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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The Lure of 42nd Street

As the new Times Square takes shape, this is a good time to think about what's special about it, the ways in which we love it and hate it and love to hate it. Since the completion and convergence of several elevated and subway lines around the turn of the century, the square—even before it became *Times* Square (which it did with the opening of the New York Times Building at 1 Times Square in 1905)—has been a special kind of space. It became famous first for its hotels, restaurants, cafés, and cabarets, places where men and women could talk, smoke, drink, dance—to both new and old music—and have a good time together. Nothing like this existed in nineteenth-century America, where the lines between respectable and dissolute spaces were sharply drawn. From the very start, even when it was Longacre Square, Times Square seemed to exist to blur those lines.

One of the great New York novels, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, features a doomed love affair between respectable people who simply cannot find places to be alone together. There's got to be " 'Somewhere we can be alone,' he insisted." The lovers are speaking now from within a closed coach. "In New York?" The Countess Olenska laughs sadly, and defies Newland Archer to find a place they can be; alas, he can't. But that is in the 1880s. Within twenty years, the Times Square district would spawn a spectacular abundance of locations—all with private dining rooms above or below—where men and women could meet each other and be private in public space. These alluring, notorious places helped transform New York into what an angry moralist of the 1900s called "the capital of dangerous love."

A crucial ingredient in modern city life was *looking*: looking at other people, looking at yourself, looking at others looking at you. Baudelaire, Whitman, and two generations of Parisian painters had portrayed this as a central modern theme. Broadway in the 1900s developed a magical "look" that was supersaturated with mirrors, picture windows, and electric light. Ezra Pound wrote in 1910 that, thanks to electrification, New York was "the most beautiful city in the world in the evening." Buildings at night appear "immaterial," the spectator "sees but the lighted windows." In Pound's vision, "the great buildings lose reality and take on their magical powers." "Here is our poetry," he proclaimed, "we have pulled down the stars to our will."

But many people here were themselves pulled down:

"I'll just go down Broadway," he said to himself. . . ."

This is Edward Hurstwood, ex-lover of Theodore Dreiser's heroine *Sister Carrie* (1900), and one of America's classic victims of dangerous love. When we (and Carrie) first meet him, he is a manager and an impressive man. But now, close to the end, he has disintegrated into a drunken bum.

> When he reached Forty-Second Street, the fire signs were already blazing brightly. Crowds were hastening to dine. Through bright windows, at every corner, might be seen gay companies in luxuriant restaurants. There were coaches and crowded cable cars.

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> In his weary and hungry state, he should never have come here. The contrast was too sharp. "What's the use," he thought. "It's all up with me. I'll quit this."

Then and there, he decides to kill himself; four pages later he does it and the book ends. But he is drawn to the light, even as it seems to proclaim death for him.

In the next decade, Times Square's "fire signs," like so many American industrial products in those days, just grew and grew. Around 1910 a circa-eighty-foot sign featured an electric young woman whose skirts blew back and forth and up and around her in response to an electronic program, to promote "Heatherbloom Petticoats." Heatherbloom established a Times Square tradition in which Calvin Klein, Benetton, and DKNY are still working today, capitalizing on the aura of "the capital of dangerous love." Beyond the products and activities they promoted, Times Square's signs have always proclaimed a promotional environment, a spectacular place where Americans could imagine themselves—and sometimes actually see themselves—not merely as spectators but as participants in the spectacle.

I was going to write that Times Square quickly established itself as the most striking public space in New York. But then I realized it wasn't true—or maybe only half true. As a great public space, Times Square is, and always was, tied with Central Park. But they are antithetical as human experiences, and the antitheses that they constitute help give New York its distinctive form. To experience Central Park is to submerge yourself in nature—though a nature orchestrated by human beings. To experience Times Square is to utterly detach yourself from nature and submerge yourself in an environment that's totally artificial and created by human beings. From the Park you enjoy a long view over or through the trees, where you can see the city take form beyond you. In the Square you're completely enclosed, and you can't see anything except the buildings and signs that are part of the Square itself. In the Park you enjoy a landscape that changes with the seasons, but is constant from year to year. In the Square you don't see the seasons at all (though you can feel them), but you are subject to the most dramatic and extreme turnovers in buildings and signs. The Park is configured to give the subject a temporary rest from dealing. The Square is arranged to promote the most intense and frantic modes of hyper-dealing. If you are lucky enough to know both, and to negotiate between them, you can be fully attuned to twentieth-century urban life.

One of the Square's special qualities, all through the twentieth century, has been its capacity to nourish and inspire impressive works in every genre of art. These works themselves have been "fire signs," shedding light not only on the Square and the people in it, but on each other. Think of the novels, from *Sister Carrie* to *The Great Gatsby* to Damon Runyon's short stories to John Rechy's *City of Night* to James Leo Herlihy's *Midnight Cowboy* to Paul Rogers's *Saul's Book* and Alix Shulman's *On the Stroll*. Or of the movies, from *Stage Door* to *Dance, Girl, Dance* to *Guys and Dolls* to *The Sweet Smell of Success* to *The Producers* to *A Chorus Line* to *Taxi Driver* to *Fame* to *Batman*. We could play this fire sign game with generations of paintings, of songs (even as Hurstwood collapses, Sister Carrie sings to herself, "There's a Broken Heart for every light on Broadway"), of stores, of office buildings, of restaurants, of theaters—but here you need to be prepared to cry. The Square's whole life has been a life of self-reflection and semiotic overflow. To be there, to even think about being there, is to be drenched in richness of meaning.

Some of the meaning is luminously hopeful. There's *The Jazz Singer*, Al Jolson's boy from the ghetto seeing his name in lights. Another equally classic Times Square image is Ruby Keeler in *42nd Street*, in a top hat, dancing at first on a theater's stage, but then suddenly on the roof of a moving taxi. In fact, this image is a democratic parable. Keeler is portrayed as a klutz who can't dance—unlike her rival, Bebe Daniels, who can—but who is like her audience, like us. (My mother, who saw Keeler perform many times, said she could dance up a storm, and was playing a klutz here only for drama's sake.) Yet she dances, though she can't; through the movie's magic realism, she can overcome both gravity and traffic—she can fly. Art empowers her—and ordinary people like

us, who identify with her—to do anything.

In Alan Parker's *Fame*, fifty years later, the protagonist again dances on a moving cab, and once more it is a parable of democracy. But now the subject is collective: a whole bunch of kids who can do it, a scruffy, multinational, urban-public-school bunch of kids, and not by magic realism but by force of real talent. (These kids are from the former High School of the Performing Arts, now *aufgehoben* into La Guardia High uptown at Lincoln Center.) The most striking idea here is that now there are new people in the cast and on the street; many of these new people are colored, many are poor. But remember the 1964 song "Dancing in the Streets"? It says, "It doesn't matter what you wear, as long as you are there." Although *Fame* appeared in the 1980s, it grows out of a 1960s edition of Popular Front democracy, the kind of sensibility that rejoices in public spaces and public spectacles as media for bringing very different kinds of people together. The message is, the Square is big enough to hold them all.

But it often seems that these hopeful visions are eclipsed by bitter diatribes whose theme is Paradise Lost. So much of the talk about Times Square seems to be both driven and crippled by nostalgia. In the 1980s, some people complained that it wasn't what it had been in the 1940s, others that it wasn't what it had been in the 1970s. Indeed, Times Square has the capacity to engender a "discourse of nostalgia" that floats freely and unites people with radically different views of the Square and the world: people (like my mother) who are nostalgic for the great days of Helen Hayes and Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontaine; people (like our mayor, and like former mayor Ed Koch) who are nostalgic for the years of Winchell, Runyon, and *Guys and Dolls*; and people (like Samuel Delaney, Rem Koolhaas, photographer Langdon Clay) who are nostalgic for the pre-AIDS golden age of hustling.

If you study the history of Times Square, it's amazing to see how pervasive nostalgia is as an organizing force for visions of the place. In the 1930s, for instance, there seems to have been a consensus that the Square had hopelessly declined from what it was in the golden age of the 1910s and 1920s. You can find it in the *WPA Guide,* circa 1939:

> [During the Depression] theaters closed one after another, and contract bridge games, chess tournaments and sideshows occupied the vacant stores. Long before, however, decisive popular support had shifted from dramas and musical comedies to motion pictures. Hollywood had taken over all the best locations, relegating the legitimate theater business to the side streets . . . . On 42nd Street, once the district's showplace, famous theaters have been converted into movie "grind" houses devoted [mostly to] burlesque shows. Among cut-rate haberdasheries, cafeterias and bus stations are tokens of a not-so-distant past.

What was once a path of glory has turned into a location for "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." According to the *Guide,* "Only the lonely, those with nowhere else to go, will go there now." And this is the way people talked in an era that we see as Times Square's golden age.

Official vision, the vision shared by everyone who has ruled Albany or City Hall for the last fifty years, places the golden age in 1945, when mobs of people danced in the streets in honor of our victory in "The Good War," and dashing young sailors (pretty much all white) poured off their ships in the harbor and along the Hudson to go "On the Town."

After the golden age, it's said, the Square was overrun by commercial sex, sleaze, and violence, and it became a human sinkhole, a civic disgrace, a place where no decent person would willingly go, and where the only helpful thing would be to blow it all away. Mayors, governors, and their planners, radically opposed in so many other ways, have all agreed—or simply taken it for granted—that the Square has become a malignant tumor, and that it's got to go.

Sometimes the nostalgia and the hatred are reversed. Rem Koolhaas recently wrote a moving elegy for the golden age of hustling on the Square. He is probably mourning for the late 1970s: his piece accompanies a series of luminous photos by Langdon Clay (reproduced in *Grand Street* #57, Summer 1996) dated 1979, just before the age of AIDS. He vilifies those who killed it: "a coalition of moralists, planners, and a nostalgia-driven entertainment giant." But he doesn't understand the emotions of the people who hate that old Times Square: they

are just as passionately intense as Koolhaas, and a lot less controlled.

One of the most passionate enemies of the old 42nd Street is Travis Bickle, the Vietnam vet and Underground Man who is the hero of Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976). Travis feels no nostalgia: he is trapped in the present moment like Kafka's mole in his impenetrable burrow. He lives in a filthy room, cramped yet almost bare, just west of the Square. Travis can't sleep, and goes through the "emotional insomnia" that John Rechy (in *City of Night,* 1963) says is the true Times Square wavelength. His entertainment is the all-night porn flicks and shooting galleries around 42nd Street. Sometimes he appears at home in these lower depths. But we see an ominous undercurrent quite early in the film. There are several shots, taken from his cab, that focus on crowds of men and women around the Square. Here the light is always lurid, the textures grungy, the sound abrasive. Some of these people could be prostitutes with their customers and pimps; others could just be ordinary people out having a good time. But they all exude sexuality, and this seems to make Travis seethe. Suddenly a candidate for president gets into his cab. When the man asks him what he thinks a president should do, Travis's rage spews out:

> Well, he should clean up this city here. It's full of filth and scum, scum and filth. It's like an open sewer. Sometimes I can hardly take it. Some days I go out and smell it, and then I get headaches that just stay and never go away. We need a president that would clean up this whole mess. Flush it out.

The candidate is startled at the violence of Travis's feelings, and so are we. It's as if Travis's hatred for "them," the men and women of the Square, has become a catalyst for every hateful desire of his own; he is projecting onto "them" all that he most fears in himself. In the last couple of minutes, after he goes on a rampage and kills several of "them," he looks relaxed and feels cleansed. Not only is *he* cleansed by his killings: the old Times Square magically disappears; the city in the last frames is entirely gentrified, pastoral, like some real estate developer's dream.

According to the official nostalgic vision, sex and violence and crime arrived in the Square only yesterday; its everyday life was pastoral till that point. In fact, if we read around in its history, we find that violence has always been close to the surface here. Any place on earth that generates crowds and promotes emotional extravagance and release is bound to be violent. Many academic people today, following the critic Mikhail Bakhtin, idealize everything connected with the word "carnivalesque"; but Bakhtin knew that carnivals were dangerous, that they were places where people got killed. Back in the 1910s, when cars were still a novelty, the Square was already a leading site for drive-by killings. Meyer Wolfsheim, the Jewish gambler in *The Great Gatsby,* gives a vivid account of one of these, "the night they shot Rosey Rosenthal," his dear friend, outside the old Metropole Hotel on Broadway and 45th. That murder really happened; what made it special was not the intimacy between murderers and police—that was a routine affair—but the fact that it got into the papers. (Andy Logan, a great city reporter, in her book *Against the Evidence,* argued plausibly that Charles Becker, the police captain executed for this crime, was a crook but not a killer, and, as his widow inscribed on his tombstone, was "Murdered by Governor Whitman.") Soon after *The Great Gatsby* appeared, Arnold Rothstein—consummate gambler, loan shark, sportsman, Broadway producer, and *bon vivant,* and real-life *Gatsby* character—would meet the same fate, victim of his greatest hit.

Complaints about Times Square often blend fear of violence with revulsion for the lowest classes. In fact, the Square has always been loaded with some of the poorest people in the city. Here is Hurstwood again, cold and hungry, looking longingly inside a Broadway restaurant:

> "Eat" he mumbled. "That's right, eat. Nobody else wants any."
>
> People turned to look after him, so uncouth was his shambling figure. Several officers followed him with their eyes to see that he did not beg of anybody.

Sounds up-to-date, doesn't it? Hurstwood seems about to commit what our mayor would call a "quality-of-life crime." The Square's re-

spectable people have always harangued the cops to get rid of these shadows so close to the bright lights.

As for sex, let's remember that Heatherbloom woman. Ninety years ago, people were talking about that strip of Broadway as "the capital of dangerous love." Since Rechy's *City of Night* and Herlihy's *Midnight Cowboy* (1965; adapted for film in 1969), we have had an image of the world of Times Square gay hustling. But the vibrancy and desperation of the Square's homosexuality were not so different from the texture of its heterosexuality. So many of the classic and glamorous Broadway films are really about the fate of girls who come to Broadway hoping their bodies will put their names in lights. What do you think "Naughty, bawdy, gaudy, sporty 42nd Street" means? It's a delightful movie; but part of its charm is the way it uses magic realism, as in *The Jazz Singer*, to turn tragedy into comedy. What do you think happened to all those generations of girls who were rejected at those auditions, or who never made it off the chorus lines, or (as in *42nd Street*) who got the part but broke a leg? Sexuality is the only card they hold, but it depreciates fast; before they know it, they are dumped by boyfriends and producers in favor of younger, fresher meat. No sex is shown in films like *Stage Door*, and Katherine Hepburn is presented there as being above such things, so it's easy to miss—I missed it when I was a kid—but you can hear it in the wisecracks these girls make about each other (and sometimes about themselves), and you can see it in the way they wait for the phone to ring.

Apart from all the generations of sexual activity around the Square, sexual fantasy has always been the primary fuel for its "fire signs." One spring day in the middle eighties, I met a CUNY graduate student and his partner on the west side of the Square, holding hands as they looked raptly up and to the east. They pointed out a Calvin Klein male underwear ad that portrayed a headless body, dressed only in blindingly white Klein boxer shorts against a black background, with red intimations of sunrise (or traces of sunset?) at the edge. It was pitched at a weird angle so that, as you looked up, the model seemed to be falling in your face. The foreshortened, vertiginous perspective was borrowed from Mantegna's "Dead Christ," the color scheme and religious aura from a dozen other Renaissance masterworks. You could tell this art director not only had been to grad school, but had read Leo Steinberg's *The Sexuality of Christ.*

A traffic-stopper from the early 1990s was an enormous curved Benetton poster on 49th Street and Seventh Avenue, touting the company's new *Colors* magazine. It featured the usual multiracial Benetton assortment of teenagers, only here they were totally, frontally nude. Or not quite nude: as they faced the camera—some looking flustered, others brazen—they were all holding small placards over their genitals: they said *truth, lies, attitude, power*, and—for the youngest looking kid, hair tousled, looking like a gamine—*first date*. What's going on here? As in many interesting ads, ambiguity is central to the allure. What can have got these kids out of their clothes and put them on an embarrassing display? My first fantasy was: drug raid on a disco, strip search in the lockup. Whatever you think, spectators have to create a story to make the ad make sense, and as we do, we notice (or else we don't notice) that we are working for the Company. Then, too, many of us will feel aroused, and then feel guilty, at the sight of these naked kids—who could be our kids, who look as innocent and as vulnerable as any of our kids—and here, too, it's as if the Company is winking at us, implicitly promising not to tell, reassuring us we're all in this together. Ever since the Heatherbloom lady, rich soft-core semiotic desserts like these have been a Times Square special.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, in what seems like a perverse zeal against sex, belongs squarely in the tradition of the sleazier producers in these movies, trumpeting wholesome "family values" while they pinch actresses' cheeks. What business does our Mayor think MTV is in, or HBO, or some of those lush hotel chains he's been courting? Doesn't he see what business he's in now? Whether he does or not, we need to see it, because, as long as we love New York, we're all in it with him.

How do we account for the obsessive, futile attempt, as old as Times Square itself, to create a Times Square without sex or sleaze? Some of it is rooted in a puritanical complex that intertwines fear of sex with fear of the city itself. This complex goes back a long way: we can find it at the very end of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, in the portrayal of the Great Whore Babylon. When God destroys her, the book says, all urban activities—trade, commerce, crafts, music—come to an abrupt end.

But an important part of the story is more modern and secular, and rooted in contemporary political economy. The high concept is called FIRE: finance, insurance, and real estate. As the deindustrialization of America began—in New York, the garment industry was the first to go—smart money came to believe that the only salvation of America's cities lay in FIRE. From this perspective, the optimal business districts were uniform blocks of large office towers, like Wall Street and Rockefeller Center. Neighborhoods like Times Square, scruffy and raggedy, full of small parcels and mixed uses, were irrational and inefficient. Remember in *Guys and Dolls,* when the gambler Sky Masterson complains to Sarah Brown, a.k.a. Sister Salvation, "You have wished yourself a Scarsdale Galahad, a breakfast-eating Brooks Brothers type." Sarah's wish was that of our leaders, Democratic and Republican, liberal and conservative, sophisticated and provincial, for the past fifty years. That "Scarsdale Galahad" would bring to the Square the saving, purifying FIRE.

In 1978 Mayor Koch, announcing that 42nd Street was disgraceful and hopeless, entertained plans for what he called "an urban theme park" on 42nd Street, just west of the Square, with the New Amsterdam Theater as a primary focus. Koch asked for models, but then disparaged the ones he got: "New York isn't orange juice," he said, "it's seltzer." In this unrehearsed epigram, Koch affirmed our own very special vulgar ethnic moxie against the nutritious but sanitized "American" monoculture that feared and dreaded New York, and that, during our 1975-1976 fiscal crisis, led to the notorious headline: "Ford to City: Drop Dead." "Seltzer" was the Koch whom even political adversary Ruth Messinger admires (along with Messinger supporters like me), and whose prejudices and vanities and fears she shares.

Alas, Koch didn't have the courage of his metaphors. He let loose a plan that, had it been fulfilled, would have drowned the whole Square in orange juice. He accepted the real estate industry's premise that the only way to get action was to build enormous skyscrapers on the corners of 42nd and Seventh Avenue. He and Governor Mario Cuomo both embraced it, and put it under control of the state Urban Development Corporation. The UDC brought in the Cooper-Ekstut planning firm to lay down design guidelines, which said that all new buildings must fit into the context of the Times Square environment as it was. As principal developer, Koch chose his biggest contributor, George Klein. As its main architect, Klein's company, Park Tower Realty, picked Philip Johnson, a man who has created some beautiful and imaginative buildings, but whose past as a Nazi sympathizer should have been a danger sign. Johnson packaged himself in contradictory ways, at once a nihilist who was above any guidelines and a whore who would build whatever his client told him to. The outcome, unveiled in early 1983, was a set of three giant slabs, *à la* upper Sixth Avenue, only decorated with Mansard roofs like the roof of the *Times* Building. This design combined the most arid and arrogant modernism with the most blatant and slavish postmodern pseudo-history. Johnson said he wanted to turn Times Square into an extension of Rockefeller Center, and that New Yorkers should be glad. Instead, a great many got violently mad.

At this point, in 1983-1984, the *Times* began to divide in fascinating ways. Abe Rosenthal supported the project with his usual crude and bullying editorials—"Get Out of the Way on Times Square," "Porn Again or Born Again"—but Paul Goldberger denounced it on the arts pages. Ada Louise Huxtable (who by then had left the *Times* but remained forever linked with it in public imagination) combined brilliant analysis with a Hepburnesque acerbic hauteur. All sorts of new people got into the case. Carter Wiseman in *New York* and Michael Sorkin in the *Village Voice* tore the project to pieces. (The

high point of Sorkin's career came when Johnson refused to appear at a Forum on Times Square if he was in the room.)

The Municipal Art Society, under Kent Barwick, made Times Square a top priority, and demonstrated a genius for publicity. It arranged to abruptly turn off all the bright lights, so people could see how much they meant. It started an international design competition for the Square, and exhibited drawings and models far better than Johnson's. It recruited old vaudevilleans to sing old songs of the Broadway that seemed on the ropes. It made a cassette using sophisticated computer simulations to show how the towers would blot out the sky, arguing that New York was being betrayed by its leaders' faith in FIRE.

Between 1986 and 1988 the City Planning Commission and the state UDC pressed Park Tower to renegotiate the office towers' design, to incorporate bright lights and big signs and show some respect for the context of the Square. This was an improvement, but the towers' size remained overpowering, and the developers escaped their original obligation to transform the 42nd Street subway station. However, the stock market crash of 1987 collapsed the market for commercial real estate. Koch and Cuomo had praised Klein and Park Tower as brilliant salesmen; but even with vast subsidies and tax breaks, they themselves were the only ones willing to buy. Ironically, disaster kept further disaster from happening, and the tower sites are still idle today.

The next step came in 1992, when the city and state negotiated an "Interim Plan" with the developers. In place of gigantism, they would promote small-scale street-level revitalization along 42nd Street. Now, in place of FIRE, a new key word had gained power: *entertainment.* Could it be that after a decade of controversy, our leaders had actually learned something about New York? They certainly seemed to have learned something about 42nd Street and Times Square: they saw that the point of the Street and the Square was extravagant entertainment. They agreed to try to promote more. They appointed an architect, Robert Stern (from Columbia University), and a designer, Tibor Kalman (from the Benetton Company), who had an intuitive feeling for the Square. That was the good news; the bad news was that it was only "interim," and that if the real estate market ever picks up, Park Tower/Prudential will still have the right to build those dark Satanic mills. Even with new people running the city and the state, no politician has the brains and guts to say the original deal was a disaster and walk away from it.

Finally, in February 1994, after *hondeling* between Stern and Disney CEO Michael Eisner, the ball game abruptly changed. Disney announced its intention to lease the New Amsterdam and use it as a base for extensive New York operations. The city courted Disney enthusiastically. (Some people, noticing how the city turned over Central Park to the Company for its premiere of *Pocohontas* in 1995, and turned over almost the whole of midtown for a Disney Parade in 1997, would say the proper word is "abjectly." Next year the Brooklyn Bridge?) So far, apart from the renovated and recently reopened New Amsterdam Theater, Disney has not spent much money. But it has definitely invested its superclean, superrich and super-American image. And if it ever builds the hotels and clubs it intermittently talks about, it seems to have made a commitment to a terrific architectural firm. Arquitectonica of Miami (whose buildings framed *Miami Vice),* which can give the Street the moxie it deserves. Disney's presence had an immediate impact in leveraging other huge conglomerates onto the Street: now HBO, MTV, AMC, Marriott, Tussaud, Condé Nast, Reuters, are all eager to be there, and to build on an enormous scale.

So should we worry? Today's blatantly commercial model of urban renewal has the capacity to waste more land than the modes of the past. The scale, incandescence, and symbolic power of Times Square make everything here more urgent and intense. Long-standing rage against Disney is part of the deal. This is based partly on an accurate view of Walt Disney's racist and xenophobic right-wing career, but also on prejudices of our own: prejudices of many intellectuals against mass culture, prejudices of seltzer against orange juice, of ethnic easterners against middle America, of New York against

the world. I'm not exactly saying these prejudices are wrong; I'll fight for most of them, but they could stand some critical scrutiny.

For instance, it has become a truism of the 1990s to blame the Disney Corporation for Mayor Giuliani's ongoing vendetta against the sex business. (To be precise, it's against the *small* sex business; the mayor is cozy with *big* sex businesses with big bottom lines.) But is it true? Disney may be behind it all, but I'm still waiting to see some hard evidence. It may be, though, that the truth is on a less multinational scale. We need to look to our own house, to New York's own volatile political culture, so receptive to mobilizations of bias and outbursts of bad faith. We should remember the outer-borough Catholics who make up a large part of Giuliani's support. Note, too, that on matters of morality and culture, many black and Latin churches are as repressive and hypocritical as anybody. In American politics since 1980, fundamentalists of all faiths have learned how to work together, and know that they are closer in spirit to fundamentalists in other religions than they are to humanists within their own. Another current in American life has been a desire to protect our children from harm that is really out there: demagogues have exploited this fear for generations, and often, as in the satanic ritual/child abuse scares of the 1980s, whipped large numbers of people into hysterical frenzy. This would be an ongoing struggle, even if the Disney Corp. had never come into being. Civil libertarians need to deal with real fears, and to show people that the castration of culture won't help their children grow up.

If Disney has played a role in this, it has probably been indirect: not Disney making threats, but other people censoring themselves out of fear that Disney and all its capital might disappear. On 42nd Street, as elsewhere, the most effective censorship is self-censorship. I'm not saying we don't have a Disney problem; but the problem may be not so much what Disney does to people as what the very mention of its name pushes people and institutions—like the 42nd Street Business Improvement District—to do to themselves. Remember the late 1960s graffito, SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL POLICE—BEAT YOURSELF UP? It may be that, in the late-twentieth-century USA, Disney, along with our other media conglomerates, functions as a sort of cultural superego. But if it does, then the only effective way for intellectuals to fight it is to strengthen our cultural ego, to learn to sing jazz and generate light, to make sure that our dear city won't beat itself up.

What can we hope for in Times Square tomorrow? The cover of the *New Yorker* for June 12, 1995, offers a lovely vision by B. Bliet. Bliet portrays a tourist, apparently tired but earnest, confronting a great array of signs in Spanish, Russian, Japanese, Arabic, Portuguese, Hungarian, Hebrew, Chinese, Greek, French, Korean, Persian, Urdu, Vietnamese, and other tongues I've missed. This vision can help us imagine a public space oriented toward the future, and democratic and inclusive enough to contain the whole world. □

P.S. I've just read, in the *Times* of August 1, about a deal in the works to bring Reuters to Times Square. It wants to build an 800,000-square-foot office tower on Seventh Avenue and 42nd Street. Now, Reuters is one of the more interesting world media giants, and its presence on the Square could be a good thing, but not if the city grants it the staggering tax breaks it seems to want to give—as if to say, in the midst of a property boom, "Now, take our prime real estate—please!" (Would they call it Henny Youngman Plaza?) And not if it is built in the way the landowner, Prudential Insurance, wants to build it: reviving Philip Johnson's despised design, the great glass slab, scourge of sky and street. People who care about the Square had better raise the roof, before this deal gets done. (See what I get for making an argument that our governments have learned something?)