THE CULTURES OF CITIES

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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 crisis 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 Kosnapel for their research on BID's and Bryant Park, respectively.
In recent years, culture has also become a more sophisticated and diverse, and traditional institutions—such as museums and art galleries—have become increasingly popular among younger audiences. This trend has been bolstered by the growth of cultural tourism, which has helped to bring new visitors to cities around the world. At the same time, the rise of digital technologies has made it easier than ever for people to connect with artists and creative professionals from around the world. This has helped to fuel a surge in cultural exchange and collaboration, and has helped to create new opportunities for artists and cultural organizations alike.

At the same time, the rise of digital technologies has also brought new challenges, particularly in the realm of intellectual property. As more and more content is created and shared online, it has become increasingly difficult to determine who owns the rights to that content. This has led to a number of legal battles, and has raised important questions about the future of copyright law and the rights of creators.

Despite these challenges, the future of culture remains bright. With a growing number of artists and cultural organizations embracing digital technologies, and with more and more people connecting with creative works from around the world, the future of culture is likely to be characterized by greater diversity and greater opportunity. This is a future worth looking forward to.
Sony Plaza: Retail stores as public space.

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

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. Retitled 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
Culture as a means of framing space: Second installation of paintings by Al Held in vacant storefront at 850 Madison Avenue, October 1982-January 1983.

Photo by Kevin Ryan, courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery.

Passed-by viewers 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 rent 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, disease, 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 organizeddaylong programs of cultural events; they renovated theiosoks 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 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" (Moiloch 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 paragon class, build the majestic art museums, parks, and architectural complexes

Photo courtesy of Patrick McMullan and 7th on Sixth.
the emerging service economy. Disney is a real estate developer in Orlando, Florida, and its amusement parks in California and Florida are major tourist attractions. Disney has also diversified into the production of films and television shows, and has become a major player in the entertainment industry.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the symbolic economy rose to prominence. This was a time of rapid economic growth and the emergence of new technologies, such as personal computers and the internet. The symbolic economy is characterized by the production of images and symbols that reflect the values and beliefs of a society. It is often associated with the rise of popular culture and the mass media.

The growth of the symbolic economy has been driven by the expansion of consumer culture and the rise of the service economy. As people have become more dependent on goods and services, they have also become more concerned with the role that symbols play in their lives. This has led to a greater emphasis on design, style, and fashion, as well as a greater focus on the cultural and social aspects of consumption.

The symbolic economy is also associated with the rise of the Internet and the digital economy. The Internet has made it possible for people to access a vast array of images and symbols from around the world, and has also facilitated the growth of new forms of entertainment, such as online games and virtual reality experiences.

The symbolic economy is a dynamic and constantly evolving phenomenon. As society changes, so do the symbols and images that are produced and consumed. The symbolic economy is a key player in the modern economy, and its role is likely to continue to grow in the future.
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 unreason- able 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 display creates urban spaces 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 representation: 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 ethnic division of labor.

As cities and societies place greater emphasis on visualiza- tion, the Disney company and 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 vac- uum left by government. At least since the 1970s debacles of Watergate and the Vietnam War, through Iran gate in the 1980s and the confessions of politicians in the 1990s, govern- ment 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 specula- tion—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 ascension 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. Cultural wealth 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-postwar economy, who could build the biggest modern art museum suggested the vitality of the local 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 isolational 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 productions are supposed to live on the margins, and the incomes of most visual artists, 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 jolt labor unions, and present a definable, 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 baulk 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, but in 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 (Whit 1987; Whit 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 "safe 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 offered 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 1981). 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 battering 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 NY03, we show our city's finest faces, and set the tone to 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.


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? is an even more surrealist example of culture framing space to project an image of urban growth. In 1991, the Andre Emmerich Gallery, which represents the abstract painter Al Held, rented a vacant ground floor retail space in the upscale commercial district at 56th 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.
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 1980s, 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 bourgeoisie 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 and 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; Sonntag 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 pulls 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. Rebellions 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 Mexicanos, hired them as servants and models, and eventually built their folk cultures into a tourist industry (Rodríguez 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 metropolitan 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 Caricization 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 Lubavitch Hassidism's appropriation.
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 self "interpretation") are sought because they legitimize the appropriation of space (Deutsches 1988). Office buildings are not just monumentalized by height and facades, they are given a human face by the artistry/women installations and public concerts. Every well-designed downtown has a mixed-use shopping center and a nearby artists' quarter. Sometimes it seems that every retail factory district or waterfront has been converted into one of those sites of visual delection—a themed shopping area 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 aquaria 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 1982; Deutsche 1988). Ironically, this has happened since artists have become more self-consciously 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 classes, 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 1980s, it seemed to be official policy that 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 reorganize space in the city is also an attempt at visual representation. 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 anxiety 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 no more pleasant public spaces, especially parks that I use in New York City. But 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 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 arts 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 dumping 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
In 1869, the first significant public space, Columbus Square, opened in the Lower East Side. This park, which was initially intended for the local community, grew in popularity over the years, becoming a symbol of community pride. The City Planning Commission, established in 1869, played a crucial role in shaping the development of public spaces in the city. It was responsible for planning and designing public parks and squares, ensuring that they were accessible to all residents.

The development of public spaces continued to evolve in the early 20th century, with the creation of Rockefeller Center and the Central Park Development Corporation in 1929. These developments were driven by the need for public spaces that could accommodate the growing population and provide a space for social interaction and cultural expression.

In the mid-20th century, the trend towards the development of public spaces continued, with the creation of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. These spaces became important cultural landmarks, attracting visitors from across the city and the country.

Today, public spaces play a vital role in the city's cultural and economic landscape. They provide a space for community gatherings, artistic expression, and outdoor recreation. The development of public spaces is a continuous process, with new parks and plazas being created to meet the changing needs of the city's residents.
Corporation rates most of the park's buildings as "unsupervised maintenance"

- Olson and Nagel, 1981. In 1932, when the park was filled with unemployed people, the Great Depression, private citizens volunteered to keep the park clean, and the corporation was reorganized. It was then that the park was

- The New York times, January 24, 1933. The corporation was reorganized again in 1933 when the city was in the midst of the Great Depression. The new organization was more efficient and better suited to the needs of the time. It was during this period that the corporation began to focus on improving the park's facilities and increasing its services to the public. In the years that followed, the corporation continued to grow and expand, becoming a major force in the city's cultural and recreational life.

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food, the park has become a visual and spatial representation of a middle-class public culture. The finishing touches will be
private ownership, expensive restaurants, whose rent payments
distribute and maintain the park. This, however, is a
subject of public approval processes until 1994.

The disadvantage of creating public space this way is that it costs so much to create parks, and many citizens
choose their own expenditures, represent large
corporations with headquarters in the city, many financial
principles: public stewardship and open access.

The Central Park Conservancy, a group of 38 private
institutions, owns and operates large parts of Central Park, the
board that has oversensed New York City's budget since
the fiscal crisis of the 1970s. However, the Conservancy, which
owns the park, has used a special assessment district to
build and finance improvements, including the Central
Park Mall, opened in the 1970s.

In New York City, Manhattan BIDs are the richest,
reflecting higher property values and business volumes. While
the entire sum of all special assessments in the 10
BIDs in Manhattan, year 1994, was estimated at over $4 million,
these municipal resources enable rich BIDs to do more. A BID
commissioner, in addition to paying the administrative
salaries and expenses, the conservancy raises $24 million during
the fiscal crisis of the 1970s. However, the Conservancy, which
owns the park, has used a special assessment district to
build and finance improvements, including the Central
Park Mall, opened in the 1970s.
in a neighborhood shopping strip in Queens, may find it hard to believe, but a midtown BID can undertake public works. The Grand Central Partnership, a 53-block organization whose center is Central Park, uses the power of public dollars, private money, and city permits to make a midtown shopping district more attractive to shoppers. The Partnership employs a team of professional staff to execute projects that improve the streetscape and increase foot traffic. City government agencies have approved the BID’s applications for tax abatements and other incentives, which allow the Partnership to implement projects that benefit the entire community.

The Partnership’s key projects include enhancing the public realm, providing services and amenities, and improving the streetscape. It has installed public art, public seating, and public restrooms, and it has created a pedestrian-friendly environment by reducing traffic and increasing green space. The Partnership also manages a number of public events, such as the annual Midtown Art Fair, which attracts thousands of visitors.

The Partnership’s success is due in part to its strong relationships with the city and its ability to leverage public and private investment. It has partnered with local businesses, community leaders, and government agencies to achieve its goals. Its projects have been well-received by the public, and they have helped to revitalize the midtown shopping district.

Despite these successes, the Partnership faces challenges. It must continue to secure funding and support from the city and private sources, and it must adapt to changing conditions. However, the Partnership remains committed to improving the midtown shopping district and creating a vibrant, attractive area for visitors and residents alike.
underpaid homeless labor force enables them to underbid competitors who compensate their own employees at lawful rates.

When, in January 1985, 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 BID. The rich BID 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 now purely a public agency 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 and money 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 join in 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 eclecticism: 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 1981 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 lawyers 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 highly more secure, but less free, 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. Vets 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, Strachue, 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-sector employees. In the late 1990s or early 2000s—estimates of the size of the private security industry vary widely—private security forces were larger than the total workforce of the United States. In California today, there are 3.9 million private security employees. In 2005, researchers estimated that the private security industry was worth $150 billion, and by 2010, they predicted it would be worth $200 billion. By 2015, the industry had grown to $350 billion.

Although public security forces work in public corporations, the private security industry is growing at a rapid pace. Between 2010 and 2015, the private security industry grew at an annual rate of 5% per year. By 2015, the industry had grown to $350 billion.

From the viewpoint of political economy, the withdrawal of public security forces from public places has been accompanied by a rise in private security forces. From the viewpoint of security, the withdrawal of public security forces has been accompanied by a rise in private security forces. From the viewpoint of security, the withdrawal of public security forces has been accompanied by a rise in private security forces.
certain aesthetic markers. These markers vary over time. Parties may be baggy pants, and celebrate the diversity. Every table 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. 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, subway stations—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, 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. Out-of-wedlock births and female-headed families are more common in all parts of the population. White 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. Cocacultures, 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 subcultures 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, 1985). Patrons of 24-hour automatic teller machines are robbed so often that the NYC 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, "Mantenga 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 go 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 stereotypical 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
Until 1974, we were told. Thus, the study of the culture of cities has been far too crowded. City life is not just a matter of residential activities fought north-westerly in the open space, but the scene of many activities. The cultural and social groups that are often considered subject to the power of the group. In a way, the study of the culture of cities has been too crowded. City life is not just a matter of residential activities. The cultural and social groups that are often considered subject to the power of the group. In a way, the study of the culture of cities has been too crowded. City life is not just a matter of residential activities.
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Disneynland and Disney World are two of the most significant public spaces of the late 20th century. 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 proclamations 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 subject 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 Breshears 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.