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First published 1995

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Blackwell Publishers Inc.

238 Main Street

Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142, USA

Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

108 Cowley Road

Oxford, OX4 1JF

UK

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Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Zukin, Sharon.

The cultures of cities / Sharon Zukin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 1-55786-436-5 (acid-free paper)—ISBN 1-55786-437-3 (pbk. : acid-free paper)

1. Cities and towns. 2. City and town life. 3. Urban sociology. I. Title.

HT109.Z85 1995

307.76—dc20

95-7534

CIP

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Commissioning Editor: Simon R. Prosser

Production Manager: Jan Leahy

Typeset by AM Marketing

Printed in the USA by Quebecor Printing/Book Press

This book is printed on acid-free paper

THE CULTURES OF CITIES

Sharon Zukin



Photo by Alex Vitale.

1

WHOSE CULTURE? WHOSE CITY?

Cities are often criticized because they represent the basest instincts of human society. They are built versions of Leviathan and Mammon, mapping the power of the bureaucratic machine or the social pressures of money. We who live in cities like to think of "culture" as the antidote to this crass vision. The Acropolis of the urban art museum or concert hall, the trendy art gallery and café, restaurants that fuse ethnic traditions into culinary logos—cultural activities are supposed to lift us out of the mire of our everyday lives and into the sacred spaces of ritualized pleasures.¹

Yet culture is also a powerful means of controlling cities. As a source of images and memories, it symbolizes "who belongs" in specific places. As a set of architectural themes, it plays a leading role in urban redevelopment strategies based on historic preservation or local "heritage." With the disappearance of local manufacturing industries and periodic crises

1. Over the past few years, I have presented parts of this chapter at conferences or lectures at Oxford, Stanford, Columbia, Georgia State, Harvard, and Temple Universities and the City University of New York Graduate Center. The discussion of Bryant Park always gets a buzz of recognition from the audience because the privatization of public space is such an important issue everywhere. I am grateful to City University graduate students Jeffrey Hochman and Andrea Kanapell for their research on BIDS and Bryant Park, respectively.

in government and finance, culture is more and more the business of cities – the basis of their tourist attractions and their unique, competitive edge. The growth of cultural consumption (of art, food, fashion, music, tourism) and the industries that cater to it fuels the city's symbolic economy, its visible ability to produce both symbols and space.

In recent years, culture has also become a more explicit site of conflicts over social differences and urban fears. Large numbers of new immigrants and ethnic minorities have put pressure on public institutions, from schools to political parties, to deal with their individual demands. Such high culture institutions as art museums and symphony orchestras have been driven to expand and diversify their offerings to appeal to a broader public. These pressures, broadly speaking, are both ethnic and aesthetic. By creating policies and ideologies of "multiculturalism," they have forced public institutions to change.

On a different level, city boosters increasingly compete for tourist dollars and financial investments by bolstering the city's image as a center of cultural innovation, including restaurants, avant garde performances, and architectural design. These cultural strategies of redevelopment have fewer critics than multiculturalism. But they often pit the self-interested of real estate developers, politicians, and expansion-minded cultural institutions against grassroots pressures from local communities.

At the same time, strangers mingling in public space and fears of violent crime have inspired the growth of private police forces, gated and barred communities, and a movement to design public spaces for maximum surveillance. These, too, are a source of contemporary urban culture. If one way of dealing with the material inequalities of city life has been to aestheticize diversity, another way has been to aestheticize fear.

Controlling the various cultures of cities suggests the possibility of controlling all sorts of urban ills, from violence and hate crime to economic decline. That this is an illusion has been amply shown by battles over multiculturalism and its warring factions – ethnic politics and urban riots. Yet the cultural power to create an image, to frame a vision, of the

city has become more important as publics have become more mobile and diverse, and traditional institutions – both social classes and political parties – have become less relevant mechanisms of expressing identity. Those who create images stamp a collective identity. Whether they are media corporations like the Disney Company, art museums, or politicians, they are developing new spaces for public cultures. Significant public spaces of the late 19th and early 20th century – such as Central Park, the Broadway theater district, and the top of the Empire State Building – have been joined by Disney World, Bryant Park, and the entertainment-based retail shops of Sony Plaza. By accepting these spaces without questioning their representations of urban life, we risk succumbing to a visually seductive, privatized public culture.

■ The Symbolic Economy

Anyone who walks through midtown Manhattan comes face to face with the symbolic economy (see map of Manhattan). A significant number of new public spaces owe their particular shape and form to the intertwining of cultural symbols and entrepreneurial capital.

- ♦ The AT&T Building, whose Chippendale roof was a much criticized icon of postmodern architecture, has been sold to the Japanese entertainment giant Sony; the formerly open public areas at street level have been enclosed as retail stores and transformed into Sony Plaza. Each store sells Sony products: video cameras in one shop, clothes and accessories related to performers under contract to Sony's music or film division in another. Sony's interactive science museum features the opportunity to get hands-on experience with Sony video equipment. Sony had to get the city government's approval both to enclose these stores and set them up for retail shopping, for the original agreement to build the office tower had depended on providing *public* space. Critics charged that retail stores are not public space, and even the city planning commissioners admitted they were perplexed by the question (AIA Forum, "Sony Plaza: Public Space or Corporate Face," May 1994). "In return for the retail space," the chairman of the local community board said, "we would like to hold Sony to the original understanding to create a peaceful refuge, which certainly didn't include corporate banners and a television monitor." "We like it," the president of Sony Plaza replied. The

- Sony Plaza: Retail stores as public space.

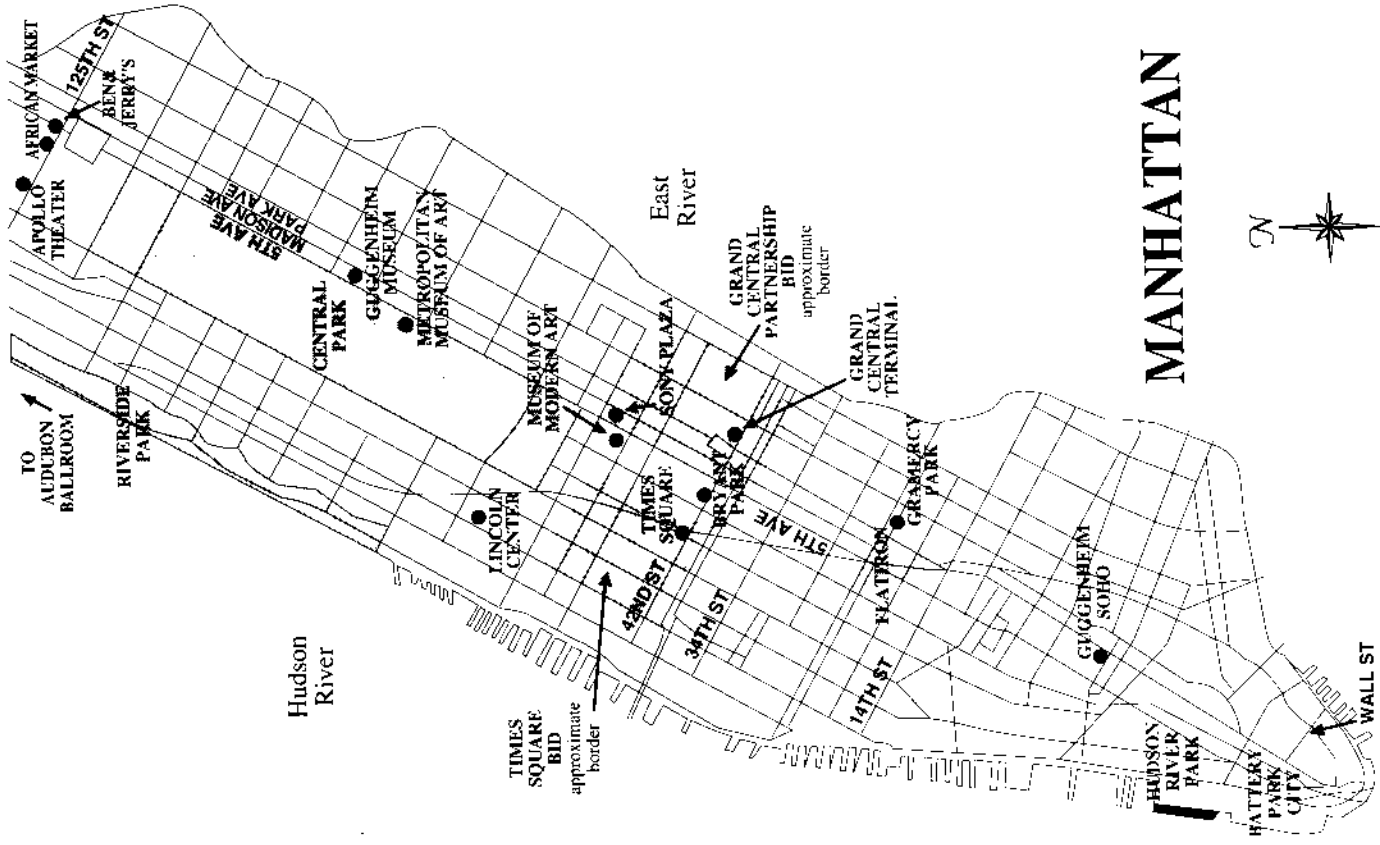


Photo by Richard Rosen.

banners "are seen as art and bring warmth and color to the space" (*New York Times*, January 30, 1994).

- ◆ Two blocks away, André Emmerich, a leading contemporary art dealer, rented an empty storefront in a former bank branch to show three huge abstract canvases by the painter Al Held. Entitled *Harry, If I Told You, Would You Know?* the group of paintings was exhibited in raw space, amid falling plaster, peeling paint, exposed wires, and unfinished floors, and

- A selective view of Manhattan's symbolic economy: Downtown financial district, parks, art museums, midtown business improvement districts and African market.



MANHATTAN



- Culture as a means of framing space: Second installation of paintings by Al Held in vacant storefront at 650 Madison Avenue, October 1992-January 1994.

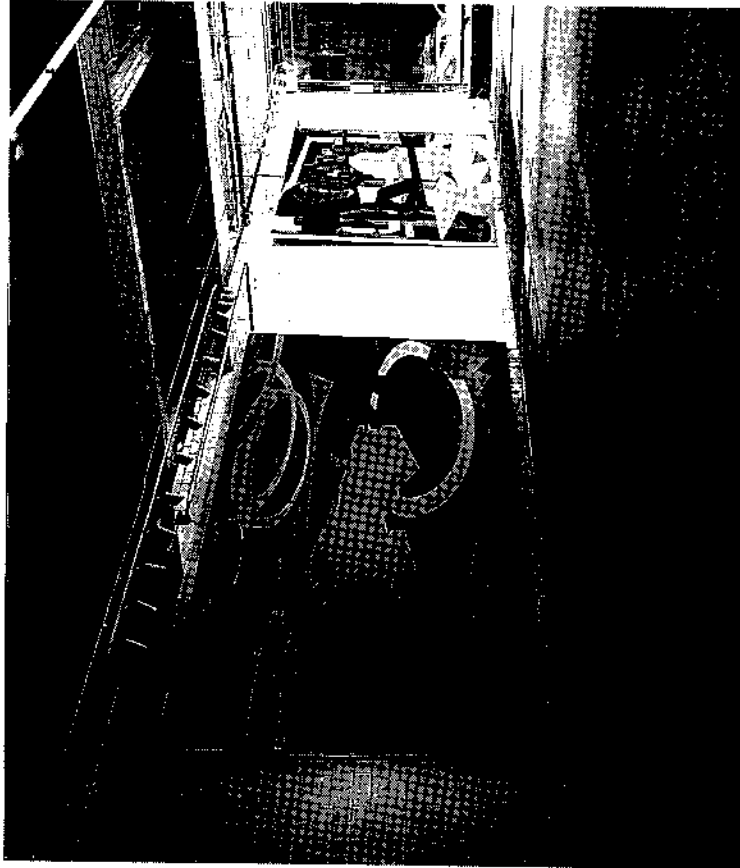


Photo by Kevin Ryan, courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery.

passersby viewed the exhibit from the street through large plate glass windows. The work of art was certainly for sale, yet it was displayed as if it were a free, public good; and it would never have been there had the storefront been rented by a more usual commercial tenant.

- ◆ On 42nd Street, across from my office, Bryant Park is considered one of the most successful public spaces to be created in New York City in recent years. After a period of decline, disuse, and daily occupation by vagrants and drug dealers, the park was taken over by a not-for-profit business association of local property owners and their major corporate tenants, called the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation. This group redesigned the park and organized daylong programs of cultural events; they renovated the kiosks and installed new food services; they hired a phalanx of private security guards. All this attracted nearby office workers, both women and men, who make the park

- Prêt-à-porter in public space: Twice a year, huge white tents are erected in Bryant Park to show the fashion collections of New York City designers.

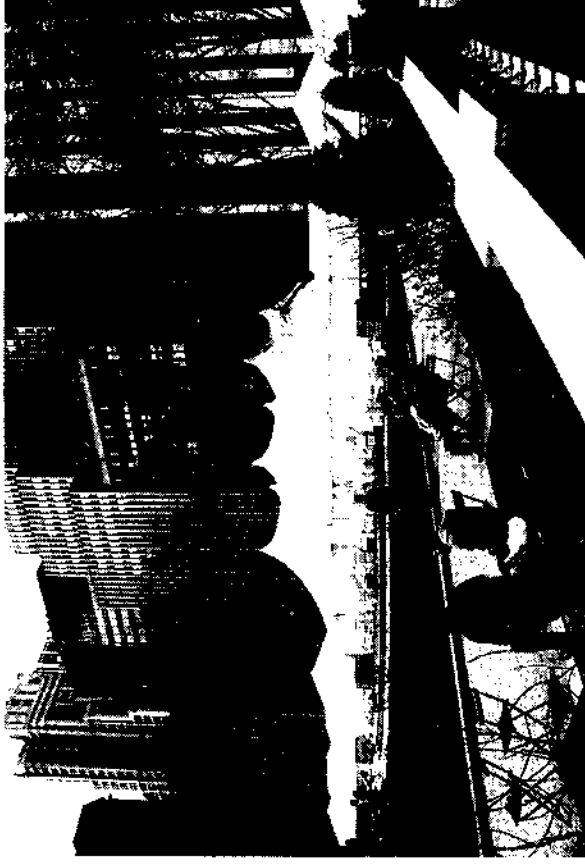


Photo courtesy of Patrick McMullan and 7th on Sixth.

a lively midday gathering place, as it had been prior to the mid 1970s – a public park under private control.

Building a city depends on how people combine the traditional economic factors of land, labor, and capital. But it also depends on how they manipulate symbolic languages of exclusion and entitlement. The look and feel of cities reflect decisions about what – and who – should be visible and what should not, on concepts of order and disorder, and on uses of aesthetic power. In this primal sense, the city has always had a symbolic economy. Modern cities also owe their existence to a second, more abstract symbolic economy devised by “place entrepreneurs” (Molotch 1976), officials and investors whose ability to deal with the symbols of growth yields “real” results in real estate development, new businesses, and jobs.

Related to this entrepreneurial activity is a third, traditional symbolic economy of city advocates and business elites who, through a combination of philanthropy, civic pride, and desire to establish their identity as a patrician class, build the majestic art museums, parks, and architectural complexes

that represent a world-class city. What is new about the symbolic economy since the 1970s is its symbiosis of image and product, the scope and scale of selling images on a national and even a global level, and the role of the symbolic economy in speaking for, or representing, the city.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the symbolic economy rose to prominence against a background of industrial decline and financial speculation. The metamorphosis of American-made products into Mexican blue jeans, Japanese autos, and East Asian computers emptied the factories where those goods had been made. Companies that were the largest employers in their communities went out of business or were bought and restructured by takeover artists.

The entrepreneurial edge of the economy shifted toward deal making and selling investments and toward those creative products that could not easily be reproduced elsewhere. Product design – creating the look of a thing – was said to show economic genius. Hollywood film studios and media empires were bought and sold and bought again. In the 1990s, with the harnessing of new computer-based technologies to marketing campaigns, the “information superhighway” promised to join companies to consumers in a Manichean embrace of technology and entertainment. “The entertainment industry is now the driving force for new technology, as defense used to be,” the CEO of a U.S. software company said (“Entertainment Economy” 1994, p. 60).

The growth of the symbolic economy in finance, media, and entertainment may not change the way entrepreneurs do business. But it has already forced the growth of towns and cities, created a vast new work force, and changed the way consumers and employees think. In the early 1990s, employment in “entertainment and recreation” in the United States grew slightly more than in health care and six times more than in the auto industry (“Entertainment Economy” 1994, p. 61). The facilities where these employees work – hotels, restaurants, expanses of new construction and undeveloped land – are more than just workplaces. They reshape geography and ecology; they are places of creation and transformation.

The Disney Company, for example, makes films and dis-tributes them from Hollywood. It runs a television channel

and sells commercial spinoffs, such as toys, books, and videos, from a national network of stores. Disney is also a real estate developer in Anaheim, Orlando, France, and Japan and the proposed developer of a theme park in Virginia and a hotel and theme park in Times Square. Moreover, as an employer, Disney has redefined work roles. Proposing a model for change in the emerging service economy, Disney has shifted from the white-collar worker described by C. Wright Mills in the 1950s to a new chameleon of “flexible” tasks. The planners at its corporate headquarters are “imagineers”; the costumed crowd-handlers at its theme parks are “cast members.” Disney suggests that the symbolic economy is more than just the sum of the services it provides. The symbolic economy unifies material practices of finance, labor, art, performance, and design.

The prominence of culture industries also inspires a new language dealing with difference (see Ewen 1988). It offers a coded means of discrimination, an undertone to the dominant discourse of democratization. Styles that develop on the streets are cycled through mass media, especially fashion and “urban music” magazines and MTV, where, divorced from their social context, they become images of cool. On urban billboards advertising designer perfumes or jeans, they are recycled to the streets, where they become a provocation, breeding imitation and even violence. The beachheads of designer stores, from Armani to A/X, from Ralph Lauren to Polo, are fiercely parodied for the “props” of fashion-conscious teenagers in inner city ghettos. The cacophany of demands for justice is translated into a coherent demand for jeans. Claims for public space by culture industries inspire the counterpolitics of display in late 20th century urban riots.

The symbolic economy recycles real estate as it does designer clothes. Visual display matters in American and European cities today, because the identities of places are established by sites of delectation. The sensual display of fruit at an urban farmers’ market or gourmet food store puts a neighborhood “on the map” of visual delights and reclaims it for gentrification. A sidewalk cafe takes back the street from casual workers and homeless people. In Bryant Park, enormous white tents and a canopied walkway set the scene for spring and fall showings of New York fashion designers. Twice

a year, the park is filled by the fashion media, paparazzi, store buyers, and supermodels doing the business of culture and reclaiming Bryant Park as a vital, important place. We New Yorkers become willing participants in the drama of the fashion business. As cultural consumers, we are drawn into the interrelated production of symbols and space.

Mass suburbanization since the 1950s has made it unreasonable to expect that most middle-class men and women will want to live in cities. But developing small places within the city as sites of visual delectation creates urban oases where everyone appears to be middle class. In the fronts of the restaurants or stores, at least, consumers are strolling, looking, eating, drinking, sometimes speaking English and sometimes not. In the back regions, an ethnic division of labor guarantees that immigrant workers are preparing food and cleaning up. This is not just a game of representations: developing the city's symbolic economy involves recycling workers, sorting people in housing markets, luring investment, and negotiating political claims for public goods and ethnic promotion. Cities from New York to Los Angeles and Miami seem to thrive by developing small districts around specific themes. Whether it is Times Square or el Calle Ocho, a commercial or an "ethnic" district, the narrative web spun by the symbolic economy around a specific place relies on a vision of cultural consumption and a social and an ethnic division of labor.

As cities and societies place greater emphasis on visualization, the Disney Company and art museums play more prominent roles in defining public culture. I am speaking, first, of public culture as a process of negotiating images that are accepted by large numbers of people. In this sense, culture industries and cultural institutions have stepped into the vacuum left by government. At least since the 1970s debacles of Watergate and the Vietnam War, through Iranagate in the 1980s and the confessions of politicians in the 1990s, government has lacked the basic credibility to define the core values of a common culture. On the local level, most mayors and other elected officials have been too busy clearing budget deficits and dealing with constituents' complaints about crime and schools to project a common image. The "vision thing," as George Bush called it, has been supplied by religious leaders from Jerry Falwell to Jesse Jackson and by those institu-

tions whose visual resources permit or even require them to capitalize on culture.

I also see public culture as socially constructed on the micro-level. It is produced by the many social encounters that make up daily life in the streets, shops, and parks – the spaces in which we experience public life in cities. The right to be in these spaces, to use them in certain ways, to invest them with a sense of our selves and our communities – to claim them as ours and to be claimed in turn by them – make up a constantly changing public culture. People with economic and political power have the greatest opportunity to shape public culture by controlling the building of the city's public spaces in stone and concrete. Yet public space is inherently democratic. The question of who can occupy public space, and so define an image of the city, is open-ended.

Talking about the cultures of cities in purely visual terms does not do justice to the material practices of politics and economics that create a symbolic economy. But neither does a strictly political-economic approach suggest the subtle powers of visual and spatial strategies of social differentiation. As I suggested in *Landscapes of Power* (1991), the rise of the cities' symbolic economy is rooted in two long-term changes – the economic decline of cities compared to suburban and nonurban spaces and the expansion of abstract financial speculation – and in such short-term factors, dating from the 1970s and 1980s, as new mass immigration, the growth of cultural consumption, and the marketing of identity politics. This is an inclusive, structural, and materialist view. If I am right, we cannot speak about cities today without understanding:

- ◆ how cities use culture as an economic base,
- ◆ how capitalizing on culture spills over into the privatization and militarization of public space, and
- ◆ how the power of culture is related to the aesthetics of fear.

■ Culture as an Economic Base

Suppose we turn the old Marxist relation between a society's base and its superstructure on its head and think of culture as a way of producing basic goods. In fact, culture supplies the basic information – including symbols, patterns, and

meaning – for nearly all the service industries. In our debased contemporary vocabulary, the word *culture* has become an abstraction for any economic activity that does not create material products like steel, cars, or computers. Stretching the term is a legacy of the advertising revolution of the early 20th century and the more recent escalation in political image making. Because culture is a system for producing symbols, every attempt to get people to buy a product becomes a culture industry. The sociologist Daniel Bell used to tell a joke about a circus employee whose job it was to follow the elephant and clean up after it; when asked, she said her job was in “the entertainment business.” Today, she might say she was in “the culture industry.” Culture is intertwined with capital and identity in the city’s production systems.

From one point of view, cultural institutions establish a competitive advantage over other cities for attracting new businesses and corporate elites. Culture suggests the coherence and consistency of a brand name product. Like any commodity, “cultural” landscape has the possibility of generating other commodities. Historically, of course, the arrow of causality goes the other way. Only an economic surplus – sufficient to fund sacrifices for the temple, Michelangelos for the chapel, and bequests to art museums in the wills of robber barons – generates culture. But in American and European cities during the 1970s, culture became more of an instrument in the entrepreneurial strategies of local governments and business alliances. In the shift to a post-war economy, who could build the biggest modern art museum suggested the vitality of the financial sector. Who could turn the waterfront from docklands rubble to parks and marinas suggested the possibilities for expansion of the managerial and professional corps. This was probably as rational a response as any to the unbeatable isolationist challenge of suburban industrial parks and office campuses. The city, such planners and developers as James Rouse believed, would counter the visual homogeneity of the suburbs by playing the card of aesthetic diversity.

Yet culture also suggests a labor force that is well suited to the revolution of diminished expectations that began in the 1960s (Zukin, 1989 [1982]). In contrast to high-rolling rappers and rockers, “high” cultural producers are supposed to live on the margins; and the incomes of most visual artists, art

curators, actors, writers, and musicians suggest they must be used to deprivation. A widespread appreciation of culture does not really temper the work force’s demands. But, in contrast to workers in other industries, artists are flexible on job tasks and work hours, do not always join labor unions, and present a docile or even “cultured” persona. These qualities make them, like immigrants, desirable employees in service industries (see Waldinger 1992, 107–8). Dissatisfaction with menial and dead-end jobs does not boil over into protest because their “real” identity comes from an activity outside the job.

Cultural work has a larger economic role than the reduced expectations of cultural workers might suggest. Culture industries feed both products and innovative ideas throughout an economy, providing “software,” as Sony calls television programs, compact discs, and laser discs, for TV sets and VCRs produced around the world. When companies locate innovation centers, corporate headquarters, and marketing agencies in the same city, whether Los Angeles, London, or Tokyo, it has an energizing effect on the entire urban economy (see Molotch forthcoming). Interpersonally, in terms of providing a social context for face-to-face relations, culture aids the transactions of highly mobile, sophisticated business elites, and facilitates communication among them across genders and sexual persuasions.

Art museums, boutiques, restaurants, and other specialized sites of consumption create a social space for the exchange of ideas on which businesses thrive. While these can never be as private as a corporate dining room, urban consumption spaces allow for more social interaction among business elites. They are more democratic, accessible spaces than old-time businessmen’s clubs. They open a window to the city – at least, to a rarified view of the city – and, to the extent they are written up in “lifestyle” magazines and consumer columns of the daily newspapers, they make ordinary people more aware of the elites’ cultural consumption. Through the media, the elites’ cultural preferences change what many ordinary people know about the city.

The high visibility of spokespersons, stars, and stylists for culture industries underlines the “sexy” quality of culture as a motor of economic growth. Not just in New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, business leaders in a variety of low-

profile, midsize cities are actively involved on the boards of trustees of cultural institutions because they believe that investing in the arts leads to more growth in other areas of the urban economy (Whitt 1987; Whitt and Lammers 1991). They think a tourist economy develops the subjective image of place that "sells" a city to other corporate executives. Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and Miami have shown the way to an economic development strategy based on the ethnographic "gaze" (Urry 1990b), the "sale and consumption of pleasure" (Mullins 1991, 331), the location of objects in space by a singular, coherent vision.

Whether there is a singular, coherent vision no longer depends on the power of a single elite group. Constant political pressures by interest groups and complex interwoven networks of community groups, corporations, and public officials signal multiple visions. The ability to arrange these visions artfully, to orchestrate and choreograph images of diversity to speak for a larger whole, has been claimed by major nonprofit cultural institutions. This is especially true of art museums.

Since the 1980s, museums have fallen victim to their own market pressures. Reduced government funding and cutbacks in corporate support have made them more dependent than ever on attracting paying visitors ("gate"). They rely on their gift shops to contribute a larger share of their operating expenses. They try out new display techniques and seek crowd-pleasing exhibit ideas. In an attempt to reach a broader public, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York have upgraded their restaurants and offer jazz performances on weekend evenings. Yet financial pressures have also led museums to capitalize on their visual holdings. By their marketing of cultural consumption, great art has become a *public* treasure, a tourist attraction, and a representation – divorced from the social context in which the art was produced – of public culture. Like Calvin Klein jeans on a bus stop billboard, the work of art and the museum itself have become icons of the city's symbolic economy.

Conflicts over representation have made organizing exhibitions a deeply and explicitly political activity (e.g., Karp and Lavine 1991). Who would speak for the Indians at the National Museum of the American Indian that the Smithsonian Institution opened in New York in 1994 and whether the museum

has the right to exhibit certain objects outside the time and space of the appropriate rituals – these issues gave rise to much criticism while the museum was being planned. Several years earlier, the Guerrilla Girls, a group of female artists who appear in masks and costumes, protested the lack of works by female artists in the opening exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum's downtown branch. Whether the Whitney Museum's biannual exhibit of contemporary American art should be a "political" rather than an aesthetic statement about sexism, racism, and freedom of expression is fought out every two years in the art columns of the New York newspapers.

Not only are political battles fought over the exhibits, struggles also erupt around the location and importance of museums in a city's political economy. Museums are supported, in general, by local elected officials and public-private coalitions. But the big museums, the high culture institutions with deep endowments, get more public support than the fledgling, populist institutions. The big museums, moreover, are always battling for more public resources. They want more space on public land, more money from the city's department of cultural affairs, more flexibility in profit-making activities, such as the right to sell the air rights above their buildings to real estate developers. Why should they get more public support? Because art confers money and power.

As William Luers, the president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and co-chairman of a New York City promotion, Arts and Culture Week, says, "By featuring our cultural institutions in promotions such as NY93, we show one of our city's finest faces, and stand to reap the proven economic gain that culture also brings" (*New York Observer*, May 24, 1993). Philippe de Montebello, the Metropolitan's director, says about a patron's gift of Van Gogh's *Wheat Field with Cypresses*, "It is pictures such as these that a visitor never forgets and always wishes to return to, and that are the measure of a great museum" (*New York Times*, May 25, 1993). If visible culture is wealth, the ability to frame the vision brings power.

■ Culture as a Means of Framing Space

For several hundred years, visual representations of cities have "sold" urban growth. Images, from early maps to picture

■ Art as a means to power: Vincent Van Gogh's *Wheat Field with Cypresses* (1889) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, The Annenberg Foundation Gift, 1993 (1993.132). Photograph © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. All Rights Reserved.

postcards, have not simply reflected real city spaces; instead, they have been imaginative reconstructions – from specific points of view – of a city's monumentality. The development of visual media in the 20th century made photography and movies the most important cultural means of framing urban space, at least until the 1970s. Since then, as the surrealism of *King Kong* shifted to that of *Blade Runner* and redevelopment came to focus on consumption activities, the material landscape itself – the buildings, parks, and streets – has become the city's most important visual representation. Indeed, in *Blade Runner*, the modern urban landscape is used as a cult object. Far more than King Kong's perch on the Empire State Building, *Blade Runner*'s use of the Bradbury Building, an early 20th century office building in downtown Los Angeles that has been preserved and lovingly restored, emphasizes the city's material landscape as a visual backdrop for a new

high-tech, global society. Historic preservation has been very important in this re-presentation. Preserving old buildings and small sections of the city re-presents the scarce "monopoly" of the city's visible past. Such a monopoly has economic value in terms of tourist revenues and property values. Just an image of historic preservation, when taken out of context, has economic value. In Syracuse, New York, a crankshaft taken from a long-gone salt works was mounted as public sculpture to enhance a redevelopment project (Roberts and Schein 1993; see also S. Watson 1991).

*Harry, If I Told You, Would You Know?*² is an even more surreal example of culture framing space to project an image of urban growth. In 1991, the André Emmerich Gallery, which represents the abstract painter Al Held, rented a vacant ground floor retail space in the upscale commercial district at 58th Street and Madison Avenue to show a group of Held's large-scale canvases. Emmerich thought of renting the store to show the paintings because they did not fit into the elevator to the gallery, which is on 57th Street. In the old days – the growing art market of the 1970s and 1980s – Emmerich might have shown these paintings at their SoHo branch, which was opened in 1971 in a loft building configured for wide loads. But that gallery was closed several years ago, and the storefront on Madison Avenue was vacated by the consolidation, in 1991, of two of the largest New York City banks, Chemical and Manufacturers' Hanover. The sight of the store, bare except for Held's bright paintings, with makeshift lighting on cement floors and thick columns, recalls the success of SoHo in upgrading property through cultural gentrification. Or else it suggests a scenario of continued economic recession, with empty spaces taken up by the symbolic economy.

As recession lasted through 1993, the gallery continued to use the empty bank as temporary exhibition space. But this was not just an isolated phenomenon. Emmerich's eccentric idea became taken up as public policy. When the long-delayed project to replace Times Square movie theaters and peep shows with office towers coincided with a real estate recession, the public redevelopment authorities worked with nonprofit arts organizations on an "interim" plan featuring renovation and re-creation of restaurants, night clubs, and stores, all preceded by an effort to "reanimate" 42nd Street

by an extended, site-specific art installation (*New York Times*, June 27, 1993, sec. 10, p. 1; see also July 5 and July 7, 1993). Stores that were emptied by the state's right of eminent domain became a sculptor's casting studio, sites for video installations, and exhibition spaces. Movie marquees and bill-

■ Art as a redevelopment strategy: First on-site art installation in Times Square, 1993.



Photo by Danny Kessler.

boards advertising real movies and products were indistinguishable from Jenny Holzer's caustic aphorisms ("Men Don't Protect You Any More").

The on-site art installation drew so much favorable attention it was repeated the following year. The re-presentation of Times Square as both a populist and an avant-garde cultural attraction – helped by continued public subsidies for hotel construction and office relocation – attracted corporate cultural industries. The Disney Company decided to open a theater for live stage shows on 42nd Street; and MTV, whose corporate offices are already in the area, decided to open a new production studio.

More common forms of visual re-presentation in all cities connect cultural activities and populist images in festivals, sports stadiums, and shopping centers. While these may simply be minimized as "loss leaders" supporting new office construction (Harvey 1989a, 12–14), they should also be understood as producing space for a symbolic economy. In the 1960s, new or restored urban shopping centers from Boston to Seattle copied suburban shopping malls by developing clean space according to a visually coherent theme. To the surprise of some urban planners, they actually thrived (Frieden and Sagalyn 1989, 72–77). No longer did the city's dream world of commercial culture relate to the bourgeois culture of the old downtown or the patrician culture of art museums and public buildings. Instead, urban commercial culture became "entertainment," aimed at attracting a mobile public of cultural consumers. This altered the public culture of the city.

Linking public culture to commercial cultures has important implications for social identity and social control. Preserving an ecology of images often takes a connoisseur's view of the past, re-reading the legible practices of social class discrimination and financial speculation by reshaping the city's collective memory (see Boyer 1992; Sontag 1977, 180). Boston's Faneuil Hall, South Street Seaport in New York, Harborplace in Baltimore, and London's Tobacco Wharf make the waterfront of older cities into a consumers' playground, far safer for tourists and cultural consumers than the closed worlds of wholesale fish and vegetable dealers and longshoremen. In such newer cities as Los Angeles or San Antonio, reclaiming the historic core, or the fictitious historic core, of

the city for the middle classes, puts the pueblo or the Alamo into an entirely different landscape from that of the surrounding inner city. On one level, there is a loss of authenticity, that is compensated for by a re-created historical narrative and a commodification of images; on another, men and women are simply displaced from public spaces they once considered theirs.

Consider Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico, where residents of "native" cultural enclaves were replaced early in the 20th century by affluent homebuyers of Anglo ethnicity. Between 1900 and World War II, East Coast artists moved to these cities and founded artists' colonies. Rebellious against the dominance of European art and seeking to develop a "native" – i.e., American – representation of nature and culture, the artists capitalized on the economic marginality of Indians and Mexicans, hired them as servants and models, and eventually built their folk cultures into a tourist industry (Rodriguez 1989). Even then, culture was used to legitimize the unequal benefits of economic growth, including higher property values, jobs in construction, hotels, and restaurants, and displacement of locals by a cosmopolitan population.

But incorporating new images into visual representations of the city can be democratic. It can integrate rather than segregate social and ethnic groups, and it can also help negotiate new group identities. In New York City, there is a big annual event organized by Caribbean immigrants, the West Indian–American Day Carnival parade, which is held every Labor Day on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. The parade has been instrumental in creating a pan-Caribbean identity among immigrants from the many small countries of that region. The parade also legitimizes the "gorgeous mosaic" of the ethnic population described by Mayor David N. Dinkins in 1989. The use of Eastern Parkway for a Caribbean festival reflects a geographical redistribution of ethnic groups – the Africanization of Brooklyn, the Caribbeanization of Crown Heights – and a social transformation of leisure, similar to that of Central Park, but far "distant from [Frederick Law] Olmsted's stately vision" (Kasinitz 1992, 142). More problematically, however, this cultural appropriation of public space supports the growing political identity of the Caribbean community and challenges the Lubavitcher Hassidim's appropriation

■ From indigenous people to sellers of crafts: The Indian Market, Santa Fe.



Indians selling their wares under the portal of the Palace of Governors, Santa Fe © Mark Nohl, *New Mexico Magazine*.

tion of the same neighborhood. In Pasadena, California, African-American organizations have demanded representation on the nine-person commission that manages the annual Rose Parade, that city's big New Year's Day event. These cultural models of inclusion differ from the paradigm of legally imposed racial integration that eliminated segregated festivals and other symbolic activities in the 1950s and 1960s (see Gates 1994). By giving distinctive cultural groups access to

■ From immigrants to New Yorkers: West Indian-American Day Carnival Parade, Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn.



Photo by Ernest Brown.

the same public space, they incorporate separate visual images and cultural practices into the same public cultures.

Culture can also be used to frame, and humanize, the space of real estate development. Cultural producers who supply art (and sell "interpretation") are sought because they legitimize the appropriation of space (Deutsche 1988). Office buildings are not just monumentalized by height and facades, they are given a human face by video artists' screen installations and public concerts. Every well-designed downtown has a mixed-use shopping center and a nearby artists' quarter. Sometimes it seems that every derelict factory district or waterfront has been converted into one of those sites of visual delectation – a themed shopping space for seasonal produce, cooking equipment, restaurants, art galleries, and an aquarium. Urban redevelopment plans, from Lowell, Massachusetts, to downtown Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, focus on museums. Unsuccessful attempts to use cultural districts or aquariums to stop economic decline in Flint, Michigan, and Camden, New Jersey – cities where there

is no major employer – only emphasize the appeal of framing a space with a cultural institution when all other strategies of economic development fail.

Artists themselves have become a cultural means of framing space. They confirm the city's claim of continued cultural hegemony, in contrast to the suburbs and exurbs. Their presence – in studios, lofts, and galleries – puts a neighborhood on the road to gentrification (Zukin 1989 [1982]; Deutsche 1988). Ironically, this has happened since artists have become more self-conscious defenders of their own interests as artists and more involved in political organizations. Often they have been co-opted into property redevelopment projects as beneficiaries, both developers of an aesthetic mode of producing space (in public art, for example) and investors in a symbolic economy. There are, moreover, special connections between artists and corporate patrons. In such cities as New York and Los Angeles, the presence of artists documents a claim to these cities' status in the global hierarchy. The display of art, for public improvement or private gain, represents an abstraction of economic and social power. Among business elites, those from finance, insurance, and real estate are generally great patrons of both art museums and public art, as if to emphasize their prominence in the city's symbolic economy.

The financial boom that lasted for most of the 1980s influenced sharp price rises in the real estate and art markets where leading investment bankers, stock traders, and developers were so active. Regardless of aesthetics, investment in art, for prestige or speculation, represented a collective means of social mobility. At the same time, a collective belief in the growth of the symbolic economy of art represented belief in the growth of the city's economy. Visual representation became a means of financially re-presenting the city. By the 1990s, it seemed to be official policy that making a place for art in the city went along with establishing a marketable identity for the city as a whole. No matter how restricted the definition of art that is implied, or how few artists are included, or how little the benefits extend to all social groups, the visibility and viability of a city's symbolic economy play an important role in the creation of place.

So the symbolic economy features two parallel production systems that are crucial to a city's material life: the *production*

of space, with its synergy of capital investment and cultural meanings, and the *production of symbols*, which constructs both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity. Every effort to rearrange space in the city is also an attempt at *visual re-presentation*. Raising property values, which remains a goal of most urban elites, requires imposing a new point of view. But negotiating whose point of view and the costs of imposing it create problems for public culture.

Creating a public culture involves both shaping public space for social interaction and constructing a *visual representation* of the city. Who occupies public space is often decided by negotiations over physical security, cultural identity, and social and geographical community. These issues have been at the core of urban anxieties for hundreds of years. They are significant today, however, because of the complexity and diversity of urban populations. Today the stakes of cultural reorganization are most visible in three basic shifts in the sources of cultural identity:

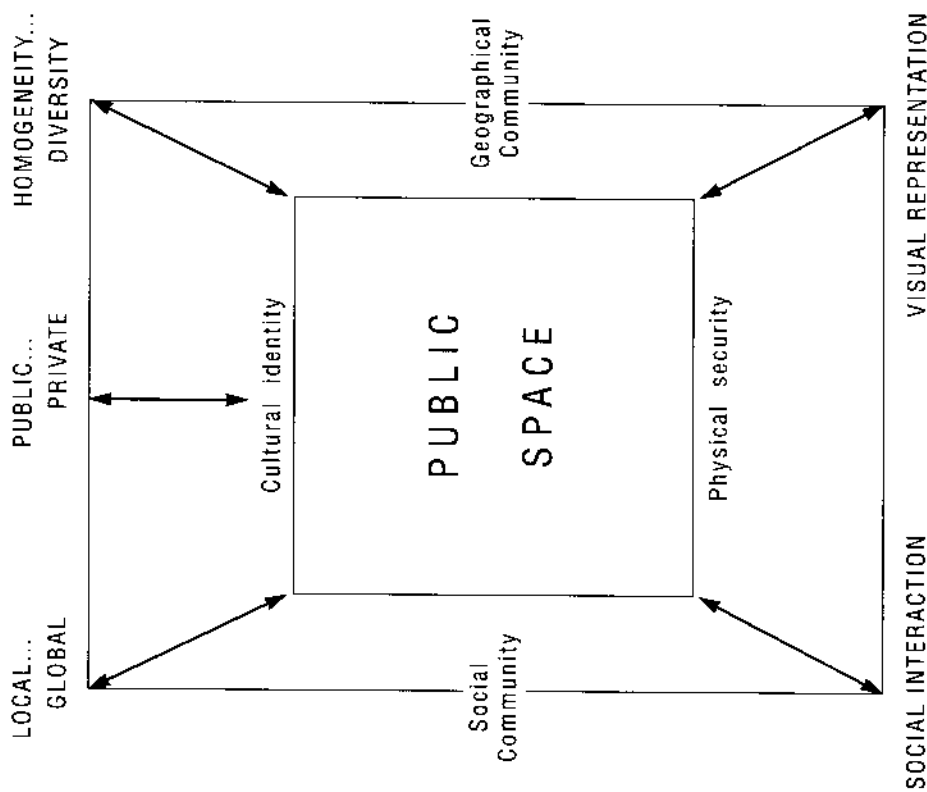
- ♦ from local to global images,
- ♦ from public to private institutions, and
- ♦ from ethnically and racially homogeneous communities to those that are more diverse.

These rather abstract concepts have a concrete impact on framing urban public space (see drawing).

Public Space

The fastest growing kind of public space in America is prisons. More jails are being built than housing, hospitals, or schools. No matter how well designed or brightly painted they may be, prisons are still closely guarded, built as cheaply as possible, and designed for surveillance. I can think of more pleasant public spaces, especially parks that I use in New York City. But is the Hudson River Park, near Battery Park City, or Bryant Park, on 42nd Street, less secure or exclusive than a prison? They share with the new wave of prison building several characteristics symptomatic of the times. Built or rebuilt as the city is in severe financial distress, they confirm the withdrawal of the public sector, and its replacement by the

The framing of public space



private sector, in defining public space. Reacting to previous failures of public space – due to crime, a perceived lower-class and minority-group presence, and disrepair – the new parks use design as an implicit code of inclusion and exclusion. Explicit rules of park use are posted in the parks and enforced by large numbers of sanitation workers and security guards, both public and private. By cleaning up public space, nearby property owners restore the attractiveness of their holdings and reconstruct the image of the city as well.

It is important to understand the histories of these symbolically central public spaces. The history of Central Park,

■ The aestheticization of fear: New landscape design and a uniformed police officer restore civility to Bryant Park.



Photo by Alex Vitale.

for example (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992), shows how, as definitions of who should have access to public space have changed, public cultures have steadily become more inclusive and democratic. From 1860 to 1880, the first uses of the park – for horseback riders and carriages – rapidly yielded to sports activities and promenades for the mainly immigrant working class. Over the next 100 years, continued democratization of access to the park developed together with a language of political equality. In the whole country, it became more difficult to enforce outright segregation by race, sex, or age.

By the late 1950s, when Arkansas Governor Orville Faubus failed to prevent the racial integration of Central High School in Little Rock, public parks, public swimming pools,

and public housing were legally opened to all of a city's residents. During the 1970s, public space, especially in cities, began to show the effects of movements to "deinstitutionalize" patients of mental hospitals without creating sufficient community facilities to support and house them. Streets became crowded with "others," some of whom clearly suffered from sickness and disorientation. By the early 1980s, the destruction of cheap housing in the centers of cities, particularly single-room-occupancy hotels, and the drastic decline in producing public housing, dramatically expanded the problem of homelessness. Public space, such as Central Park, became unintended public shelter. As had been true historically, the democratization of public space was entangled with the question of fear for physical security.

Streets and parks became camping grounds for mental patients, released from hospitals without access to alternative residential and treatment facilities. Sleeping on the sidewalks alongside them were increasing numbers of drug abusers who had drifted away from their families but were also cut off from other possible support systems. A growing population of homeless families begged for apartments in public housing. A series of lawsuits in various cities made it all but impossible to treat any of these people as criminals. In New York City, a jerry-built system of public shelters offered inadequate, often unsafe beds for a night, hotel rooms for a longer period, and subsidized apartments for persistently homeless families. No government initiatives have yet penetrated the sources of homelessness in poverty and unemployment, hospitals and drug treatment centers, and lack of cheap housing. But homeless people remain a visible presence in public spaces: on the streets, in the parks, on plazas in front of expensive apartment houses, in office building atrium lobbies, in subway cars and stations, in bus stations, in railroad terminals, under bridge and highway entrances.

New York City parks have removed and redistributed the homeless by creating the "defensible spaces" that Oscar Newman wrote about in the 1960s, using the design guidelines prescribed by William H. Whyte in the 1980s. Playgrounds are fenced in for children and their guardians, and parks are closed at night. Tompkins Square Park in lower Manhattan, site of violent confrontations in 1988 and 1991 between the

police and neighborhood homeowners, punk activists, and homeless men sleeping in the park – all of whom, or some of whom, opposed gentrification – was closed for two years for extensive landscaping. When the park was reopened, open sight lines permitted children, ballplayers, and elderly bench sitters to keep an eye on each other while using their own spaces.

In 1989, a private organization that manages Central Park, the Central Park Conservancy, demanded demolition of the Naumberg Bandshell, site of popular concerts from the 1930s to the 1950s, where homeless people gathered. Similarly, the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation started cleaning up the midtown business district by adopting the social design principles developed by Whyte. Whyte's basic idea is that public spaces are made safe by attracting lots of "normal" users. The more normal users there are, the less space there will be for vagrants and criminals to maneuver. The Bryant Park Restoration Corporation intended their work to set a prototype for urban public space. They completely reorganized the landscape design of the park, opening it up to women, who tended to avoid the park even during daylight (see Cranz 1982), and selling certain kinds of buffet food. They established a model of pacification by cappuccino.

Central Park, Bryant Park, and the Hudson River Park show how public spaces are becoming progressively less public: they are, in certain ways, more exclusive than at any time in the past 100 years. Each of these areas is governed, and largely or entirely financed, by a private organization, often working as a quasi-public authority. These private groups are much better funded than the corresponding public organizations. Design in each park features a purposeful vision of urban leisure. A heightened concern for security inspires the most remarkable visible features: gates, private security guards, and eyes keeping the space under surveillance. The underlying assumption is that of a paying public, a public that values public space as an object of visual consumption. Yet it has become inconceivable in public discussions that control of the parks be left in public hands. When the *New York Times* praised plans to require developers to provide public access to the city's extensive waterfront, the newspaper said that only a public-private partnership could raise the funds to

maintain such a significant public space (editorial, October 14, 1993).

A major reason for privatization of some public parks is that city governments cannot pay for taking care of them. Since the 1960s, while groups of all sorts have requested more use of the parks, the New York City Parks Department has been starved of government funds. Half the funding for Central Park is now raised privately by the Central Park Conservancy, which enjoys a corresponding influence on parks policy. Founded by private donors in 1980, the conservancy's original mission was to raise funds in the private sector to offset the park's physical deterioration. But it soon developed an authoritative cultural voice. The conservancy publicly defends the intentions of Olmsted and Vaux, the park's original designers, to create a "natural" landscape for contemplation. Most often, they beautify the park by restoring its 19th century buildings and bridges or setting up a nature program or skating facilities on one of its landscaped ponds. The conservancy has also become an arbiter between groups that want to use the park for sports or demonstrations, thus mediating between the homeless and the joggers, between athletes who come to the park from all over the city and those who come from low-income neighborhoods on the park's northern borders. The conservancy, moreover, has spoken loudly and often in favor of hiring nonunion labor. While Roy Rosenzweig and Betsy Blackmar (1992) show that, historically, the unionization of park employees was an important means of democratizing access to Central Park, the park's public administrator (who is also the conservancy's director) argues that nonunion labor is more efficient and less costly than unionized public employees. By being able to implement its viewpoint on this most central of public spaces, the conservancy has become a more important guardian of public culture than the city's Parks Department.

In midtown, Bryant Park is an even more aggressive example of privatization. Declared a New York City landmark in 1975, the nine-acre park is essentially run by the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, whose biggest corporate members are Home Box Office (HBO), a cable television network, and NYNEX, a regional telecommunications company. Like the Central Park Conservancy, the Bryant Park Restoration

Corporation raises most of the park's budget, supervises maintenance, and decides on design and amenities.

The design of Bryant Park, in 1934, was based on an Olmstedian separation of a rural space of contemplation from the noisy city. By the late 1970s, this was determined to have the effect of walling off the park's intended public of office workers outside from drug dealers and loiterers inside. When the restoration corporation was formed, it took as its major challenge the development of a new design that would visually and spatially ensure security. The wall around the park was lowered, and the ground leveled to bring it closer to the surrounding streets. The restoration corporation bought movable chairs and painted them green, as in Parisian parks, responding to William H. Whyte's suggestion (1980; 1988, 119-23) that park users like to create their own small spaces. Whyte recommended keeping "the undesirables" out by making a park *attractive*. Victorian kiosks selling cappuccino and sandwiches were built and painted, paths were repaved and covered with pebbles, a central lawn was opened up, and performers were enlisted to offer free entertainment in the afternoons. The restoration corporation hired its own security guards and pressured the New York City Police Department to supply uniformed officers. Four uniformed New York City police officers and four uniformed private security guards are on duty all day.

Plainclothes private security guards are also on patrol. A list posted at all entrances prohibits drug use, picking flowers, and drinking alcohol except for beverages bought at park concessions, which are limited to certain seating areas. It states the park's hours, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., coinciding roughly with the business day. The rules specify that only homeless people connected to a particular shelter in the neighborhood have the right to rummage through the garbage cans for returnable bottles and cans. Unlike Parks Department workers, Bryant Park maintenance workers do not belong to a labor union. Starting salary for a maintenance worker is \$6 an hour, half the starting rate of unionized workers in other city parks.

On a sunny summer day at noon, Bryant Park is full of office workers out to lunch – between 1,500 and 6,000 of them. The movable chairs and benches are filled; many people are

sitting on the grass, on the edge of the fountain, even on the pebbled paths. Men and women eat picnic lunches singly, in couples, and in groups. Some traditional social hierarchies are subverted. Women feel free to glance at men passing by. Most men do not ogle the women. The dominant complexion of park users is white, with minority group members clustered outside the central green. Few people listen to the subsidized entertainment, an HBO comedian shouting into a microphone; no one notices when she finishes the show. A large sculpture by Alexander Calder stands in the middle of the lawn, on loan from an art gallery, both an icon and a benediction on the space. At sunset in the summer, HBO shows free movies from their stock of old films, a "take back the night" activity similar to those now being tried in other cities. This is a very deliberate exception to the rule of closing the park at night. During lunchtime, at least, the park visually represents an urban middle class: men and women who work in offices, jackets off, sleeves rolled up, mainly white. On the same day, at the same hour, another public space a block away – the tellers' line at Citibank – attracts a group that is not so well dressed, with more minority group members. The cultural strategies that have been chosen to revitalize Bryant Park carry with them the implication of controlling diversity while re-creating a consumable vision of civility.

The problem of controlling Bryant Park is not new (Biederman and Nager 1981). In 1932, when the park was filled with unemployed people during the Great Depression, private entrepreneurs built a replica of Federal Hall, charged an entrance fee of 25 cents, and installed turnstiles to control access to the park – an early Magic Kingdom until a public boycott forced it to be shut down. In 1944, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia decreed that anyone caught loitering in the park after 10 p.m. would be arrested.

Since its renovation, Bryant Park has changed character. It has become a place for people to be with others, to see others, a place of public sociability. John Berger (1985) once criticized New Yorkers for eating while walking alone on the street, alienating a social ritual from its proper context. Yet now, in the park, eating becomes a public ritual, a way of trusting strangers while maintaining private identities. Because of the police and security guards, the design, and the

food, the park has become a visual and spatial representation of a middle-class public culture. The finishing touch will be a privately owned, expensive restaurant, whose rent payments will help finance the park's maintenance. This, however, is a degree of privatization that has stirred prolonged controversy. First envisioned in the 1980s, the restaurant remained the subject of public approvals processes until 1994.

The disadvantage of creating public space this way is that it owes so much to private-sector elites, both individual philanthropists and big corporations. This is especially the case for centrally located public spaces, the ones with the most potential for raising property values and with the greatest claim to be symbolic spaces for the city as a whole. Handing such spaces over to corporate executives and private investors means giving them *carte blanche* to remake public culture. It marks the erosion of public space in terms of its two basic principles: public stewardship and open access.

The Central Park Conservancy, a group of 30 private citizens who choose their own replacements, represents large corporations with headquarters in the city, major financial institutions, and public officials. The membership echoes both the new (the nonelected, tripartite Emergency Financial Control Board that has overseen New York City's budget since the fiscal crisis of 1975) and the old (the board of "gentlemen" trustees that originally guided the planning of Central Park in the 1860s). The idea of governing public space in Central Park by a board of trustees was periodically resurrected until the 1930s and again in the 1970s (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992, 507). The fiscal crisis of the 1970s, however, inspired a wider institutionalization of local elite control. Overlapping the Carter and Reagan administrations in Washington, D.C., the New York City Parks Commissioner encouraged the formation of private groups to oversee public parks from 1978 to 1983. He also named special administrators for the largest parks, Central Park and Prospect Park. For more than 10 years, the Central Park administrator has also been the president of the Central Park Conservancy. Significantly, while she is one of several people in the Parks Department, including the commissioner, who earn \$106,000 a year, her salary is paid by the conservancy. In addition to paying the administrator's salary and expenses, the conservancy raised \$64 million dur-

ing the 1980s (Siegel 1992, 38). According to two political scientists who act as watchdogs over the city's parlous economy, private parks conservancies are one of the few "bright spots" in the Parks Department's budget (Brecher and Horton 1993, 308, 311 ff.).

The Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, a subsidiary of the Bryant Park Business Improvement District, follows a fairly new model in New York State, and in smaller cities around the United States, that allows business and property owners in commercial districts to tax themselves voluntarily for maintenance and improvement of public areas and take these areas under their control. The concept originated in the 1970s as special assessment districts; in the 1980s, the name was changed to a more upbeat acronym, business improvement districts (BIDs). A BID can be incorporated in any commercial area. Because the city government has steadily reduced street cleaning and trash pickups in commercial streets since the fiscal crisis of 1975, there is a real incentive for business and property owners to take up the slack. A new law was required for such initiatives: unlike shopping malls, commercial streets are publicly owned, and local governments are responsible for their upkeep. BIDs were created by the New York State Legislature in 1983; by 1993, 26 were up and running in New York City: 10 in Brooklyn, 9 in Manhattan, 5 in Queens, and 1 each in the Bronx and Staten Island. In 1994, as new BIDs were still being formed, a super-BID was established for an area of lower Manhattan from City Hall to the Battery. One of its "public" functions will be to enhance the area surrounding the World Financial Center and Battery Park City, which are publicly owned but leased to private developers. At the same time, private schools and apartment buildings on the affluent Upper East Side have discussed forming a BID to fight street crime in their area with neighborhood security guards. BIDs have also spread to other states. There are 400 of them in New Jersey.

In New York City, Manhattan BIDs are the richest, reflecting higher property values and business volume. While the entire sum of all special assessments in the 10 Brooklyn BIDs in fiscal year 1993 was a little less than \$4 million, 3 BIDs in Manhattan *each* had an assessment over \$4 million. These unequal resources enable rich BIDs to do more. A BID

in a neighborhood shopping strip in Queens may just be able to buy street cleaning services and put up Christmas lights, but a midtown BID can undertake public works. The Grand Central Partnership, a 53-block organization whose center is on 42nd Street near Bryant Park, employs uniformed street cleaners and security guards, runs a tourist information booth, refashions the illumination of Grand Central Terminal, closes a street in front of the terminal to make a new outdoor eating space, and hires lobbyists to ask the state legislature for supplemental funds from the state budget. Also, while the staffs of BIDs in the outer boroughs worry about working without health benefits and pensions, the executive director of the Grand Central Partnership, who also oversees the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation and the 34th Street BID, earns \$315,000 a year — more than double the mayor's salary.

What kind of public culture is created under these conditions? Do urban BIDs create a Disney World in the streets, take the law into their own hands, and reward their entrepreneurial managers as richly as property values will allow? If elected public officials continue to urge the destruction of corrupt and bankrupt public institutions, I imagine a scenario of drastic privatization, with BIDs replacing the city government. As Republican Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said enthusiastically at the second annual NYC BIDs Association Conference in 1994, "This is a difficult time for the city and the country as we redefine ourselves. BIDs are one of the true success stories in the city. It's a tailor-made form of local government" (*Daily News*, November 16, 1994).

The Grand Central Partnership, a midtown BID established in 1988, assumed a key governmental function four years later by issuing its own bonds. At that time, the BID sold \$32.3 million worth of 30-year bonds with an A1 rating from Moody's Investors Service Inc. and Standard & Poor's Corp.; this was a higher rating than that of New York City bonds. In contrast to municipal bonds, which are backed by tax rolls, the BID's bonds are backed by the special property assessment building owners pay annually to the BID. With the proceeds of its bond sales, the Grand Central Partnership plans to rebuild public space in its domain, taking on projects that the city government has neither the will nor the means to accomplish. Traffic is banned from the Park Avenue viaduct

while the partnership, acting as a nonprofit developer, creates new space and leases it to a restaurant. Another area across the street will be redesigned as a demonstration district for new lighting, signage, landscaping, street furniture, kiosks, and traffic grids.

We know who defines this image of the city, but who will occupy it? City government agencies have approved the BID's plans, not least because the property owners (including the Philip Morris Corporation) are powerful and their projects promise to create revenue. But the local community board, representing a wide variety of business interests, has challenged the BID's plans because they make traffic more crowded and alter the somewhat rakish, small business character of the area around Grand Central Terminal (Feiden 1992; Wolfson 1992; Slatin 1993). (Creating a pedestrian mall here also makes a taxi ride from Grand Central Terminal to my house more expensive, since cars can no longer turn straight into Park Avenue to drive downtown.) The community board has raised questions about the effectiveness of the BID's "services" for the homeless and the brusqueness of their removal by the BID's security guards (*New York Observer*, January 17, 1994; Community Board 6, March, 1994). These issues were dramatized when the Coalition for the Homeless, an advocacy group, sued the partnership for hiring out the homeless as security guards at below the minimum wage. The partnership was also accused of failing to give homeless people job training and hiring some of them, itself, as low-wage employees (Drucker, 1994). "For years," the coalition stated in a complaint filed February 1, 1995, with the U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York, the Grand Central Partnership and 34th Street Partnership

have victimized the homeless . . . by tantalizing them with their alluringly named 'Pathways to Employment' ('PET') program, which promises job training and meaningful employment. In fact, the PET program provides neither meaningful job training nor meaningful jobs. Rather, it is bait that lures the homeless to Defendants at illegal, subminimum wages. . . . This cheap, and largely defenseless, labor pool has enabled Defendants to land significant contracts because Defendants' use of a captive,

underpaid homeless labor force enables them to underbid competitors who compensate their own employees at lawful rates.

When, in January 1995, the partnership proposed expanding its jurisdiction up Madison Avenue as far as 56th Street, including Sony Plaza, the Coalition for the Homeless offered the only principled opposition.

In their own way, under the guise of improving public spaces, BIDs nurture a visible social stratification. Like the Central Park Conservancy, they channel investment into a central space, a space with both real and symbolic meaning for elites as well as other groups. Like the Central Park Conservancy, the resources of the rich Manhattan BIDs far outstrip those even potentially available in other areas of the city, even if those areas set up BIDs. The rich BIDs' opportunity to exceed the constraints of the city's financial system confirms the fear that the prosperity of a few central spaces will stand in contrast to the impoverishment of the entire city.

BIDs can be equated with a return to civility, "an attempt to reclaim public space from the sense of menace that drives shoppers, and eventually store owners and citizens, to the suburbs" (Siegel 1992, 43-44). But rich BIDs can be criticized on the grounds of control, accountability, and vision. Public space that is no longer controlled by public agencies must inspire a liminal public culture open to all but governed by the private sector. Private management of public space does create some savings: saving money by hiring nonunion workers, saving time by removing design questions from the public arena. Because they choose an abstract aesthetic with no pretense of populism, private organizations avoid conflicts over representations of ethnic groups that public agencies encounter when they subsidize public art, including murals and statues (*New York Times*, July 17, 1992, p. C22; J. Kramer 1992).

Each area of the city gets a different form of visual consumption catering to a different constituency: culture functions as a mechanism of stratification. The public culture of midtown public space diffuses down through the poorer BIDs. It focuses on clean design, visible security, historic architectural features, and the sociability among strangers achieved by suburban shopping malls. Motifs of local identity are chosen

by merchants and commercial property owners. Since most commercial property owners and merchants do not live in the area of their business or even in New York City, the sources of their vision of public culture may be eclectic: the nostalgically remembered city, European piazzas, suburban shopping malls, Disney World. In general, however, their vision of public space derives from commercial culture.

An interesting application of BIDs' taking the opportunity to re-present public culture is the new "community court" in Times Square, which grew out of a proposal put forward in 1991 by officials close to the Times Square BID. The proposal was to dispense immediate justice for local crimes in an unused theater in the area (*New York Times*, November 15, 1991, p. A1). The goal of this unprecedented decentralization — not even envisioned in the city's criminal justice system since the 1960s — was to clean up Times Square. Prominent city and state government officials in the court system praised the proposal. A neighborhood court, they said, would speed the disposition of cases against minor offenders accused of such crimes as prostitution, shoplifting, trespassing, and running a scam of three-card monte in the street, and enhance community control over quality of life. The theater owner who would donate the use of the theater for a courthouse, who was also the chairman of the Schubert Organization, spoke of the "devastating" impact of crime on a long-delayed Times Square redevelopment plan. The deputy mayor for public safety admitted the proposal for a Times Square court could be criticized as "elitist," but that seemed to be less of a problem than how to finance it. The *Times* printed an editorial in strong support. The only voices of dissent were raised by the Manhattan District Attorney's office, which protested the diversion of time and money to a single branch court, and the Legal Aid Society, which joined the DA's office in criticizing the new pressures on attorneys to run up to midtown from the primary site of the courts in lower Manhattan.

The Times Square court promised to create a new public culture consistent with a historic local identity: "With attentive spectators filling red plush seats, judges and attorneys could be expected to maintain high standards of efficiency and dignity long absent from the Criminal Court. The judges would also be encouraged to use more imaginative and productive

sentences than fines or jail time: three-card monte players, for example, might be required to help with street-cleaning" (*New York Times*, November 17, 1991). In fact, once the court was set up in 1994, community service sentences of 10 to 12 days were carried out in the Times Square area. A person convicted by the community court was given a broom by the Times Square BID and told to sweep the sidewalks, not unlike the Grand Central Partnership hiring the homeless to sweep 42nd Street. This is a public culture worthy of Dickens.

■ Security, Ethnicity, and Culture

One of the most tangible threats to public culture comes from the politics of everyday fear. Physical assaults, random violence, hate crimes that target specific groups: the dangers of being in public spaces utterly destroy the principle of open access. Elderly men and women who live in cities commonly experience fear as a steady erosion of spaces and times available to them. An elderly Jewish politician who in the 1950s lived in Brownsville, a working-class Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn where blacks began to move in greater numbers as whites moved out, told me, "My wife used to be able to come out to meet me at night, after a political meeting, and leave the kids in our apartment with the door unlocked." A Jewish woman remembers about that same era, "I used to go to concerts in Manhattan wearing a fur coat and come home on the subway at 1 a.m." There may be some exaggeration in these memories, but the point is clear. And it is not altogether different from the message behind crimes against black men who venture into mainly white areas of the city at night or attacks on authority figures such as police officers and firefighters who try to exercise that authority against street gangs, drug dealers, and gun-toting kids. Cities are not safe enough for people to participate in a public culture.

"Getting tough" on crime by building more prisons and imposing the death penalty are all too common answers to the politics of fear. "Lock up the whole population," I heard a man say on the bus, at a stroke reducing the solution to its ridiculous extreme. Another answer is to privatize and militarize public space — making streets, parks, and even shops more secure but less free, or creating spaces, such as shopping malls and Disney World, that only appear to be

public spaces because so many people use them for common purposes. It is not so easy, given a language of social equality, a tradition of civil rights, and a market economy, to enforce social distinctions in public space. The flight from "reality" (Huxtable 1993) that led to the privatization of public space in Disney World is an attempt to create a different, ultimately more menacing kind of public culture.

In *City of Quartz* (1990), Mike Davis describes the reshaping of public spaces in Los Angeles by surveillance and security procedures. Helicopters buzz the skies over ghetto neighborhoods, police hassle teenagers as putative gang members, homeowners buy into the type of armed defense they can afford . . . or have nerve enough to use. While Los Angeles may represent an extreme, high-tech example, I have also seen "Eyes on the Street" surveillance signs on lamp posts in small towns in Vermont and the design of Bryant Park gives evidence of a relatively low-tech but equally suggestive concern for public order. Indeed, Bryant Park may be a more typical public space than downtown Los Angeles because it has been "secured" within a democratic discourse of aestheticizing both cities and fear.

Gentrification, historic preservation, and other cultural strategies to enhance the visual appeal of urban spaces developed as major trends during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Yet these years were also a watershed in the institutionalization of urban fear. Voters and elites — a broadly conceived middle class in the United States — could have faced the choice of approving government policies to eliminate poverty, manage ethnic competition, and integrate everyone into common public institutions. Instead, they chose to buy protection, fueling the growth of the private security industry. This reaction was closely related to a perceived decline in public morality, an "elimination of almost all stabilizing authority" (Siegel 1992, 37) in urban public space. As public authority eroded, employment in the private security industry tripled, growing from over half a million to 1.5 million jobs, from 1970 to 1992 (Cunningham, Strauchs, and Van Meter 1990). Between 1972 and 1990, 300,000 new jobs for security guards were created, making detective and protective work the 20th fastest growing employment sector in the United States.

Private armies, those of the security companies, have grown faster and stronger than public security forces. In the late 1960s or early 1970s – estimates of the date vary – employment in private security firms of all kinds began to exceed that in public law enforcement agencies. From the mid 1970s, when municipal budgets began to tighten, public agencies have grown to a much smaller extent than private firms. In California today, there are 3.9 private security employees for every public security employee. In the less urbanized Indiana, the ratio is more equal, with 1.7 private security employee to 1 in the public sector. By 2000, researchers have predicted, 73 percent of the country's "protective employees" will work in the private sector, while only 27 percent will work in public law enforcement.

Although many security employees work in private corporations, public-private partnerships are a significant, and growing, part of the industry. In New York, public agencies and private firms share information and emergency duties (*New York Times*, July 13, 1993, p. B2). A private force of 112 armed guards and 20 security supervisors work in the three richest mid Manhattan BIDs, including Bryant Park. In Phoenix, Arizona, private security forces have been used for crowd control (Cunningham, Strauchs, and Van Meter 1990, p. 275). In Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and New Haven, they patrol streets around private universities; in suburbs, they drive around the perimeter of the campus. The urban public university where I teach hires its own private security guards. In Lexington, Kentucky, which is often said to be a typical American city, private security guards are on duty in public housing projects.

From the viewpoint of political economy, the withdrawal from public to private security employees is part of a general shift to privatization. Fiscal austerity limits government spending increases, even on the police. Yet private security cannot be free. The security costs borne by the private sector are passed on to the public by excluding potential criminal acts from segregated spaces, leaving the rest of the city to watch out for itself and be watched by the police. Crime, the criminal justice system, and private security forces absorb a high percentage of the unemployed, a "reserve army" in a more literal sense than Marx intended in his famous phrase

about "the reserve army of the unemployed." While factory jobs disappear, urban workers, especially minority-group members, seek security jobs, and their mainly white colleagues in small, rural towns go to work in prisons.

The geographers John Jakle and David Wilson (1992), and the ecological historian John Wilkinson (1973), have written about Americans' tendency to abandon their farmlands, workplaces, and towns when they stop being economically productive, leaving the country littered with "derelict landscapes" (Jakle and Wilson 1992). From a similar point of view, American attitudes toward cities smell strongly of fear of the old and disdain for those who inherit it. As urban public spaces have included more strangers, those who look and talk so differently they are considered "Others," the Americans who used them before have abandoned them, leaving them to a generalized ethnic Other, a victim of the politics of fear. An anthropologist concluded her study of "urban danger" in Philadelphia (Merry 1981) by saying that people tend to think Others are criminals; eventually, crime becomes a device, an idiom, for thinking about the Other.

In the past, those people who lived so close together they had to work out some etiquette for sharing, or dividing, public space were usually the poor. An exception that affected everyone was the system of racial segregation that worked by law in the south and by convention in many northern states until the 1960s, when – not surprisingly – perceptions of danger among whites increased. Like segregation, a traditional etiquette of public order of the urban poor involves dividing up territory by ethnic groups. This includes the system of "ordered segmentation" that the Chicago urban sociologist Gerald Suttles (1968) described a generation ago, at the very moment it was being outmoded by increased racial and ethnic mixing, ideologies of community empowerment, and the legitimization of ethnicity as a formal norm of political representation. Among city dwellers today, innumerable informal etiquettes for survival in public spaces flourish. The "streetwise" scrutiny of passersby described by the sociologist Elijah Anderson (1990) is one means for unarmed individuals to secure the streets. I think ethnicity – a cultural strategy for producing difference – is another, and it survives on the politics of fear by requiring people to keep their distance from

certain aesthetic markers. These markers vary over time. Pants may be baggy or pegged, heads may be shaggy or shaved. Like fear itself, ethnicity becomes an aesthetic category.

Ethnicity and private security services have shaped an urban public culture that simulates inclusion. The old civic virtues for mingling with strangers – civility, security, tact, and trust – have lost their meaning in the fear for physical safety and the dramatization of ethnic diversity. Every tabloid carries the news: public spaces are too dangerous for public culture. Elementary school pupils carry homemade arms, teenagers attack each other in crimes of sexual abuse. Even ethnically homogeneous subcultures lack solidarity. In most states, both crime victims and convicted criminals are disproportionately black and Latino and come from the same inner city ghettos (Ellis 1994). In the city around them, whatever its name, the symbolic geography of neighborhoods has been remade by selective abandonment and redevelopment. People who were perceived as part of “far away” worlds are present in the “here and now” (see Shields 1992a). Spaces inherited from the modern city – department stores, schools and welfare offices, subways and buses – frame encounters that are both intimate and intrusive.

In everyday experience in the city, the “Other” might be the salesperson or waiter who speaks to you in a familiar tone, the supermarket cashier or bank teller who taps on computer keys with inch-long fingernails, the subway driver who roars into the station wearing a turban. At the same time, despite debates stretching from the Chicago School of the 1920s to the “underclass” school of the 1980s, many social practices that were once considered limited to “subcultures” now cross class and ethnic lines. Illegal drug use, out-of-wedlock births, and female-headed families are more common in all parts of the population. Whites watch and copy African-American rap artists (“gangstas,” with a nod to previous generations of immigrants who made their mark on society). Lessons are taken from the struggle for existence, both social and sexual, of the older generation. Mass entertainment provides common icons and rituals. *Cocaculturalism*, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (1993, 117) calls the whole complex of commercial culture, is the most powerful form of public culture. If this is the only source of public culture, there is less distance between subcul-

tures and between “ghetto” and “mainstream” identities. Then social distance is reestablished by developing new cultural differences, confirming the cultural power of fear.

In such a landscape, there are no safe places. The Los Angeles uprising of 1992 showed that, unlike in earlier riots, the powerless respect fewer geographical boundaries, except perhaps the neighborhoods where rich people live. Carjackings – the ultimate American violence – occur on the highway and in the parking lots of fast food restaurants. “If you can’t feel safe at McDonald’s,” a driver in Connecticut says, “is there any place you can feel safe?” (*New York Times*, February 27, 1993). Patrons of 24-hour automatic teller machines are robbed so often that the NYCE Network, with 10,000 machines in New York City, distributes a pamphlet of safety tips worthy of a military base: “As you approach an ATM, be aware of your surroundings. . . . When using an ATM at night, be sure it is located in a well lit area. And consider having someone accompany you.” Someone, that is, other than the homeless man who stood by the door with an empty paper cup in his hand, until the New York City Council passed a law that forbade panhandlers to stand within 15 feet of an ATM. Or, as a Spanish-language subway advertisement cautions, “*Man-tengase alerta. Sus ojos, oídos y instinto son sus recursos naturales de seguridad en la ATM.*” In Chicago and Los Angeles, ATMs have been installed in police stations, so residents with bank accounts in the poorest neighborhoods will have a safe place to get cash.

For a brief moment in the late 1940s and early 1950s, working-class urban neighborhoods held the possibility of integrating white Americans and African-Americans in roughly the same social classes. This dream was laid to rest by movement to the suburbs, continued ethnic bias in employment, the decline of public services in expanding racial ghettos, criticism of integration movements for being associated with the Communist party, and fear of crime. Over the next 15 years, enough for a generation to grow up separate, the inner city developed its stereotyped image of “Otherness.” The reality of minority groups’ working-class life was demonized by a cultural view of the inner city “made up of four ideological domains: a physical environment of dilapidated houses, disused factories, and general dereliction; a romanticized notion

of white working-class life with particular emphasis on the centrality of family life; a pathological image of black culture; and a stereotypical view of street culture" (Burgess 1985).

By the 1980s, the development of a large black middle class with incomes more or less equal to white households' and the increase in immigrant groups raised a new possibility of developing ethnically and racially integrated cities. This time, however, there is a more explicit struggle over who will occupy the image of the city. Despite the real impoverishment of most urban populations, the larger issue is whether cities can again create an inclusive public culture. The forces of order have retreated into "small urban spaces," like privately managed public parks that can be refashioned to project an image of civility. Guardians of public institutions – teachers, cops – lack the time or inclination to *understand* the generalized ethnic Other. "We don't know how to reach Salvadoran refugees, Vietnamese boat people, African-Americans whose neighborhoods are full of crack," says a public school reformer in Los Angeles. "There is a widening gulf between those of us in charge and the successor generation. We can't relate to their reality" (*New York Times*, February 16, 1993, p. A13).

Yet the groups that have inherited the city have a claim on its central symbolic spaces. Not only to the streets that serve as major parade routes, not only to the central parks, but also to the monumental spaces that confirm identity by offering visual testimony to a group's presence in history.

Many places that we think of as great public spaces have become so only over time. Some, like city halls, Grand Central Terminal, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art, were built as representations of centralized power. Others, like Times Square, are places of commercial rather than political culture (Taylor 1992). Public spaces like the Mall in Washington, D.C., may eventually become civic spaces, evoking a sense of citizenship and the memory of sacrifice or heroism that citizenship often requires. Or a public space can be rebuilt or reconfigured to repress the memory of citizenship. The Basilica of Sacré Coeur was built on Montmartre, site of the slaughter of Communards in 1871 (Harvey 1985b); traffic was rerouted around Columbus Circle, in New York, to end the left-wing rallies that gathered there in the 1920s and 1930s.

Until 1914, we are told, "Times Square was the scene of many outdoor forums. When the square became too crowded these activities shifted northward; now in the open space below the [Columbus] monument impromptu discussions are held and groups listen to oratory on every conceivable subject from Thomas Paine and the *Age of Reason* to the advantages of a vegetable diet" (Federal Writers' Project 1939b, 180). Now the discussion at Columbus Circle focuses on which developer is going to build a multistory speculative tower there and how little he will pay the city treasury for the right to build it.

Many social critics have begun to write about new public spaces formed by the "transactional space" of telecommunications and computer technology, but my interest in this book is in public spaces as places that are physically *there*, as geographical and symbolic centers, as points of assembly where strangers mingle. Many Americans, born and raised in the suburbs, accept shopping centers as the preeminent public spaces of our time. Yet while shopping centers are undoubtedly gathering places, their private ownership has always raised questions about whether all the public has access to them and under what conditions. In the 1980s and 1990s, shopping centers became sites for hotels, post offices, and even schools, suggesting that public institutions can indeed function on private property. A recent decision by the New Jersey Supreme Court (*New York Times*, December 21, 1994), moreover, recognized that the great public spaces of modernity – "the parks, the squares, and the streets . . . have now been substantially displaced by [shopping] centers," and consequently, that the private owners of these shopping centers could no longer prevent people from exercising their Constitutional right of free speech. But it will take many years, and many changes in the culture of privatization, for shopping centers to develop into symbolic landscapes of public power. If suburbanization, computerization, and electronic media are to transform the social spaces of shopping malls and internets into public spaces, they require greater subjective legitimacy.

When Disneyland recruited teenagers in South Central Los Angeles for summer jobs following the riots of 1992, it thrust into prominence a new confluence between the sources of contemporary public culture: a confluence between commer-

cial culture and ethnic identity. Defining public culture in these terms recasts the way we view and describe the cultures of cities. Real cities are both material constructions, with human strengths and weaknesses, and symbolic projects developed by social representations, including affluence and technology, ethnicity and civility, local shopping streets and television news. Real cities are also macro-level struggles between major sources of change – global and local cultures, public stewardship and privatization, social diversity and homogeneity – and micro-level negotiations of power. Real cultures, for their part, are not torn by conflict between commercialism and ethnicity; they are made up of one-part corporate image selling and two-parts claims of group identity, and get their power from joining autobiography to hegemony – a powerful aesthetic fit with a collective lifestyle. This is the landscape of a symbolic economy that I try to describe in the following chapters, on sites as geographically and socially diverse as Disney World, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, New York art worlds, Times Square, New York City restaurants, and ghetto shopping streets like 125th Street in Harlem. These are my sources; this is my “city.”

How do we connect what we experience in public space with ideologies and rhetorics of public culture?

On the streets, the vernacular culture of the powerless provides a currency of economic exchange and a language of social revival. In other public spaces – grand plazas, waterfronts, and shopping streets reorganized by business improvement districts – another landscape incorporates vernacular culture or opposes it with its own image of identity and desire. Fear of reducing the distance between “us” and “them,” between security guards and criminals, between elites and ethnic groups, makes culture a crucial weapon in reasserting order. Militant rhetoric belongs to the forces of order. “We will fight for every house in the city,” said the New York City Police Commissioner in his inaugural address in 1993. “We will fight for every street. We will fight for every borough. And we will win.” This Churchillian call echoes the appeal of right-wing journalist Patrick Buchanan, who explicitly identified cities and culture when he addressed the 1992 Republican National Convention in Houston: “And as those boys [in the

National Guard] took back the streets of Los Angeles, block by block, my friends, we must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country.”

But whose city? I ask. And whose culture?

■ Visual order, physical beauty, and social control: The landscape of Metro Orlando, "one of the 'top 10' U.S. cities in which to work and live."

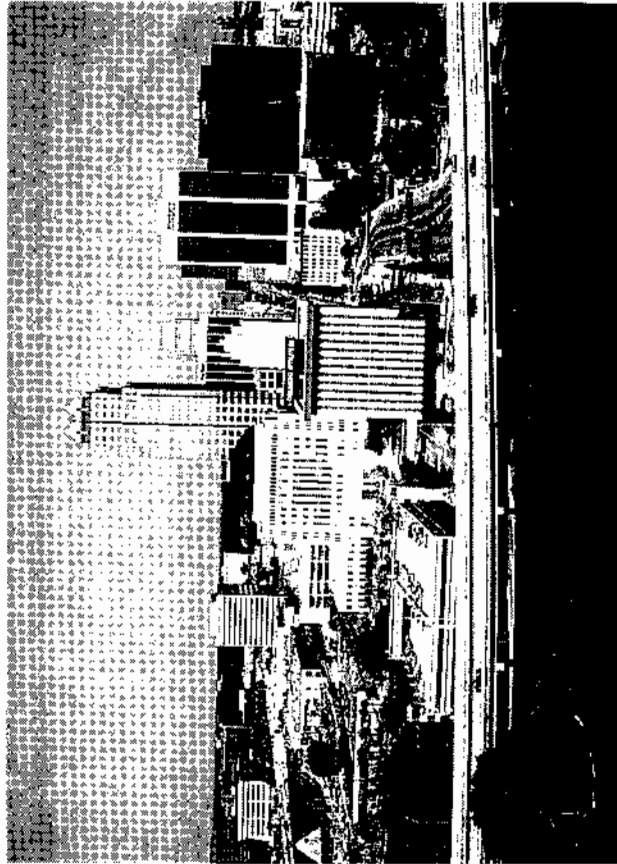


Photo courtesy Economic Development Commission of Mid-Florida, Inc.

2

LEARNING FROM DISNEY WORLD

Disneyland and Disney World are two of the most significant public spaces of the late 20th century.² They transcend ethnic, class, and regional identities to offer a national public culture based on aestheticizing differences and controlling fear. The Disney Company is an innovator of global dimensions in the symbolic economy of technology and entertainment; it also exerts enormous influence on the symbolic economy of place in Anaheim and Orlando. The world of Disney is inescapable. It is the alter ego and the collective fantasy of American society, the source of many of our myths and our self-esteem.

2. After I wrote about Disneyland and Disney World as archetypal landscapes of power (Zukin 1991), I thought I had finished with them. I *wanted* to be finished with them. But then I realized they were on *everyone's* mind. At every anthropologists' conference, at least five scholars offered critiques of the Disney Company's theme parks. The business media were filled with prognoses of Euro Disney's success. I was asked to write jacket blurbs for two new books: one filled with enormous detail about every feature of Disney World and the other using "theme park" as a trope for the cultural subtext of urban design. To top it off, the faculty labor union at my university organized a package tour to Disney World. So I could not leave the subject alone. This chapter began as a paper for a conference on Encountering Space: Identity and Place in the Human Sciences, organized by Marc Blanchard in the Critical Theory Program at the University of California, Davis, in 1992. I have expanded and updated it, with special emphasis on the growth of Orlando and the continued growth of the Disney Company.