a stand-in for social policy. Thus at least part of the public rationale for the project was to do the dirty work for private development in Times Square in the interests of growth. To this bad cop routine was added the BID's good cop's operations in

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168. NYC Dept. of City Planning, *Midtown Development*, June 1981, p. 18.

169 Huxtable, *Re-inventing Times Square*, p. 363.

the early 1990s. The BID has inscribed another set of privately determined boundaries around Times Square which convey direct and indirect value to the businesses in the district (see **fig. 3.14**). By providing a layer of essentially private government to supplement and in some cases supplant overburdened public services, BIDs have become islands of privately financed stability. In addition to tangible benefits like trash collection, security and getting the homeless off the streets, businesses profit indirectly from the advertising and promotional activities of the BID. As I suggested, the value of symbolic capital in the BID's construction of "neighborhood" may ultimately be even greater to image-conscious businesses in the new Times Square.

The politics of the 42nd Street Development Project and the overall redevelopment of Times Square must be seen in the context of the changing social and economic priorities of the City since the mid-1970s. We can trace the contours of the process through the history of organization overseeing the 42nd Street Development Project, New York State Urban Development Corporation. The UDC was established in 1968 as the largest state urban development grant program in the country. It was originally conceived "as a tool for creating housing and jobs for minority group members and the poor."<sup>170</sup> In keeping with this public mission, the UDC in its early history financed low and moderate income housing in New York City and the surrounding suburbs. But in the city's fiscal crisis in 1975, the UDC was saved from bankruptcy by private bank loans and thereafter shifted its focus to growth projects with no direct benefits to low or moderate income people.<sup>171</sup>

The UDC's retreat from its original goal of providing affordable housing was emblematic of larger trends in the City's housing policies and the private housing market in the 1980s. The low-rent housing market suffered a massive decline in the 1980s, falling by 26% as a share of total rental units in the city. The number of single room occupancy units (SROs), traditionally the last stop between shelter and the streets, are estimated to have declined by up to 100,000 units in the 1980s.<sup>172</sup> The severe shrinkage in low-income

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170. Quoted in Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, p. 171.

171. Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, p. 171.

172. Sassen, *Global Cities*, p. 262.

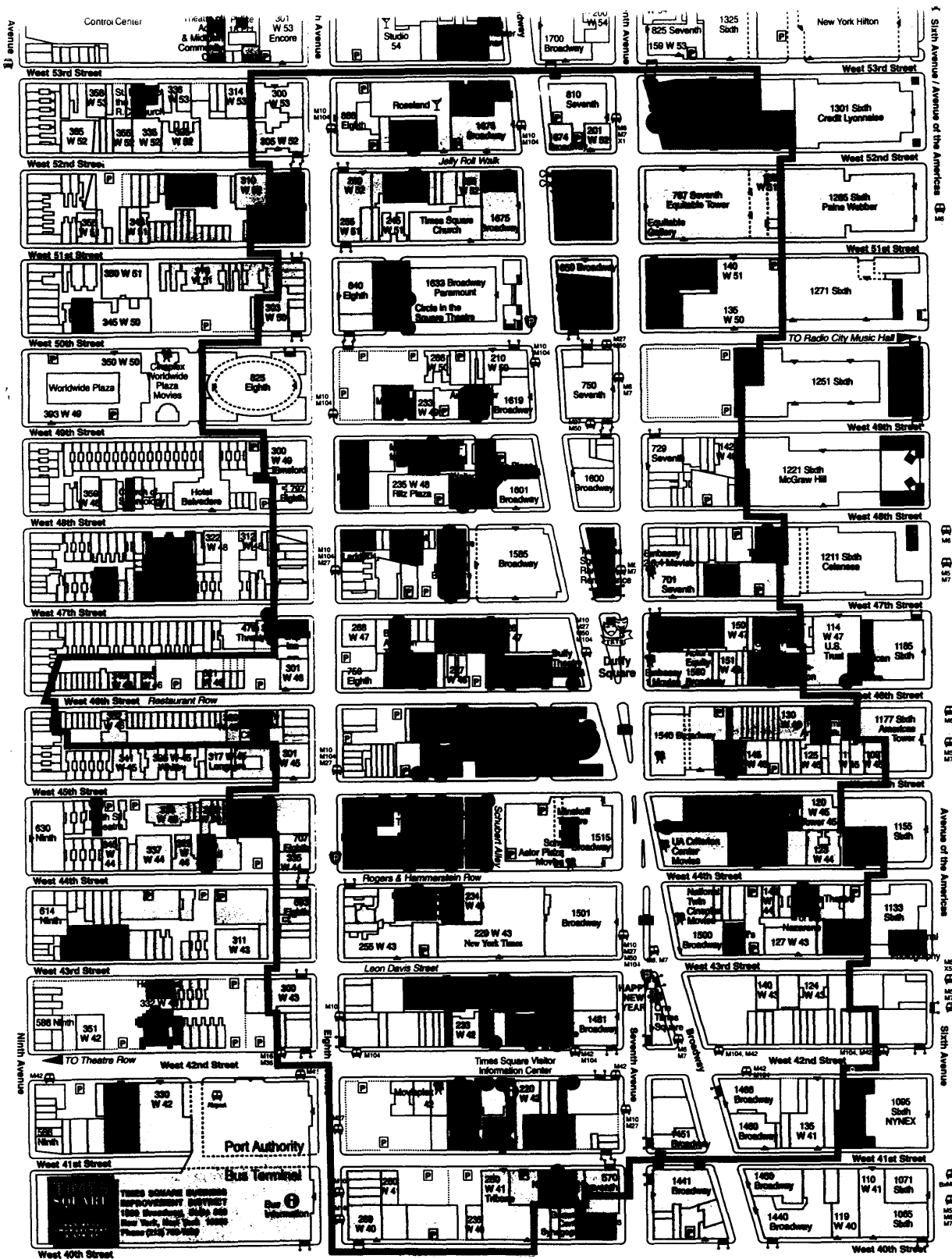


Fig. 3.14. Map of the Times Square Business Improvement District.

housing, compounded by declining household incomes among the poor, contributed to sharp increases in overcrowding and homelessness. The one area that has retained a relatively large, but also declining, number of SROs and city-subsidized housing for the homeless is Times Square. But urban planner Peter Marcuse contends that redevelopment has made Times Square a linchpin in the City's policy of systematically removing the homeless from high-value areas of Manhattan. As evidence he points to the Special Initiatives Program in which the City places homeless families in minimally-rehabilitated *in rem* housing which is concentrated overwhelmingly in ghettos like the South Bronx and Central Harlem. This is no accident, according to Marcuse, but rather

a sophisticated plan for downtown Manhattan; this is a way of clearing the homeless out of Manhattan south of 96th Street, and perhaps out of central Brooklyn also. It is also a way of getting rid of the welfare hotels that are a blight on Times Square. Times Square is to be redeveloped; you can't do that if you have homeless people hanging around--you've got to get them out.<sup>173</sup>

Whether or not the City's homeless policy is a direct instrument of the social and spatial re-engineering of downtown Manhattan, there is clear evidence of the linkages between the economic restructuring in the 1980s and the city's dramatic rise in homelessness. These linkages, and the role played by the City and the UDC in creating them, form the larger economic and political framework within which the redevelopment of Times Square must be viewed. The human dimension of the "blighted conditions" and "negative image" targeted by the 42nd Street Development Project is precisely those people who, for a variety of reasons, have been left behind in New York "Ascendant."

### **Times Square as Market/Place**

The forces of postindustrial transformation, operating both on and through cities' economic development policies, have reconstructed urban markets and places as settings for new types of cultural production and consumption. The image of place plays a crucial role

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173. Quoted in "Planning: Power, Politics, People," in Brian Wallis, *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism, A Project by Martha Rosler*, (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 1991), p. 243.

in this process as the symbolic capital that developers and planners invest in an area to make them attractive to new residents and consumers. Places and the images associated with them thus function as economic commodities with a particular set of use and exchange values. The cycle of devaluation and revaluation of places in the urban landscape is governed by market mechanisms of uneven spatial development. Changes in formal markets for commercial and residential property, however, are linked to shifting social and spatial relations within various informal and even "underground" and illegal markets. There is therefore no necessary contradiction between the rise of what many describe as "third world" informal economies in the midst of the larger technological, service-based postindustrial economy of American cities.

In her analysis of the rise of "global cities," Saskia Sassen examines informalization as a parallel phenomenon to postindustrial restructuring. She argues that "what are perceived as backward sectors of the economy may not be remnants of an earlier phase of industrialization but may well represent a downgrading of work connected to the dynamics of growth in leading sectors of the economy."<sup>174</sup> The informalization of economic activities, according to Sassen, can be thought of as an "emergent, or developing, 'opportunity structure'" that has a complementary or compensatory relationship to formal market structures. Sassen mainly considers the phenomenon of informal work in terms of the rise of small-scale and decentralized manufacturing, contracting and specialized services in New York City in the 1980s. However, many of her observations can be applied to the economic activities that have emerged in response to a changing commercial market in and around Times Square during the same period. For example, the burgeoning number of non-licensed street peddlers in the area, many of whom are recent immigrants, sell everything from fake Gucci watches to pirated videos usually to unsuspecting tourists. As more and more retail stores in Times Square have gone upscale, these hit-and-run entrepreneurs have

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174. Sassen, *Global Cities*, p. 286.

exploited the market by selling the same "brand-name" (often counterfeit or stolen) merchandise at much lower prices.

Similar formal and informal market dynamics operate in the illegal and semi-legal activities of Times Square's underground economy. In 1978 the Ford Foundation commissioned an extensive study of the street life and markets of West 42nd Street as part of a more comprehensive redevelopment plan, which ultimately culminated in the design for "The City at 42nd Street." In seeking to understand the particular social ecology of the West 42nd Street "Bright Light District," the authors of the study cite Robert Park's seminal 1921 essay, "The City," in which he argues that people come together in cities "not because they are alike, but because they are useful to one another. This is particularly true in great cities where social distances are maintained in spite of geographical proximity, and where every community is likely to be composed of people who lived together in relationships that can best be described as symbiotic rather than social."<sup>175</sup>

The illicit markets around Times Square and particularly West 42nd Street are dependent on a concentrated network of such symbiotic relationships. As the 42nd Street Study demonstrates, the sellers and buyers in these markets are brought together by economic necessity and their transactions follow most the normal dynamics of supply and demand. The authors quote one drug hustler as indicative of the nature and scope of the market:

Why do you think we be here risking getting busted if wasn't no money out here. You know them tour guides with tourists in 'em--they be buying joints everyday especially since the summer started. When people be coming from the movies, they be buying too. I got a bunch of regular people who be coming to me everyday. Even when it rains I make money. Sometimes more money because people be buying a whole bunch of joints at one time before they go to the movie. I never make less than 50 dollars a day.<sup>176</sup>

Street economies in joints, gambling and con games forms what the authors describe as a quasi-legal world of hustling in Times Square that exists in a continuum of informal and

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175. Kornblum and Boggs, "The Social Ecology of the Bright Light District," in "West 42nd Street: The Bright Light Zone" (CUNY, July 1978), p. 18.

176. "West 42nd Street," p. 126.

formal economic activities. With limited employment options available to the largely young Black and Hispanic men who hustle on 42nd Street, most of them see what they do as a legitimate economic alternative to more serious types of crime. One hustler, for example, reported that he gave up being a “stick-up” man and went into selling joints so he could save up enough money to buy a gypsy cab.<sup>177</sup>

Hustling thrives amid the larger demand structure that is created by Times Square’s role as a major transportation hub and entertainment center. The steady stream of commuters, tourists and local visitors to the area forms a constant source of new customers for whatever is for sale. The area’s commercial sex industry is highly profitable despite the fact that establishments pay exorbitant rents (as much as 1000% more than non-sex uses), high legal fees and are subject to police monitoring and regulation. Many of the hustlers who end up on the wrong side of the law find employment in the sex establishments who must hire ex-convicts because of the difficulty of attracting “straight” employees. The results of the 42nd Street Study’s survey of patronage at commercial sex establishments led the authors to conclude that economic development would not eliminate the commercial sex industry from the Times Square Area since that is where it finds its most concentrated market.<sup>178</sup> Their predictions seem to have been borne out since the study was conducted by the number of sex businesses that have relocated from 42nd Street to adjacent areas along Eighth Avenue. Like many other retail businesses in Times Square, many of these sex establishments have become more capitalized and “upscale” by consolidating operations in mall-like sex “emporiums” and targeting a more the area’s growing mainstream middle-class patrons.

The authors of the 42nd Street study attribute the concentration of illicit activity on the street to its function as a “night frontier” in the city. “It is a place where the laws of

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177 “West 42nd Street,” p. 128.

178. “West 42nd Street,” p. 39. Twenty percent of respondents reported having patronized adult bookstores, 10 percent said they also attended peek shows, and 4 percent admitted patronizing a massage parlor. Authors surmise that the data underrepresents the actual proportion of the metropolitan area population which patronizes commercial sex establishments.



conventional society are suspended," they explain, "where people come to seek adventure, to take risks in dealing in the fast life."<sup>179</sup> But as much of the research in the study shows the economic "laws of conventional society," of supply and demand and profit and loss, are in many ways as operative on the streets of Times Square as they are in corporate boardrooms. How then do we explain the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of place in which its social life is simultaneously marginal and central to the normal workings of society? Part of the explanation takes us back to the beginning of the century when Times Square emerged as an "amoral" commercial zone in the city which lay beyond what was seen as the moderating influence of the domestic sphere. The source of deep social and moral anxiety over the emergence of this new kind of place in the urban landscape stemmed from its fluid class boundaries and its exposure to the unrestrained forces of the market. The "betwixt and between" nature of modern market relations, rooted neither in place nor in basic social institutions, opened up liminal spaces of transaction in which social roles were not clearly defined.

Sharon Zukin has traced the separation of the market from the spatial and moral fixities of place to the logic of modern capitalism in which production was freed up from spatially-bound resources or labor. "In the abstract," argues Zukin, "economic restructuring can be thought of as a process of liminality. It socially reorganizes space and time, reformulates economic roles, and revalues cultures of production and consumption."<sup>180</sup> It is here in the liminal spaces of the market economy, moreover, that we can begin to locate Foucault's concept of heterotopia and address the question of power. Heterotopic spaces arise out of the conditions of liminality that exist at all levels of social and economic interaction. Although they often occur in spatially marginalized and concealed locations, they are just as likely to emerge at the center of the urban marketplaces. Thus in the 1920s and '30s spaces for alternative sexual identities were

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179. Kornblum and Boggs, "Redevelopment and the Night Frontier," p. 18.

180. Zukin, *Landscapes of Power*, p. 29.

formed in a symbiotic and coterminous relationship with the market for mainstream entertainment in Times Square. And now as then, the "Night Frontier" is a place of liminal social activity that is inseparable from the wider web of formal and informal, legal and illegal market relationships.

The frontier of the market is a place of differential economic value and contested social claims to that value. One of the authors of the 42nd Street Study frames the conflict over who will control the potentially lucrative Times Square market in explicit class terms. Terry Williams argues that Forty-second Street is a "gold mine" for which "there is a battle going between the middle class of the city, and particular [sic] its cultural innovators (architects, businessmen, planners, local residents, and clergymen), and the street culture class over who will control the street and gather its gold."<sup>181</sup> Neil Smith makes a similar argument in his analysis of how the ideological construction of the frontier in New York's Lower East Side has been used as an instrument of gentrification. Developers and middle-class pioneers began to target the "undeveloped" Lower East Side for higher market residential uses in stages beginning in the 1970s. Thus Smith argues that "economic geography defines the strategy of urban pioneering."

Whereas the myth of the urban frontier is an invention that justifies the violence of gentrification and displacement, the everyday frontier on which the myth is hung is the stark product of entrepreneurial exploitation and economic reality. In the Lower East Side as elsewhere, the frontier is before anything else a frontier of profitability.<sup>182</sup>

Times Square has been similarly constructed as a "Wild, Wild West" Midtown frontier in the redevelopment discourse of city planners and developers. The Real Estate section of the New York Times, for example, declared the "Taming of the Wild Wild West" with the construction of the Armory Condominium two blocks west of Times Square. "The trailblazers have done their work: West 42nd Street has been tamed, domesticated, and polished into the most exciting, freshest, most energetic new

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181. Williams, "West 42nd Street," p. 162.

182. Smith, "New City, New Frontier: The Lower East Side as Wild, Wild West," in Sorkin, ed. *Variations on a Theme Park*, p. 84

neighborhood in all of New York." <sup>183</sup> Another advertisement in the Times portraying executives as cowboys on horseback announces that "The Tops Guns of New York Business are Heading West: Some of the smartest companies in town have discovered the opportunities, conveniences, and elegant 21st century spirit of the new Solomon WestSide. It's 2,000,000 sq. ft. of prime New York office territory and it's going fast, so stake your claim now!" (see **figs. 3.15** and **3.16**).

The corporations that have recently moved into Times Square are some of the largest and most diversified entertainment, media and financial conglomerates in the world. The corporate reconstruction of place represents both a continuation and a departure from the process that created Times Square as a center of the modern entertainment and media industry in the first two decades of the century. In both cases, basic locational factors like transportation infrastructure, real estate values and access to a large local and tourist market have made Times Square a good investment. Until the advent of movies and television, however, the early theater and entertainment industry was far more dependent upon a place-based market. The fortunes of the theaters rose and fell with the changing economy, social structure and culture of New York City. The value of Times Square today to multimedia giants like Disney and Time Warner has much less to do with physical place than with image.

This is where the frontier myth and reality plays a crucial role. The spatial boundaries that have been drawn around Times Square in terms of zoning, the business improvement district and even special police precincts have created a frontier of economic opportunity for private developers. But redevelopment has also constructed a imaginary frontier where the identity of Times Square is suspended and malleable. The City and corporations have thus moved into into this conceptual space of liminality to reconstruct Times Square as a unique and exciting place to visit and to do business. But, as Harvey has argued, "[t]he assertion of any place-bound identity has to rest at some

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183. Quoted in Smith, "New City, New Frontier," p. 69.

## Times Square as Urban Frontier:

### Myth and Reality

Some of the smartest companies in town have discovered the opportunities, commissions, and elegant 21st century spirit of the new Solomon WestSide. Its 3,000,000 sq. ft. of prime New York office territory and it's going fast, so make your claim now!

**3500 Broadway:** This commanding 42-story building occupies the entire blockfront between 47th and 48th Streets. 1506 Broadway offers efficient column-free tower floors from 30,000 to 36,000 sq. ft., and large base floors from 65,000 to 45,000 sq. ft. Spectacular 300' views and the latest technical sophistication are some of the other distinctive features of this magnificent new building.

**750 Seventh Avenue:** Located between 40th and 42nd Streets, the sparkling permanent design of this 35-story tower establishes 750 Seventh as the ultimate New York signature building. With floor areas from 36,000 sq. ft. to 12,000 sq. ft., it is ideal for major multi-floor users as well as single floor tenants seeking the custom quality and attention to detail normally found only in a corporate headquarters building. Call our exclusive Leasing Agents, Wm. A. White/Grubb & Ellis, Inc. (212) 750-9700. Solomon Squibbs Inc., Westwood, N.Y.

**The top guns of New York business are heading West!**  
(to the new Solomon WestSide)

fig. 3.15

"The top guns of New York business are heading West!"  
Advertisement from Real Estate section of the *New York Times*.  
(source: B. Wallis, ed. *If You Lived Here...*, New York, 1991, p. 18.)

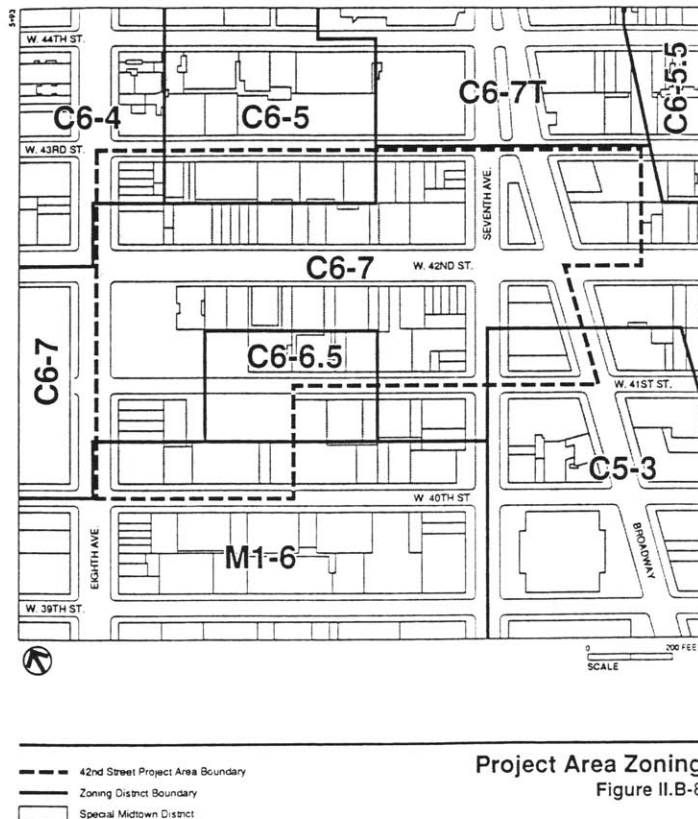


fig. 3.15

Drawing borders..  
Map of zoning codes for the 42nd Street Development Project area.  
(source: 1993 *Draft Supplemental EIS*, p. II, B-17.)

point on the motivational power of tradition...Through the presentation of a partially illusory past it becomes possible to signify something of local identity and perhaps do it profitably." <sup>184</sup> The architectural symbols and forms as well as the rituals traditionally associated with Times Square form a rich and varied palette of "authentic" place-making elements which can be mixed and matched to create a collage of old and new. Even the image of the "Night Frontier" itself has been commodified to sanitized to resemble a place of pure fantasy, a border town in the realm of the "Magic Kingdom."

The public role of redevelopment in the process of "taming the frontier" must also be seen in terms of the power to stake a claim to urban territory and exploit its "best and highest" economic use. The power to restructure urban space is primarily exercised through market mechanisms, but when this proves inadequate, as in the case of Times Square, public authority is leveraged to serve private ends. The delegitimizing and deterritorializing of whole categories of uses and users of the Times Square market was the principal objective of the 42nd Street Development Project. What is at stake, however, is more than simply the reshuffling of property values from one part of the city to smooth over the rough edges of the urban real estate market. The market is simply the functional mechanism that brings people together who need each other, but market relations can produce deep social attachments to places and people that transcend mere economic expedience. Thus the 42nd Street Study of the hustling subculture in Times Square notes the extensive social networks and friendship patterns among its daily users:

What emerged from our observations was a pattern indicating the capability of individuals to know each other more intimately. It is clear now that some of the dealers were relatives, others lived in the same residence, and others were acquaintances from prison. Members of the street network who at first seemed appeared individualistic and competitive were part of a clique often seen conversing, sharing drugs, loaning each other money, calling each other's names. They often arrived promptly each morning as if they were going to a regular job which, in fact, they were by conducting their business as usual and then returning home. <sup>185</sup>

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184. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 303.

185 "West 42nd Street," p. 159 - 60.

Times Square functions as a central market-place in the city for a variety of different users. Its users, from street peddlers to corporate image-makers, have vastly unequal access to the mechanisms of power through which space is controlled and places imaged. These power relationships are reflected in the structure of the market in Times Square, which provides the disparate means of making a living as well as catalyst for the social construction of place. This market-place exists in a continuum of symbiotic economic and social relationships which extend from the streetcorner to major transit points to hotels and high-rise offices. Under the all-encompassing auspices of crime prevention and economic development, public and private authorities have tried to break these linkages. But given the entangled mesh of these relationships, which weave in and out of formal and informal, and legal and illegal markets, where and how should the break be made?

This is the fundamental problem and contradiction in the calculation of the full costs, both economic and social, of the redevelopment effort in Times Square. In its sweeping "cleanup" operation, the UDC and the City may be shortsightedly eliminating the already shrinking options for housing and legal employment among a growing urban underclass. The challenge of planning is thus to begin to reconceptualize the postindustrial/postmodern city as a spatial and social whole and not simply a collection of commodified places. This would involve a longterm and comprehensive effort to address basic social needs issues like housing and employment as an integral part of the redevelopment of public places within the city.

## C O N C L U S I O N

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In this thesis, I have sought to tell the story of how a particular place has undergone a simultaneous life and death in the modern city. The real and imagined life of places follows the constant cycles of creation and destruction by which cities take form. The transformation of Times Square since the early 1980s is in some ways paradigmatic of the type of changes that many older cities are undergoing in response to larger social, economic and cultural forces. In other ways, however, the image of the new Times Square that is emerging out of the ashes of the old is the result of a local dynamic of urban development involving shifting configurations in the power of people and ideas to shape place. Thus, this thesis is also meant to be a contribution to what I believe is a critical theoretical debate on how and why the construction of place-image is emerging as a central strategy of urban redevelopment.

Times Square has always existed as a kind of allegory of the modern city. At the turn of the century, entertainment entrepreneurs raised the Broadway theater from a metropolitan urban art form to the level of a national and international cultural icon. Technical innovations in electronic lighting and mass commercial advertising created a the image of the modern neon cityscape which complimented the spectacle of the stage. But as the lights and glamour of the Great White Way gradually faded after the 1920s, the image of Times Square was buried deep under the tarnish of decline and neglect. By the 1960s and '70s, when redevelopment efforts focused on the area, Times Square and particularly 42nd Street had acquired the reputation as a Night Frontier, a liminal danger zone in the urban psyche. Plans for revitalizing Times Square thus emphasized the need to reverse the perception of decline and attract new private development to the area. This was also the basic premise of the 42nd Street Development Project, only now public incentives would provide the magnet for large-scale office and commercial development and create a new corporate image for Times Square.

By the early 1990s, this vision for Times Square had changed. Gone was the prospect of gleaming new office towers and sidewalks scoured by the next generation of high-tech white collar workers. In its place was an image of the old and the new Times Square, a montage of a mythical past and a visionary future. I have argued that this change of vision resulted from a number of economic and cultural factors related to the larger reconstruction of place in the postindustrial city. The trend in planning toward preserving the historic urban fabric of cities and prospecting the past for useful cultural artifacts has placed a greater focus on creating instrumental images of place. The conscious manipulation of “tradition,” through the reauthentication of local symbols, myths and rituals, has thus become a key component of postmodern urban revitalization. This redevelopment strategy came to the fore in Times Square in the late 1980s and early 1990s, beginning with the plan for the restoration of the 42nd Street theaters and culminating in the official *42 Street Now!* Plan.

This change in a cultural “structure of feeling,” as Harvey describes it, cannot be isolated from the larger political economy of place-making. Only the means of the 42nd Street Development Project have changed, after all, not the ends. The basic problem in the planning process of the 42nd Street Development Project, however, was that the “legitimate” and “illegitimate,” “desirable” and “undesirable” uses were never defined in terms of the social and economic needs of the broadest spectrum of Times Square’s actual “users.” Rather, these terms were tropes in an ideological discourse which conflated “undesirable” uses with “undesirable” people, and “illegitimate” activities with an “illegitimate” claim to public space. This was not the result of any confusion in meanings or intent. The intent was clear enough from the first line of the Project Objectives: “Eliminate blight, physical decay and crime.” In equating physical problems with social ones, however, the plan was based on a narrow environmental determinism that foreclosed the possibility of addressing each problem in the social and economic context of the city as a whole.



In addition to the lack of broad-based assessment of the project in terms of social needs, the planning process was conducted in isolation of the kind of rigorous theoretical debate that I believe is needed on the nature of the postindustrial cities and places. I have therefore used this thesis as an opportunity to begin to engage this debate by framing a conceptual analysis of the evolution and instrumentality of place-image. Critical theories on the production and representation of space provide the general structural tools of such an analysis, and I have applied these where I believe they have been most useful.

However, these tools can often be blunt analytical instruments of the real world. Although the increasing corporate power to produce and control cultural representations of place can be explained within the overall framework of Harvey's theory of "flexible accumulation" or Lefebvre's notion of "abstract space," it misses many of the the nuances in the story of how the reimagining of Times Square has actually taken place. There was, for example, the outcome of the struggle to define a vision for Times Square was by no means preordained from the start. On the contrary, as I have shown, the vision based on an instrumentalist reconstruction of the past was initially put forth by architects and civic groups who had only marginal influence in the planning process. Place-image, moreover, cannot be simplistically reduced to reflections of "deeper" economic forces. By the time the reconstructed vision was appropriated by the City as part of its current redevelopment plan it had taken on an internal dynamic that have actually helped to create the opportunities for the economic change in the area. What is needed, therefore, is an ongoing dialogue between urban theory and the living city to both strengthen the explanatory power of theory and to broaden the implications of empiricism.

By way of an appropriate epilogue to this story, Times Square has once again provided the evidence of the changing signs of the times. On May 12, the City announced that the Disney Development Company in partnership with the Tishman Urban Development Corporation have been selected as the developer for the \$300 million hotel and retail complex at the corner of 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue. If plans go ahead,

Disney will now provide two major anchors for the redevelopment of 42nd Street, the other site being the New Amsterdam Theater. The courtship of 42nd Street by Disney, that would have been unthinkable ten years ago and even raised some eyebrows and apprehension only two years ago, is now a happy marriage. With Hollywood now reuniting with Broadway, we have oddly come full circle back to the situation of the 1920s and '30s. Only now it is now a much wider circle of consumer images and forms, embracing Disney-generated fantasy in architecture, on the stage and in the stores. Times Square will now dance to the tune played in corporate boardrooms instead of Broadway studios. But even then there will be, as there has always been, the disharmonies of modern urban life.

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