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# Mediating Change: Symbolic Politics and the Transformation of Times Square

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## **Comments**

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# **Mediating Change: Symbolic Politics and the Transformation of Times Square**

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**Paper prepared for the Conference on New York City History \*  
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## **Introduction**

The transformation of Times Square is a story of complexity and consequence ripe for the telling on several levels. As a physical transformation, the twenty-year saga begins in the early 1980s with the city's dual-sided policy initiatives to dramatically rezone midtown Manhattan *and* aggressively redevelop West 42nd Street through a public coalition of city and state public entities. As a social transformation, the public-development project promised to clear away the depraved social pathology of the place—the “bad” uses—and put in place “good” uses: new commercial activity at either end of the block and renovated historic theaters for Broadway fare in the midblock. As a cultural transformation, commercial activities attractive to the middle class would replace the sex-and-drug bazaar that had earned the street a worldwide reputation for decades. From its very beginning, the redevelopment intentions for West 42nd Street and Times Square grabbed center stage as a high-profile initiative of central importance to elected officials, reflective in both real and symbolic terms of the city's agenda to rebuild itself, economically as well as physically, after a crushing fiscal crisis. By the end of the decade, the effort was at a stalemate, bogged down by litigation and entrapped in a real estate downturn. By the mid-1990s, economic and social forces had recast the long-running pessimistic prognosis for the project. As activity on the street shifted from drug dealing, prostitution, and pornography to legitimate theater, family entertainment, tourism, and office employment, ironies of change defined the transformation. As seen from afar, the

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\* Drawn from Lynne B. Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon* MIT Press, November 2001.

transformation signaled not merely a new 42nd Street, but redemption of New York's image as a "big, bad city."

Nothing really went according to plan, for either public officials or private developers. Rather, a complex relationship between planning and politics recast the initial intentions of the 42nd Street Development Project (42DP) and in interaction with market forces altered the course of revitalization in Times Square. Symbolism too became a mediating force among contending, fractious interests in shaping the fabric of the place. From its beginning as Longacre (also known as Long Acre) Square, Times Square quickly evolved into an icon as the place's symbolic associations—garish commercialism, spectacular signage, cultural diversity, and social tolerance—embedded themselves deep into the city's psyche. More than the city's center for entertainment, more than a commercial marketplace capable of satisfying diverse consumer needs, Times Square has been a public place of high symbolic importance. Its symbolic role guaranteed that any plan for its renewal would arouse fierce debate and fractious opposition from a range of interests. It would push the hot buttons of public controversy: free speech, property-taking through eminent domain, development density, tax subsidy, and historic preservation. It was contested turf.

Throughout the twenty-year development period, symbolism was used by all of the drama's players to shape the debate and promote alternative visions of what the new 42nd Street should be. For the project's promoters, it served as a rationale for advancing a large-scale development strategy predicated on condemnation, a cleanup designed to return the street to its former legendary glory. Promising that the midblock historic theaters would be preserved, city officials used symbolism as political leverage to build a coalition of support among preservationists, culturally-minded civic groups, and performing artists. Developers too, fearing a return to the days of porn, evoked symbolic as well as real images of the past as an argument against allowing movies on the street. The argument against demolition of the architecturally defaced former Times Tower rested solely on symbolism: It was revered not as architecture, but as an irreplaceable icon of the place, of New York. Civic groups in pushing forth

their agenda for strong urban-design controls in Times Square vociferously argued in terms calculated to evoke symbolic meaning: Don't let corporate culture dull and dim the Great White Way. And finally, the project's planners evoked the razzle-dazzle visual images of the Great White Way to promote *42nd Street Now!*

Drawing on the complete story of the transformation in *Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon*, this paper focuses on the role of symbolism, as historic legacy, in mediating change in this most public of public places. It begins with description of Times Square's five meanings of place and then explains the central role of symbolism in several key episodes of the transformation of West 42nd Street, from initial plans to final blueprint. The historic but darkened theaters, mutilated but beloved former Times Tower, and legacy of commercialism and glitz signs each weighed in as tangible and powerful arguments for rebuilding in ways that would be consistent with the symbolic legacy of the district's past. That success bequeathed one of the transformation's most meaningful lessons of renewal.

### **Symbolic Soul of the City**

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the unvarnished and unromantic truth about Times Square contrasted sharply with the historic image and myth about the place. It was no longer the nation's central production center for popular entertainment, yet it remained its preeminent icon and symbol of show business. It was no longer the city's creative core or its trend-setting scene, yet it remained its symbol of "golden potential" and a "testing ground of the limits of fantasy and fulfillment." It was no longer coining revolutionary vernacular speech, yet the place maintained its hold on the mental imagination of tourists and city dwellers alike. Even when the energy crisis dimmed the dramatic displays and bright lights of the district in the early 1970s, the legendary vision of spectacles continued to shine brightly in the minds and imaginations of those who visualized the past. Even in civic disgrace and criminal distress when in 1981, West 42nd Street was billed by *Rolling Stone* magazine as "the sleaziest block in America" and identified in the national press with the general woes of New York, the "local" nature of the place

continued to be eclipsed by its larger role as a powerful national metaphor, this time, however, for urban pathology and decline. Hopeful words attached themselves to negative realities: “gloriously vulgar,” “decedent raffishness,” “seedy grandeur,” “tawdry glamour,” “a junkyard for dreams.” The Great White Way might now be “a byword for ostentatious flesh-peddling in an open-air meat rack,” but it was still the “crossroads of the world.”<sup>1</sup> The illustrious memory of success was not to be erased.

One did not have to look too far for an explanation of this paradox. For New Yorkers, West 42nd Street and Times Square had become synonymous with the city itself, its commercialism, intense energy, urban insouciance, and cultural and economic diversity—a constantly changing stage for urban life. Writers sharpened their pencils when evoking the romance and importance of the place, especially in the 1980s when all seemed threatened by the city and state’s redevelopment plan which most critics disfavored intensely: Times Square, they said, was “a bubbling up of human nature. Its chronometer is on perpetual Night Saving Time”; “A giant blinking toy, an entertainment in itself”; “The most fragile kind of urban fabric, in a constant state of change”; “The most dynamic and intense urban space of the 20th century, America’s gift to the modern world, a home for magic realism, the commercial sublime”; “Times Square is not just a place, it’s a backdrop, a colorful, ironic setting that symbolizes the round-the-clock vibrancy of New York City.”<sup>2</sup>

In short, Times Square served as the symbolic soul of New York. Its chaotic action, dense and diverse pedestrian activity, continuous role as the key entertainment district—in a city defined by creative juices—immutable prime location as the city’s transit hub, and unique physical “experience of place” which derived from its small-scale buildings, open space, and illuminated lights made it a public place over-endowed with meaning, or as the cultural commentators saw it, drenched in semiotic meaning. Times Square was a stage for urban life to one group, a state of mind to another, and a danger zone to still another. Its seediness was considered integral to New York.

Symbolic meanings of place took center stage in the campaign to garner support for the city’s aggressive plans for redevelopment. Symbolic rhetoric dominated the many sets of public hearings on the

42DP during the 1980s. The depth of symbolic significance underscored the objections of civic groups, architectural critics, and cultural commentators who later made strong appeals to preserve Times Square's values, past and present, which they believed were being cast aside in the pursuit of a comprehensive cleanup that would use "good" activities—offices, hotels, restaurants, theaters—to drive out the "bad"—drug dealing, prostitution, vagrancy, and homeless congregations—of West 42nd Street. And as controversy and complexity continuously spawned lawsuits and produced years of delays throughout the decade, the symbolism of the place grew ever more sophisticated and elaborate.

Meaning permeates a city incrementally. Over time, out of the specialness of memorable events as well as the commonality of daily experiences, an overlay of meanings accumulates. It maps the evocative content of place from a generalized perspective, though casts, shadows, and weights of meaning differ across groups of city residents. At least five meanings fashioned the symbolism of place of Times Square for New Yorkers.

First, as "The Theater District," Times Square laid claim to exceedingly proud history renown throughout the world. Embodied in a tradition of legitimate theater which in its time represented the leading edge of show business, this story glorified a type of urban energy characterized by the city's own special ethnic "moxie."

Second, as "The Turf of Promoters and Showmen," Times Square lay claim to the nation's first great "entrepreneurs of entertainment"—Oscar Hammerstein I, David Belasco, Florenz Ziegfeld, Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel, Irving Berlin, Damon Runyon, the Minsky Brothers, Billy Rose. Legends as larger-than-life showmen, they left an enviable legacy of "financial shrewdness with a remarkable sensitivity to new markets and changing public tastes,"<sup>3</sup> a general point of business pride whose currency has never lost value among the city's immigrants or its movers and shakers.

Third, as "The Great White Way," Times Square lay claim to having invented the "commercial aesthetic"—bright carnivalesque signs of color, light, and glass designed to thrill, excite, and awe onlookers while convincing them to buy. Visually, the commercial aesthetic came to define and dominate

not only Times Square but also much of American culture in a way few cities in the world could match. Through the medium of promotion, it created super-sized evocative images of desire on billboards and brilliantly lit “spectaculars,” and these reinforced the city’s own sense of self-importance—that it was setting time for the nation, that Times Square was an index of cultural changes taking place in real time.

Fourth, as “The Testing Ground,” Times Square laid claim to being a place without limits where “anything goes.” This was rooted in the historically close association between theater and vice, but the tales of deviant excesses on West 42nd Street during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s bequeathed an especially distinctive legacy of sexual theater. It was theater that continually tested the limits of social tolerance, even that of New Yorkers who habitually exhibit a liberal, if ambivalent, social tolerance—part pure disgust, part hardened acceptance, part perverse pride: “I can handle anything; there isn’t anything I haven’t seen in this city; nothing is newly shocking.” Indeed, as Ada Louise Huxtable wrote in her sharply critical essay “Re-inventing Times Square: 1990,” the city requires a “testing ground of limits,” a place dealing with fantasy and fulfillment, and this has been Times Square’s unique societal and urban role. Speaking about architecture with words whose meaning extended beyond the tangibility of bricks and mortar she said: “When conventional sources [of eclecticism] have been rung dry, the door is opened to no-style and free-style, to increasingly hyped effects, and to the shock value of those things usually considered taboo.”<sup>4</sup> Life in Times Square was prescient, she implied, for by the 1950s and 1960s, a similar testing was taking place in society at large. This was no less true in the 1970s and 1980s when an unbridled market created a unique drugs-and-sex half-world which, when threatened with extinction by the public’s power of condemnation, acquired a new-found mythic status in what would be irrevocably lost.

Finally, as “Quintessential New York,” Times Square provided a city image for the nation at large. That image took shape from the experience of being in Times Square and sampling its particular brand of city life—going to theater, joining the crowds, vicariously partaking of Broadway’s success. Constant promotion made it part of the national mythology. While the reality of Times Square was



changing, especially after the 1930s, Hollywood defined Broadway for America and kept alive the aura of its old image. As cast on the west coast, Broadway meant the musical—“production numbers of dazzling, almost surreal beauty,” and “an enchanted place where talent and hard work could lead to undreamed-of success.”<sup>5</sup> The list of “Broadway” movies is long and includes among others: *Broadway Melody of 1929* (with later editions in 1938 and 1940), *Glorifying The American Girl* (1929), *42nd Street* (1933), *Dames* (1934), *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936), *Stage Door* (1937), *Babes on Broadway* (1942), *Footlight Serenade* (1942), *Broadway Rhythm* (1943), *The Band Wagon* (1953), *Main Street to Broadway* (1953), *Guys and Dolls* (1955), *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), *The Producers* (1968), *Funny Girl* (1968), *All That Jazz* (1979), *Fame* (1980), *Staying Alive* (1983), *The Muppets Take Manhattan* (1984), *Breakin’* (1984), and *A Chorus Line* (1985).

This image of Times Square from the glory days of the 1920s was important symbolically, even if it was out of date, for this was also the highpoint of urban growth in America, when cities all over the country boasted of their progressive achievements in architecture, engineering, culture, and community. It was also a time when being in public, especially in Times Square, and being a part of the mixed crowd—not as just a spectator but simultaneously as a participant—symbolized the ultimate city experience for visitors and residents alike. Cities glowed in “the spectacle of urban life” in a way that they have sought to recapture ever since.

Cleaning up West 42nd Street, and by extension Times Square, promised to put the shine back on the “big apple,” the city’s universally known booster nickname.<sup>6</sup> The historic legacy of Times Square should have made entertainment the obvious planning priority of redevelopment because the area’s intrinsic character, still evident beneath the sleaze, did not have to be invented, as had been the monumental task with the creation of Lincoln Center. It was already in place. It was known worldwide. Yet even had that been the city and state’s initial planning agenda, the stage for controversy was set. The heavy multifaceted symbolism of Times Square, forged over an extended period of more than 60 years, was embedded with sensitive associations that touched an especially broad range of interests; it was a

heavy political load for any redevelopment plan. The politics of the 42nd Street Development Project would be symbolic politics. What other scenario could possibly prevail?

### **The Foundation of Political Compromise**

The “revitalization of 42nd Street as a theater and entertainment center” featured front and center in all of the earliest planning documents for the redevelopment project. While economic pragmatism might mean bending to the commercial profit motive of large-scale office development to pay the bill for cleaning up the street, city and state officials consistently argued that the task was being undertaken in service of the bigger goal: “to strengthen the existing theater district and provide a strong anchor for it along 42nd Street.” The *General Project Plan (GPP)* noted the neglected heritage of the street’s great theaters with their “breathtaking architectural details” hidden by movie marquees that had been added in the 1930s, and explained the desire of the Urban Development Corporation (UDC), the powerful state that had taken on the role of lead agency for the project, and the city “to seize the opportunity presented by this concentration of theaters to restore as many theaters as possible.”<sup>7</sup> In brief prose the 1981 *Request for Proposals (RFP)* similarly made the case: “a concentration of legitimate theater uses within the Project Area is possible and necessary to achieve the Project’s goals.” The words “possible and necessary” represented a telling combination of official encouragement and formal requirement for doing something extraordinarily difficult. The combination also signaled a weak beginning.

The importance of theater preservation was a political given: After withstanding the political heat surrounding the loss of the Helen Hayes and Morosco Theaters, Mayor Edward I. Koch and city officials did not want a second bruising theater battle. “We had to preserve everything,” said Paul Travis, project manager for the city’s entrepreneurial agent, the Public Development Corporation (PDC).<sup>8</sup> Though not formally designated as architectural landmarks, save for the New Amsterdam Theater which by 1982 had been designated as a New York landmark and placed on the National Register of Historic Places, the 42nd-Street theaters were considered to be of landmark quality, worthy of preservation. Quality

restoration was deemed as important as preservation, so working with historians recommended by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), the project's planners developed design guidelines for interiors and exteriors of the street's nine theaters. If a full restoration of the theaters was not feasible, the *RFP* explained, the project's design guidelines had built in flexibility by permitting that "some of the existing theaters be restored and operated as commercial legitimate theaters and others be devoted to quality entertainment uses, such as multi-media, institutional theater or film."<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, throughout the 1980s, the task of recreating the street's historic entertainment focus presented a daunting programmatic and economic challenge. The decade would turn out to be one of the worst for the theater industry, with business conditions on a downward slide following the peak 1980-81 season. "Urban entertainment," the concept that clusters of activity devoted to middle-class recreation could flourish in cities, had yet to see its moniker in lights. And movie uses—widely associated with what had made the street a mess—were not allowed long term under the terms of the theater deals approved by the city's Board of Estimate (BOE);<sup>10</sup> the RFP did not prohibit "film" uses per se, but the big fear, pushed mainly by private developers, was that movie theaters would turn West 42nd Street back to pornography. These factors—in short hand, poor timing—conspired against the success of a market-driven commercial strategy for theater preservation. Relying upon private developers to fill out this portion of the plan could not possibly alter that reality.

From the start, the theater sites [see Figure 1] struggled for attention. With no specially designed incentives to attract prospective bidders, it is hard to understand how public officials expected this difficult piece of the project to move forward. For three years city and state officials failed to attract prospective developers for Site 5, home of the Lyric, Selwyn, Apollo, Times Square and Victory Theaters, and only in the month before the public hearing on the *Final Environment Impact Statement (FEIS)* did they conditionally designate a developer/operator, Cambridge Investment Group, Ltd., headed by public-servant-turned-real estate developer, Michael J. Lazar. Lazar's designation, the last of those made on the project, came only after city and state officials insisted that because of his lack of experience

with theater operations he find an established theater company to run the houses, which he did in Jujamcyn Company, a major New York theater operator. Then, less than twenty months later, when he was indicted on charges of racketeering and mail fraud stemming from a major scandal at the city's Parking Violations Bureau, the city and state revoked this conditional designation. Designation of a developer for the Site 5 theaters remained suspended in a void for four years, until 1990, when a newly created non-profit, the 42nd Street Entertainment Corporation (42EC) took over the theater agenda for the 42DP.

Preservation of the midblock theaters and the low-density character of the 42nd Street corridor were always put forth as the justification for the enormous densities of the office towers and the questionable inclusion of a wholesale mart on a historic entertainment street. The soundness of the policy logic lacked planning substance, however. Despite evidence of studies completed, theater planning was minimal, one knowing participant recalled. City and state officials were making decisions for the theaters on the basis of generalized ideas and stylized facts from feasibility studies conducted between 1980 and 1981, when the theater business was relatively robust. As summarized in a 1984 report on the "Status and Summary" of the Theater Preservation/Renovation Program, the 13-page "outline" fell far short of the type of overall vision and concrete economic strategy needed to energize the implementation of such a high-profile goal and historic theme for the street's revitalization. It suggested that thought had been given to regulatory issues of control—scale, prohibition of air-rights development, design, and use of the renovated spaces—designed to ensure that the theaters' preservation. Nevertheless, missing were the detailed economics of how this "plan" would actually work. Indeed, the plan's program implicitly assumed that theater needed nothing more to stay alive in New York than a supply of adequate buildings in which to mount productions.

Responsibility for the cost of acquiring the theaters had been structured into the deals with private developers of the office, mart, and hotel sites, but these were capital subsidies for acquisition of the existing structures. They would only carry the theater agenda through the first act of the redevelopment

play. Act two, renovation, could proceed only with private funding from the theater's designated developers. While the deal for the office sites allowed \$4.2 million of its \$9.45 million theater contribution to be used for the improvement and renovation of the five theaters packaged into Site 5 and the deal for Site 7 likewise provided for a \$750,000 contribution, these amounts were not intended to cover the renovations but for property acquisition. More to the point, act three, theater operation, had to be self-sustaining: The seven theaters slated for profit-making uses were expected to make it on the strength of box-office revenues, helped along only by relatively low payments-in-lieu-of taxes (PILOTs) in the deal approved by the BOE and favorable federal tax benefits for historic preservation. Where operating funds were to come from for the Liberty and the Victory Theaters, required by the *GPP* to be used only for "institutional" theater, was not dealt with at all.

The city's deal makers understood the self-sustaining mandate for the theaters to be a risky proposition. As an alternative for the Times Square Theater, the deal with Cambridge Investment Group allowed the developer to use the space for retailing; similarly, in the case of the Empire and Liberty Theaters (adjacent to the mart site on the south side of the street), some mart-related uses were permitted. Renovation of the street's crown-jewel, the Art-Deco New Amsterdam Theater—legendary even by the rich Broadway standards of the time—seemed more certain than the others, as it was to be redeveloped for legitimate theater independent of the project by the Nederlander Organization, the national's largest theater operator.<sup>11</sup> But for the more historically significant of the two theaters intended for use by non-profit organizations, the Victory, uncertainty prevailed: No concept/feasibility plan for renovation and reuse had been prepared. Moreover, the earliest feasibility study commissioned by the city and UDC had identified the Victory and Liberty Theaters for non-profit uses precisely because their physical characteristics limited the potential box-office revenues and, thus, their use for Broadway theater. The study called for subsidies to cover higher overhead necessary to book, manage, and raise funds for the Victory and Liberty operations. "The total annual deficit for these two houses may well reach \$1 million, although as much as \$500,000 of that might be offset by fund-raising," the report concluded.

“Alternatively, this requirement could be met by diverting a small portion of the property tax revenues produced by the rest of the 42nd Street development apart from the ten theaters.”<sup>12</sup> The deal for the theaters did not provide for any operating subsidies, however.

The precariousness of the theater-preservation strategy was not veiled. Rather, hope seemed to lie in by-the-by change, at least as presented in the official record. “Institutional operators have not yet been identified for either the Victory or Liberty,” the *FEIS* reported. “UDC and the City are confident that, as the project moves ahead, the necessary commitments of funds will be forthcoming with respect to the renovation of the Victory and the non-profit operation of both the Victory and the Liberty.” The fallback solution anticipated by the city’s planners was first-run movie or theater-related uses, “until such renovation and theater operations become feasible.”<sup>13</sup> In one of the last-minute compromises made prior to the BOE hearing on the 42DP, the city addressed mounting criticism of its theater “plan” with an announcement that a 14-person Theater Advisory Committee would be formed, according to a UDC update on the project, “to advise on the programming and management of the non-profit theaters.”<sup>14</sup> It would take another three years, however, and the hiring of a dedicated urban planner, Rebecca Robertson, for the 42DP to concentrate on how to meet its goals for the theater sites.

However persistent and strong the public sector’s symbolic rhetoric on preserving the theaters was, it did not persuade the skeptics. At the public hearings, the incompleteness of the “plan” was called to task by the Regional Plan Association with an appeal to the BOE to withhold approval until assurances for the theaters and four other significant planning issues were forthcoming. The Actors’ Equity Association and Save the Theaters, Inc., the city’s major theater preservation organization, jointly withheld endorsement of the 42DP, firmly convinced after the demolition of the Helen Hayes and Morosco Theaters that the city and its planners did not really understand the elements needed to maintain the vitality of the theater district. They had lost both patience and belief that the city would ever do the right thing for its underappreciated Broadway heritage. The promises to restore the 42nd Street movie houses to their historical roles as legitimate playhouses were “too vague” to be judged, Jack L. Goldstein,

director of Save the Theaters later wrote. “It is unclear whether funding for the theaters will be sufficient; it is unclear how they will be operated. Instead of a cohesive plan for the sensible management of the 42nd Street corridor as an entertainment complex of mixed performing arts uses, the plan simply proposes that some of the theaters be thrown into the competitive commercial market of Broadway.”<sup>15</sup>

Though the city’s goal was genuinely conceived, its initial execution was seriously flawed. It was crippled by the narrowness of what theater preservation meant at the time—”live” Broadway-like productions—and a policy decision that commercial use of the theaters should prevail over other ways to preserve the structures. The financial imperative remained dominant even in this most politically sensitive piece of the public agenda. Scenarios for reuse as film-revival houses or commercial-television production facilities had been briefly considered by UDC and PDC’s consultants, who concluded that such uses were “not necessarily commercially feasible.”<sup>16</sup> If the theaters could be commercially operated, there would be little need to spend scarce city resources to obtain the benefits their revitalization would bring to the street—middle-class pedestrian activity, ongoing employment, restaurant trade and related retail sales. Entertainment in the most general sense was not encouraged in the redevelopment plan, though this would have been consistent with the cleanup strategy to put a new slate of “good” pedestrian-generating activities on the block in place the existing “bad” uses. “There seems never to have been a recognition that forms of entertainment other than theater are also ‘legitimate,’” argued one architectural critic in an insightful review of the redevelopment plan for *Architectural Record* in 1984. “The [design] guidelines do not encourage movie theaters or nightclubs, rehearsal space, or stages for dance and music (except Broadway musicals). These uses frequently cannot generate the revenues per square foot that office or retail space can. They are, however, indispensable elements of what makes New York a center for the arts.” The problem, he concluded, was the “giantism of the plan,” which was “at odds with the idea of a coherent theater or entertainment district.”<sup>17</sup> A more politically forthright assessment would have concluded that the theater “plan” amounted only to compensatory symbolism.

The hollowness of the policy effort would further weaken an already fragile consensus for the project. As revealed in the city and state's deals for development, the priority of the 42DP was singularly clear: commercial office development. The financial strategy of concentrating massive densities for office towers on all sides of the symbolic center of Times Square defined the 42DP in terms that became highly controversial, aesthetically as well as programmatically. In the absence of a substantive program for the theater agenda, the city's planning approach threatened the symbolic as well as physical character of West 42nd Street. Reflecting the city's zeal to clear away social problems, the corporate character of the initial plan, exemplified by the design for four massive office towers dreamed up for George Klein, the designated developer, by architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee, appeared arrogantly and brutally insensitive to the cultural symbolism of the place.

### **An Object Lesson for Government**

Intense concern over the fate of the former Times Tower signaled the opening round of the civics' battle, led by the Municipal Art Society (MAS), for the symbolic soul of Times Square. It was the harbinger of high-profile politicized events to come, though this clash had nothing to do with aesthetic merit.

Architecturally mutilated in 1964 after the *Times* sold the building to Allied Chemical Corporation which sought a "showcase for chemistry," the \$10-million facelift—hailed at the time in the business press as a hopeful sign that the "decaying travesty" of "once-proud" Times Square was in for a change<sup>18</sup>—covered the historic skyscraper with what Huxtable called "a no-style skin of lavatory white marble with the look of cut cardboard."<sup>19</sup> The 25-story former limestone and terra-cotta building designed in Italian-Renaissance style by Cyrus L. W. Eidlitz remained, nonetheless, to the world at large, the Times Tower. "It could probably be made of marzipan and it wouldn't matter. The odd little icon is universally known by the illuminated signs," remarked Huxtable.<sup>20</sup> Its evocative power was part illusion, yet its signs assured an enduring iconic status just as its site, shape, and silhouette had definitely guaranteed its role as the symbolic focus of Times Square when first erected 80 years earlier.



Not long after the Johnson/Burgee designs debuted publicly, in a move designed to draw widespread attention to the fate of the former Times Tower, the MAS and the Design Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts co-sponsored an open, international design competition for the site. The goal: “focus attention on imminent large-scale development in the area” and “reflect on the possible meaning of this very special public space for the next generation.”<sup>21</sup> It was a “no-build” competition, the society explained, because the building—which no one seemed to reference any way other than by its namesake—was in private hands. For a \$45 fee, every entrant was given a kit with background information and photographs; entries were to be judged on the basis of a single drawing, 30 by 40 inches. Responses poured in, 565 of them from 1,380 individuals or teams registered in 17 states and 19 countries, many of whom were young designers seeking an opportunity for recognition in a blind judging.

The diverse entries, which included many buildings similar in shape to the original Times Tower and one, its literal reconstruction, “all made clear the deep, almost passionate commitment of architects to Times Square’s traditional, somewhat honky-tonk, identity,” wrote *Times* architecture critic Paul Goldberger in a review.<sup>22</sup> Consistent with that view, the entries also revealed a common distress with the radical transformation of Times Square proposed by the Johnson/Burgee designs. A distinguished jury of nine design professionals chaired by Henry N. Cobb, a partner of I. M. Pei & Partners and also at the time chairman of the department of architecture at Harvard University, deliberated over two days. In the end when it became apparent that no three entries had garnered sufficient support to justify the distinction between “prize” and “commendation” as set forth in the competition guidelines, the jury decided not to award a first-prize winner, but rather eight equal prizes of \$2,250, one of them to a poem. Considered from a professional perspective, the terms of the competition lacked an explicit program of action so it was difficult to come to a clear decision on a winner. It was an “idea” competition. Under the leadership of Cobb, the jury issued a public statement unanimously putting forth its judgment that the Times Tower site stands at a “unique point of confluence” and should be occupied by a building. “It is not an appropriate site for an open plaza or monument. . . the building on this site should respect and reinforce the

street walls of Seventh Avenue and Broadway. In this respect it would be difficult to improve on the wedge-shaped form of the present building.” The jury also stated that the building site should be “multi-use, and at least in part accessible to the public. It should include space devoted to those entertainment and communications functions whose continued presence is crucial to the life of the district of which Times Square is the vital center.”

Making a public statement was unusual for an architectural jury, though not for the MAS. Indeed, creating public awareness through a PR-type event, even if it turned out to be something of a polemic, was a tactic typical of the society. For planning and aesthetic issues of civic importance, the society’s leaders aimed to create media awareness of the policy questions, to get out front of an issue and present viable alternatives to the public at large and city officials in particular. The winning proposals from the Times Tower site competition, like other events to follow, were exhibited at the society’s Urban Center on Madison Avenue at 51st Street. The message: Leave the Times Tower site as it is, even if it is dead.

Creating an open space void of aesthetic interferences that would set off his Rockefeller Center-like ensemble of office towers was a Johnsonian idea. “It is not a distinguished building of any kind,” said his partner Burgee, who reportedly added that the former Times Tower ought to be torn down because it does not fit with Johnson’s plans.<sup>23</sup> Klein agreed, although he did not have to disagree with that assessment to understand that it was politically necessary to present an alternative centerpiece for the site. Toward that end he retained architects Venturi, Rauch & Scott Brown of Philadelphia as consultants. Asked to design an element for the site that would be in keeping with Times Square’s popular references and commercial vitality and that at the same time would be consistent with the scale of the proposed towers to surround it, the principals brought to the task a unique architectural understanding of contemporary American popular culture. Constrained by having to work with Johnson and Burgee’s designs as a given, they nonetheless kept to their own signature definition of architecture. With their colleagues, Robert Venturi and John Rauch quickly produced a series of daring iconographic images

based on the general idea of a “Big Apple for Times Square,” which they described as “a piece of representational sculpture which is bold in form yet rich in symbolism, realism with a diversity of associations. It is popular and esoteric...stark in its simplicity and monumental in scale....This 90 ft.-plus diameter apple is the modern equivalent of the Baroque obelisk that identifies the center of a plaza.”<sup>24</sup>

Times Square is “exceedingly important, if not the most important space in the city—wonderfully exceptional where the diagonal hits the grid,” Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown later explained in an interview.<sup>25</sup> They wanted to put something there—in the center of Manhattan—that would be as symbolic and imageful to New York as the Statute of Liberty at the island’s edge. They wanted it to be civic in character, memorable. The big apple small in the context of such huge towers, the bright-red glossy surface, the simple silhouette, all these elements reflected their well-studied view that contrasts in scale and unusual juxtapositions “are traditional means of creating surprise, tension and richness in urban architecture.” Just as it signified Venturi’s love of double meaning, the preliminary design was at the same time a “spoofing” of Johnson. The first but not the last of their brilliant if sometimes jarring visions for New York, the “Big Apple” was rejected by Klein.

Fellow architects and critics reacted with no more affection, however much some respected Venturi’s courage to tread where others did not even dare while others misunderstood his brilliant architectural wit. In an appraisal of remaining design problems in the Johnson/Burgee scheme, Goldberger caught the architect’s intent—“The Venturi plan is shocking, difficult to accept at first—and brilliant...the genius in this work lies in its ability to manipulate proportion and the element of surprise in such a way as to make us think of the apple as a monumental object, not as a common piece of fruit”—but then Goldberger saw no reason to save the ghost of what was once an “eccentric” landmark.<sup>26</sup>

Venturi’s Big Apple was brilliant, but “alien.” As expressed in the ideals and entries of the MAS competition, the opinions voiced at the BOE hearings and on the pages of the *Times*, New Yorkers did not want iconography for Times Square, or more specifically, they did not want a new icon. They simply wanted the former Times Tower preserved, whatever the state of its aestheticism, because it was an icon

of the city. As John J. Costonis defined the concept in his cogently argued book about preservation, *Icons and Aliens*, the former Times Tower was an icon because it was “invested with values that confirm our sense of order and identity.”<sup>27</sup> It represented the symbolic environment of Times Square, physically. Its embedded associations—as a public place of breaking news announcements, as a civic place of celebration and of protest, as a center of unrestrained commercialism—had made it so. The former Times Tower was synonymous with the “zipper,” the ball drop on New Year’s Eve, big billboards, and blinking electric signs. Venturi’s playful and ironic Big Apple may have been less alien than Johnson and Burgee’s awesomely corporate towers, but in the political context of the times, only relatively so. Both threatened the icon and hence, New Yorkers’ “investment in the icon’s values.” At a time of uncomprehended change, actual and proposed—a description fitting midtown Manhattan during the 1980s’ building boom—the bonds between people and icons, Costonis wrote eloquently, become especially compelling. In the face of environmental changes perceived to be a threat to social values, the call for preservation becomes a symbolic call for reassurance and psychological stability, not an aesthetic brief based on notions of beauty. Nowhere was this more so than in Times Square.

Only George Klein, his architects and the project’s most ardent public supporters saw the need for a “centerpiece” for a new Times Square. Using the language of design, the two different sets of architects set out criteria for evaluating what was appropriate for the dense concentration of office towers. The Venturi proposal was the most controversial put forth by the developer, but not the only one. A proposal for a seven-story, Italianate-style bell tower by Johnson and Burgee quietly circulated around New York about two years later, and before that the two partners’ more reasonable scheme to strip the old Times Tower down to its steel skeleton, paint it white and use it as a base for searchlights. The skeleton, in fact, has been the icon’s most enduring architectural feature. When built, the Times Tower was notable chiefly for its “progressively engineered steel frame and its pedantically designed details.”<sup>28</sup> Stripping away those details had done nothing to diminish the tower’s appeal as a place to make a statement. In 1968, for

example, the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude, known for their wrapping of civic monuments, focused their intentions on Allied Chemical's "Flat Iron" tower, but to no avail.<sup>29</sup>

In the mid-1980s, among the architects, planners, historians, and other experts opposed to any kind of radical alteration, no discussion of an appropriate "centerpiece" was really necessary. The ghost was sufficiently evocative. Not unexpectedly given the symbolic importance of the tower, city and state officials could come to no agreement on an alternative idea for the site. Having learned their lesson, somewhat reluctantly, they gave in to the status quo—though not before the leases with TSCA had been signed in summer 1988.

### **Reframing the Issue**

Ominously, the Johnson/Burgee designs for the 42DP towers threatened to become a model for the entire district's reconstruction. As the MAS and other civic groups viewed the situation, at stake was nothing less than the permanent scale of the neighborhood, and the diverse character of its commercial uses and entertainment activities; these were economically fragile enterprises which could not afford the high rents in new buildings and would not survive a relocation. Because it feared a "Williamsburg, Virginia type of preservation," recalled architect and MAS director Paul Byard, the 45-member board<sup>30</sup> considered it very important to save the low-rent space in structures like the Brill Building. As the early headquarters for America's popular music industry, the Brill Building, built in 1931, held symbolic significance; it was, as one historian noted, "a building that had a warren of small gyms and the offices of fight promoters and commission agents, in addition to demonstration rooms for vocalists, songwriters, pluggers, and others...."<sup>31</sup> A hollow prospect haunted the MAS board: "The future may be preserved theaters with nothing around them to support them in a cultural sense, and our theater district could become a kind of Houston."<sup>32</sup>

When the detailed fabric of daily commerce was examined through this refracted lens of awareness, the MAS discovered another dimension of the district beyond the Broadway theater industry:

the bars of Eighth Avenue thriving with middle-class black patrons, the lunchtime-frequented boxing clubs, the dwindling pool rooms, and the ubiquitous movie theaters with first runs catering to low-income customers from all five boroughs, the family-owned businesses and restaurants like the Grand Luncheonette—which grabbed its moment of national fame in *Taxi Driver* (1976)—whose longevity in Times Square made them neighborhood fixtures. Under the dedicated joint leadership of architect Hugh Hardy and landscape architect Nicholas Quennell, the MAS formed an Entertainment District Committee to spearhead the organization’s new agenda for Times Square—to protect the “bowl of light” created by the low-density buildings which made up the bow-tie; to preserve the visual, glitz character of its commercial billboards and electronic signs; and to secure landmark status for its legitimate theaters. The group worked “feverishly” to make progress on what the society’s board minutes noted as “the three s’s: Size, Shape and Signage,” while struggling with the larger issue of zoning. The committee was convinced, Hardy reported to the MAS board, “that if we clean up Times Square by tearing it all down and replacing it with office towers, we will be doing the wrong thing by eliminating the area’s diversity.”<sup>33</sup> A few months later, Hardy passionately reiterated the MAS’ mission:<sup>34</sup>

Times Square is overutilized and underappreciated... We [the Entertainment District Committee] have begun to counter the argument that you have to abolish Times Square in order to clean it up. We have become effective in persuading people that if business continues as usual, Times Square will disappear. We are making it clear that we are not opposed to all development. We will address the issue of density, how much and where. The shaping of bulk is a primary consideration. In this regard, the Portman Hotel (Marriott Marquis) has proved to be a helpful ally by being an example of what not to do. We will attempt to propose a way to approach our goals through taxation and zoning rules and regulations, and we will continue to promote our views zealously. We will have to identify the coalition that will then go and do our work. We have to convince interested parties that they will have to cooperate or lose the neighborhood.

First and foremost, it was Hardy, principal of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, who championed the Times Square “character” issue within the MAS. While others fixed on the physical environment of the district or the cultural significance of the theaters, for him, the cause was all about promoting public culture, theater in particular. “I though people were missing a lot of what made Times Square the vibrant, diverse area is was: the breadth of activity and popular culture that the district

attracted.” The ancillary activities—voice trainers, instrument suppliers, prop and costume makers, lighting specialists, makeup and set artists, booking agents, talent brokers, publicists—that support the theater have always been important, he stressed in an interview, to defining the character of the Theater District.<sup>35</sup> Little of this might actually get preserved, but this image was another form of romanticism about Times Square.<sup>36</sup>

Hardy and his fellow MAS board members, in particular Philip Howard and Kent Barwick with staff member Darlene McCloud, set out to change the public consciousness about Times Square. To convince an unknowing and skeptical public that the lights, glitter, and tawdry character were worth preserving, Barwick staged PR stunts, developed effective pamphlet literature, and deployed organizational tactics designed to make the “character” issue a cause celebre. The board focused the staff’s efforts on what it believed to be the greatest strength of the organization, coalition building, since “The Society, operating by itself, cannot possible make any difference: our power comes from being able to spur action.”<sup>37</sup> First, as discussed earlier, it sponsored an international competition for the former Times Tower site in March of 1984, which “worked,” Barwick said, “because it was a prolonged public relations device. It got people talking and asking questions.”<sup>38</sup> To attract an even bigger audience likely to be sympathetic to the cause, Barwick teamed up with Tama Starr, the third-generation head of her family’s Artkraft Strauss Sign Corporation, which had built most of the famous Times Square signs, and other civics. On Saturday evening the weekend before the first set of public hearings on the 42DP, they staged a half-hour blackout of all signs at 7:30 P.M. The idea was to surprise and stun the thousands of theatergoers bustling through Times Square on the way to their 8:00 P.M. curtains, thereby dramatizing the importance of signage and bright lights in Times Square—what would be lost in a corporate-dominated redevelopment plan. For maximum effect, they turned off all the signs, one by one, at two-second intervals, so the television cameras could pan the spreading darkness from south to north. The one sign deliberately left lit, the 20-foot-high-by-40-foot-wide Spectacolor display on the former Times Tower flashed the message: “HEY, MR. MAYOR! IT’S DARK OUT HERE! HELP KEEP THE BRIGHT

LIGHTS IN TIMES SQUARE!” The hugely effective attention-getting event—nothing like it had happened since World War II—was repeated in November, on the eve of the BOE’s final deliberation of the 42DP.<sup>39</sup>

The next move may have been one of Hardy’s most inspired ideas to dramatize the case. In the summer of 1985 before the City Planning Commission (CPC) hearings on new planning controls for the Theater District scheduled for September, he enlisted the aid of Peter Bosselman and his Simulation Laboratory, or Sim Lab, to depict what would happen if the Theater District was fully developed under existing zoning. Sim Lab’s task was to suggest an image of what might be possible in Times Square under Hardy’s “ideal world” of “revised zoning controls and stronger signage and set back requirements.” Bosselman, director of the Environmental Simulation Laboratory in Berkeley, California had developed Sim Lab with a grant from the National Science Foundation to provide a realistic “experience” of what a project would really look like *before* it was built by moving through a three-dimensional model, and had tested it out with a simulation of San Francisco’s proposed Downtown Plan. The model was judged to be very influential, Hardy and others argued, because it had been helped citizens and civic decision makers understand the consequences of the rezoning proposal. The effect in San Francisco, one member explained, was one of horror at the impact on downtown. By applying the same simulation techniques to Times Square, the MAS aimed to tell the city that they “didn’t want Sixth Avenue from river to river.”<sup>40</sup>

Bosselman developed a 16-foot miniature model of every building along Seventh Avenue and Broadway between 42nd and 53rd Streets, including signs, billboards, cars, people, statues, and trees around the ticket booths on Duffy Square, which was capable of portraying three worlds of Times Square—existing, fully built out, and ideal. Accompanying the model was a 12-minute film narrated by Jason Robards showing each development scenario of Times Square from a pedestrian’s viewpoint. The impact of the model, first shown publicly at the CPC hearings—with the cast of *Big River* for live-entertainment backup—was immediate and riveting. “The dramatic change in scale dazzled the eyes of designers, planners, and nonprofessionals alike,” Bosselman wrote later.<sup>41</sup> Apparently fascinated by the



model's vivid impression of the neighborhood and the alternative transformations that awaited it, the commissioners subsequently came to speak of Times Square as an "Entertainment District." Though admittedly modest, this acknowledgment of the neighborhood's unique role in New York marked the MAS' first tangible triumph. The change in language in official circles, Barwick noted in a mood of self-congratulation at a board meeting, was what changed the argument.<sup>42</sup> In the terms Donald A. Schön used to describe *The Reflective Practitioner*, it reframed the issue.

After viewing the model, an impressed Paul Goldberger led off his architectural review in the *Times* with the provocative title, "Will Times Square Become a Grand Canyon?" In this article, Goldberger attacked the city's zoning incentives and policies:<sup>43</sup>

The light, the energy, the sense of contained chaos that have long characterized Times Square are essentially incompatible with high-rise office buildings, or with stark and harsh modern hotel towers like the Marriott. It has been clear since the first of these towers went up in this part of town more than 15 years ago: these buildings do not fit. They do not reflect the character of Times Square and the theater district; they squash it, as firmly as a shoe might flatten an ant.

The Times Square Sim Lab model was a stunning success. Astutely, Hardy and his committee and Barwick had reasoned through how best to use the model, how its message would be received, and what impact it could have on the policy debate. The group wanted to show a lot of affordable signage, the necessity of the "bowl of light"—air space and a view of the sky. It had gone back in time to study the 1916 Zoning Ordinance, which had been developed with light and air as guiding principles. But as one director remarked, "It doesn't do much good to tell someone who is 25 years old that the 1916 zoning was better. Millions of square feet of typists makes theater-related uses impossible."<sup>44</sup> The model proved to be tactically important because it could convey the significance of FAR in lay terms, without depending upon the use of abstract concepts. The MAS leaders used it to take a positive position of what should be there rather than coming out with negative messages about FAR targeting developers, which, Byard stressed at one meeting, from a political perspective, would more likely be perceived as an impossible posture by city policy makers and politicians. From the start they saw the Sim-Lab model as a device around which a strong PR campaign could be mounted, and they craftily used the model to promote the

Society's ideal vision with a choreographed plan of heavy press and media coverage and presentations of the model and the film to the theater unions, all of their professional associates and the city's other civic organizations. "If you are opening an exhibit on Times Square in the middle of August," advised Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, who was among those who early on believed that the proposed plan for the 42DP would sterilize Times Square, "and you hope to change the results of anything, it would be wise to plan on generating a barrage of publicity."<sup>45</sup>

Other PR events followed: the inaugural of the new Cannon sign with its three miles of neon (November 1985); a *Times* op-ed titled "Times Square's Last Rites" (June 1986) by Philip K. Howard, long-time active MAS director and corporate lawyer who was later elected chairman of the society; creation of the Broadway-star-studded "Committee to Keep Times Square Alive" to support the cause and raise voices at public hearings. One such event, a press conference, occurred on the front steps of City Hall the day the BOE met to vote on the new design rules mandating signs, lights, and setbacks in Times Square, which the MAS had worked so hard and diligently to birth (January 1987). There were exhibitions on Times Square at the society's Urban Center headquarters on Madison Avenue at 51st Street<sup>46</sup> and a presentation of a Certificate of Merit to Artkraft Strauss (June 1987) "For delighting millions over many decades with extravagant sign displays that wrap Times Square in ribbons of light and color, and for bringing glamour and glitter to the nation's New Year's Eve for the past eighty years by dropping the lighted ball on top of the Times Tower."<sup>47</sup>

All of these events were opportunities for the MAS to get its message across, to educate the public as to what the organization was trying to do, which though not inconsistent with the discarded Cooper-Eckstut design guidelines for the 42DP, was diametrically opposed to the city's current program for the project. Even after the new Times Square design regulations had been legislated into law in February 1987, Barwick pointed out the necessity of continued vigilance. Not only did he feel that developers might try to elude the legislation, the work was far from done: two other key items on the city's planning agenda for Times Square—rezoning and landmark designations—were still to be debated

and decided later that year. The MAS needed to mobilize its constituency, get out in front of its issue, and stay there. It would be the “Passionate Minority,” to borrow a term from Anthony Downs.

If the issue of signage struck a dissonant chord with the aesthetic legacy of the MAS, protecting the physical and cultural character of a prized city neighborhood, even Times Square, fit squarely within its organizational mandate to preserve the best attributes of the city’s civic appearance, especially after the city passed a Landmarks Preservation Law in 1965. Since the 1950s the MAS had seen its role as erecting a scholarly foundation for the preservation movement; its record of activism in the early days of that movement when lots of glorious buildings in New York fell victim to the wreckers ball was mixed. The genesis and character of the society imparted a conservative bent which worked against aggressive advocacy, so its support in several key cases turned out to be belated, sometimes too late. Also, the need to avoid outright controversy within the boardroom lest it cause a split within its own ranks, as was the case in the society’s reluctance to come out against the 42DP before the BOE in 1984, could lead to waffling. In short, the MAS was not always a forerunner in high-profile land-use controversies. But as the campaign to save the character of Times Square revealed, slow entry into the fray did not diminish its ultimate impact.

### **Forging a New Political Consensus**

A good-time place that belongs to everybody: democratic, freewheeling, hedonistic. A mix of high and low culture, theater, popular entertainment. An experience for consumers, tourists, families. An aesthetic cacophony of contradictory styles, scales and materials, honky-tonk diversity. Brash bold signage and glitz, unabashedly commercial. Crossroads of the World, an international trademark, an instantly recognizable brand.

These were the set pieces for rescripting the redevelopment of West 42nd Street. The belated task began in earnest in mid-1991, went public in concept in the fall of 1992, then formally debuted in detail a year later. Defined first as “interim,” *42nd Street Now!* put forth a dramatically different plan of

programmed uses calibrated to restore “New York’s quintessential entertainment district”—without conceding an inch of ground over the office towers that would “continue to be a major part of the long-term redevelopment.” “The focus of the renewed 42nd Street will be theaters and all that goes with them: restaurants and retail establishments related to entertainment and tourism. Once again 42nd Street will be able to take its rightful place among the world’s great urban entertainment destinations.”<sup>48</sup> In concept, visual imagery, and language, the plan revealed a shift in values so clear and so startling that a certain level of disbelief and cautious skepticism accompanied the general enthusiasm with which it was greeted. After rumors of The Walt Disney Company’s interest in restoring The New Amsterdam Theater as its New York venue for legitimate theater solidified into a hard financial commitment affirming the new entertainment focus for West 42nd Street, a cartoon by Arnaldo Franchioni in the *New Yorker* titled “Fantasy: The New Forty-Second Street?” captured the inescapable irony of such an improbable transformation of planning values.

When the idea of a new “interim” plan for 42nd Street was announced to the public in August 1992, simultaneous with the formal collapse of the old plan, the editors of the *Times* called the city and state’s decision to suspend construction of the four office towers “A New Opening for Times Square.” Those at *Newsday* saw it as “an unexpected benefit from the city’s economic doldrums, a “Glad Reprieve for Times Square.” At *Crain’s*, editors advised, “Times Sq. Revival should center on consumer uses.” The “opportunity—for faster restoration of the street-level hurly-burly and empty theaters” and the benefit of a revitalized street “in a manner more in keeping with its ebullient history” came with caveats: “An interim approach is hardly ideal. Why struggle to revitalize 42nd Street only to tear it down later?” It also came with costs: the developers were “relieved of the immediate cost of renovating the sprawling Times Square subway interchange.” Relief that the planned towers would not go forward, as designed, was palpable, as was the hope that the alternative plan would hold a silver lining. *Newsday’s* editors were prescient: “there’s a good chance that if the entertainment center proves successful, it could influence the design—and aesthetic integration into Times Square—of any office towers that are ultimately built.”<sup>49</sup>

Any type of consensus on the 42DP was rare because the credibility of public action on this project had long since disappeared. “We had become a pariah, politically,” Robertson recalled.<sup>50</sup> Even those with objections to individual pieces of the new plan applauded the whole new vision as a sign that a future existed for West 42nd Street. The city and state’s real task now was to get from the present empty, desolate street to the new vision of West 42nd Street as a place of lights! signs! dancing! It was “post-no-bills” territory. Something needed to happen, fast. While the formal, more detailed vision was in the process of being worked out, it was “urgent,” said the *Times* “that the emptiness be refilled.”

Both sides knew that they could not leave the project where it was, boarded up. TSCA, according to George Klein, first recognized this. Carl Weisbrod, the project’s earliest visible leader and Robertson’s predecessor, said the idea was definitely hers. It was, she said, something of an epiphany: “The Gap opened a store at the corner of 42nd Street and Seventh Avenue in the spring of 1992, and they did it all on their own.” “It was a pivotal moment. Our retail guys said their numbers were incredible, and suddenly we realized what was possible here.”<sup>51</sup> The bill would be paid by TSCA under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the 42DP and the developer in which TSCA finally agreed to spend a minimum of \$20 million to fill these empty spaces in adherence with design guidelines being established as part of the new plan. “The quid pro quo for not having to build is that your have to bring 42nd Street back to life,” said Robertson.<sup>52</sup>

The “interim” goal of *42nd Street Now!* was to establish tourist and entertainment-related shops and other “lively late-night venues”—a music store with video theater, nightclubs, restaurants, a ticket agent, even a currency-exchange service center—in the existing buildings where the towers were to rise, some day. It was a temporary antiblight plan to attract pedestrian activity to the storefronts left vacant from the condemnation; the expectation was that the stores would remain in place for seven to 15 years. For the longer-term “full-build program,” in the jargon of the *Supplemental EIS*, the rescripted plan presented three revised priorities: an expanded program of entertainment uses for the midblock theater sites under the 42DP’s control; exacting design, use and operating (DUO) guidelines to assure visual

drama through razzle-dazzle lights and signage; and a commitment of public rather than private funds to complete condemnation of the project area's western end—which remained essential to cleanse the street of pornography.

The ideas that gave rise to these priorities came from several sources. These included the public debates and intensive studies of the entertainment district which led up to the 1987 design guidelines for and 1988 rezoning of Times Square and the 44 diverse and creative proposals for reuse of the historic theaters and the role-defining deliberations of the 42EC, renamed the New 42nd Street, Inc. (New42). At the same time, developer Douglas Durst put forth an “antiplan” plan of entertainments for eight historic theaters on the street, which his family controlled for a brief period.<sup>53</sup> Robertson's task was to meld the many ideas (crazy, out-of-the box, traditional), studies and reports (theater preservation, visual aesthetics, zoning, financial feasibility, retail development feasibility), and creative thrusts into a feasible plan, then aggressively market the vision and shepherd the plan through various approvals to ensure that would assure its implementation. Asked about the parallels with the project opponents' proposals for a tourist-based entertainment center, she once replied: “You know what? Every good idea has its time. The fact of the matter is that this is a good idea, even if we were not necessarily the authors of it.”<sup>54</sup>

The goal of the design-driven conceptual plan was to recreate the street's legendary luster, with razzle-dazzle honky-tonk details. The images and ideas in their visuals represent a look backward, with modifications for technology and activity options geared to current consumer tastes for pleasure and entertainment. It was nostalgia elevated by state-of-the-art marketing.

It would take more than two years to line up all the pieces before Robertson could orchestrate the formal presentation of *42nd Street Now!* in September 1993. For earlier changes to the program requiring amendments to the *GPP*, an Environment Assessment had been sufficient, procedurally. But the scope and direction of change embedded in the new plan finally put it over the top; UDC would have to completely redo the EIS, a time-intensive and costly—approximately \$1.6 million—task as necessary politically as procedurally. Not unexpectedly, the new entertainment and tourist-oriented agenda of the

plan garnered strong support from the performing-arts community, once their greatest fear—competition from additional legitimate-theater entertainment—had been assuaged.<sup>55</sup> This group, in alignment with architects and design professionals, turned out in force for the public hearings, more so than for the previous events. Together, they grabbed the most microphone time, 17 spots of the total 53 who testified. No other set of interests even came close; the closest were the property owners and tenants of West 42nd Street, nine in number. Those representing the arts and culture spoke in highly positive terms about the new plan—though the producers were against subsidies to Disney. Five major issues about the proposed changes to the *GPP* dominated the testimony: broadening the uses for the midblock theaters, especially the return of movies to the street; traffic and transportation impacts; procedures for the plan’s approval; the financial arrangements with developers and questionable need for subsidies, now; and, lastly, social and street conditions—continuing concern about possible displacement of sex-businesses and crime to nearby Clinton and Chelsea neighborhoods.

The response to the interim plan was overwhelmingly favorable: “beneficial,” “great and brilliant,” “will break deadlock on the project plan,” “realistic look at the area and heads project in right direction,” “generally sound,” “worth doing,” “laudable,” “imperative now.” Though some voices of dissent could be heard, the overall tone of the hearings was relatively mild compared to past events, as was the overall turnout.

The intense clash of values so dominant in earlier public forums was absent from these hearings, though disappear totally it did not. Many New Yorkers continued to voice dislike of the idea of inventing a new Times Square, preferring the place as it was: gritty and sinful, a spectacle characterized by unusual street life. This came out most forcefully in set of opinions invited by the *Times* and printed on its op-ed page. Luc Sante, the author of *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York*, cleverly parodied the idea of recapturing “that eccentric Times Square dazzlement” when he spoke of the requirement for “colorful characters” and “spontaneous public spectacle.” The well-respected and insightful architectural critic for *The Boston Globe*, Robert Campbell, summed up the character of New York, as revealed by Times

Square as the city “of the risk of the unknown, and so the turf of the inside dopester, the urban sleuth, the holder of private knowledge. Let Times Square remain so. Let it be always the home of entertainment, but never turned insider out to become, itself, a presented entertainment.” And in a sarcastic plea, Susan Orlean, a *New Yorker* staff writer and author of *Saturday Night* called for the old diversity. “If a peddler on Broadway is selling fake cellular telephone, shouldn’t others nearby be encouraged with tax abatements to offer, say, wind-up chattering teeth or those weird neon tubes?”<sup>56</sup>

Just as the new plan no longer fought with the street’s historic identity, the city and state’s commitment to the original high-density office program remained solidly in place. In the minds of many, *42nd Street Now!* was enticing but unfortunately interim. The editors of *Newsday* advised public officials “Better rethink those office towers.” The project was “out of synch with market reality,” they wrote: “the public had swallowed the idea of four bulky towers...with great difficulty. What made the idea of these monstrosities somewhat palatable were the public benefits dangled before New Yorkers. Like a brand new mezzanine for the dilapidated 42nd Street subway station...” but this was “kissed goodbye” back in 1992. “Redeveloping Times Square is still a worthy venture,” they concluded, “but what seemed feasible in 1982 may be obsolete....Fifty-story boxes never did cut it in Times Square.”<sup>57</sup> Long-time critics of the 42DP such as Senator Franz Leichter and the MAS were quick to forcefully reiterate their objections to a “massive give-away [that] will be New York City’s largest taxpayer-financed real estate boondoggle ever,” “unbelievably large subsidies...that never made sense for the site, and are even worse now.”<sup>58</sup> Veteran *Times* reporter Thomas J. Lueck questioned, “Must Show Go On?”<sup>59</sup>

These criticisms of the city’s financial deal with TSCA held even less political weight in the new deal climate than they had in the past. This despite the fact that they arose under the Dinkins Administration, which was less friendly to real estate development than the Koch Administration had been. The city could not afford, as the business bi-weekly *Crain’s* put it, “angering the company that had invested almost \$300 million in the project,” nor to lose the 5,000 jobs its subsidiary, Prudential Securities, Inc., had in New York, which “not coincidentally,” as *Newsday* pointed out, were in jeopardy.



The reason was simple: The city and state needed Prudential and its deep pockets to fund the antiblight interim plan and shield the public sector from possible further failure. Although they were in a position to default the insurance giant, “A default doesn’t do us any good,” said Vincent Tese, chairman of UDC.<sup>60</sup>

If as an entertainment venue West 42nd Street today comes off as being too intensely conventional—a nostalgia-oriented place packed with 38 movie screens, a wax museum, four Broadway theaters, and lots of restaurants and retail activity centers but missing the type of technologically advanced entertainments representative of the 21st century—the problem stems from the political exigencies of the rescripted plan, *42nd Street Now!* Driven by an immediate need to bring forth a new vision for the street after the project had collapsed along with the market for commercial development, the plan relied almost exclusively on visual aesthetics, in contrast to outlining a provocative program for innovative content. It was part of a process geared to rebuilding political support for the controversial project through new but comfortably safe images evocative of Times Square’s symbolic legacy, carefully and professionally supported by intensely detailed design guidelines. As a political document, the new vision aimed to heal controversy, rebuild anew a coalition of support, and market a set of hopes that, at the time, seemed almost improbable. In other words, the plan was not a content-driven call for innovative programming that aimed to cultivate way-out, cutting-edge entertainments, though Robertson and her colleagues probably would have welcomed such uses. Rather, the visual razzle dazzle of the images sought to assure key decision makers in government and business and, most importantly, the civics, that the 42DP was now firmly aligned with the historic symbolism of Times Square. Ironically, therein lay its limitation.

As much as *42nd Street Now!* guaranteed that public officials would be ready to proceed when the market recovered, in hindsight, the entertainment array on the new 42nd Street—relative to technologically empowered entertainment showing elsewhere, at the animated Bellevue Studios in the Music Box at Berlin’s Sony Center, for example—represents the status quo. In that sense, it represents a nostalgic redo in new dress. Without diminishing the significance of the project’s achievement, in light of

the possibility for exciting avant-guard fare, the programmatic build-out of West 42nd Street represents something of a missed opportunity.

The symbolic and social meaning of Times Square could mobilize powerful imagery. When deployed skillfully, it could fashion public opinion and spotlight planning issues of particular importance to special interests. As a tactic of opposition, however, symbolism could not protect First-Amendment rights, challenge eminent-domain takings, pose substantive questions about environmental impacts, inject procedural delays on a continual basis, or threaten the economic feasibility of the 42DP. In short, it was not a useful tool for those who sought to block the project completely—through litigation. Nor could symbolism reveal the underlying economic dynamic of the public sector’s deals with private developers or address other hard questions of public policy. Without these, symbolic politics ruled the debate over Times Square’s future. Politically effective in shaping the dialogue, it was nevertheless limited. That argument is, however, part of the bigger story of the transformation of West 42nd Street and Times Square.

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As an icon of city life, Times Square represents a symbolism that heralds change as a core identity. That core identity is not frozen in any one frame—neither the roof gardens and nightlife habitués characteristic of West 42nd Street pre-Prohibition, nor the 1930s romantic legend of Broadway, nor the public place of the 1940s where people gathered to listen to the ballgame or wait for war news, nor the 1950s playground of military shore leaves, nor the fleshpots and drug bazaar of the 1960s and 1970s, neither the Black and Latino teenage chill place of the 1980s, nor the last gasp of adult entertainment still present on the edges of the district in the 1990s—it is all these things and more arranged in some time-blurred montage of symbolic imagery. The cultural identities have been so fused

together in the meaning of Times Square that the sheer inclusiveness of the place represents a trip across demographic groups, income and status, and race.

The new Times Square remains synonymous with the city itself, its commercialism, intense energy, urban insouciance, and cultural and economic diversity. The five meanings that over time fashioned the symbolism of place of Times Square for New Yorkers and the world at large—Theater District, Turf of Promoters and Showmen, Great White Way, Testing Ground, Quintessential New York—are still in tack, with some modifications and one exception. In place of the larger-than-life entrepreneurial impresarios—Hammerstein, Ziegfeld, Klaw and Erlanger, Thompson—the Turf of Promoters and Showmen is now home the world’s giant entertainment conglomerates—Disney, SFX Entertainment—who have brought a corporate approach to theater production at the same time that 42nd Street’s other theater marquees have been renamed—the Ford Center for the Performing Arts and the American Airlines Theater. If the commercial aesthetic has found new and highly expensive forms of expression once again relighting Times Square, the place has lost its edge as a social testing ground, for now. As is so evident in the hyperbole and the record-breaking numbers of tourists, Times Square continues to embody the quintessential city image for the nation at large. A number of broad economic and social forces are contributing to New York’s renewed position as the “Shrine of the Good Time” and its glow as a “spectacle of urban life.” As in past, Times Square takes up its historic role by serving as the symbolic metaphor. As an enduring stage for city life, the transformed Times Square presents itself as a work in perpetual progress.

## NOTES

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1. Laurence Senelick, "Private Parts in Public Places," in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), 329-353, at 329.
2. Virginia Dajani, *The Livable City*, no. 10/1 (October 1986): 1; Hugh Hardy, "Make It Dance!" *Ibid.*, 6; Marshall Berman, "Signs Square," *Village Voice*, July 18, 1995 23ff; Herbert Muschamp, "Smaller Is Better: Condé Nast in Times Square," *New York Times*, May 18, 1996, 24.
3. Margaret Knapp, "Introductory Essay, Entertainment and Commerce," in *Inventing Times Square*, 120-132, at 120.
4. Ada Louise Huxtable, "Re-inventing Times Square: 1990," in *Inventing Times Square*, 356-370, at 360.
5. Knapp, "Introductory Essay, Entertainment and Commerce," 130.
6. As a metaphor the city, the Big Apple first appeared in print as early as 1909 as a description of the dominant metropolis in the nation—"New York [was] merely one of the fruits of that great tree whose roots go down in the Mississippi Valley, and whose branches spread from one ocean to the other....[But] the big apple gets a disproportionate share of the national sap." Twenty years later it surfaced as a general metaphor for the acme of success in certain endeavors (show business, jazz, horse racing), so many of which (along with their symbolic streets) were in New York that the city itself, Allen wrote, came to symbolize the acme of various fields—would mean more than removing the "low-life undesirables." Irving Lewis Allen, *The City in Slang: New York Life and Popular Speech* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 62-63.
7. NYS UDC, *42nd Street Development Land Use Improvement Project New York, New York, General Project Plan* [hereinafter referred to as *GPP*], Section 5, C.2.
8. Paul Travis, author interview, January 27, 1992.
9. NYS UDC, *42nd Street Development Project: Request for Proposals*, June 1981, 2.
10. The language of the BOE called for renovation and use of the Lyric, Apollo and Selwyn Theaters (the Site 5 theaters), the Harris theater and the New Amsterdam as "Broadway Theaters;" the Liberty and Victory Theaters were to be used for nonprofit theater. Retail, restaurant or mart-related conference uses were permitted for the Empire Theater, and retail or restaurant use was permitted for the Times Square Theater. The *GPP* allowed that "one of two theaters could be used for first-run movies on an interim basis while being renovated or until theater use becomes feasible."
11. At the time of their conditional designation in April 1982, the Nederlander Organization had been in business 20 years and controlled the operation of some 25 theaters located in New York, Chicago, Baltimore, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix, St. Louis and Detroit; ten of these theaters were in New York. As the Eastdil analysis prepared for UDC's board noted, Nederlander had a contract to purchase the New Amsterdam for \$5.2 million and, after closing, would contribute the property to UDC in order to obtain the designation for this site. In addition,

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Nederlander was designated to develop the Harris Theater at his cost and operate it as a legitimate theater.

12. American Practice Management, Inc. (APM), "Assessing Market Feasibility of Ten Theaters on 42nd Street," report prepared for the NYC Public Development Corporation and the NYS Urban Development Corporation, with the assistance of Brannigan-Lorelli Associates, Inc. and Theater Now, Inc., January 1981, 19.

13. NYS UDC, *42nd Street Development Project: Final Environmental Impact Statement*, S-13.

14. NYS UDC, "42nd Street Development Project: Update," October 22, 1984, 9.

15. Jack L. Goldstein, "Development and the Threat to the Theater District," *City Almanac* 18 (Summer 1985), 23-24, at 24.

16. APM, "Assessing the Market Feasibility of Ten Theaters on 42nd Street," 3.

17. James S. Russell, "Golddiggers of '84?" *Architectural Record* 172 (October), 125-131, at 131.

18. "Old stage, new stars," *Business Week*, October 24, 1964, 132-133, at 132.

19. Huxtable, "Re-inventing Times Square: 1990," 358.

20. Ibid.

21. Virginia Dajani, "Times Tower Site Competition," *The Livable City* [a publication of the Municipal Art Society], October 1986 (Number 10/1), 2-3, at 3; George Lewis, "Lively Times Square," *Oculus* 46 (November 1984), 21.

22. Paul Goldberger, "Picking A Centerpiece For A New Times Sq.," *New York Times*, September 17, 1984, B1.

23. Arthur Spielman, "Saving Times Square May Mean End Of Its Best Known Building," Reuters North European Service, January 1, 1984.

24. Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc., "Times Square Plaza Design," description of preliminary design completed in 1984 as provided by VSBA.

25. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, author interview, December 4, 1999.

26. Paul Goldberger, "An Appraisal/Design for Time Square: Problems Remain," *New York Times*, July 15, 1984, B1.

27. John J. Costonis, *Icons and Aliens: Law, Aesthetics, and Environmental Change* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 1989), xv.

28. Huxtable, "Re-Inventing Times Square: 1990," 358.

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29. Three decades later, Pritzker-Prize winning architect Frank Gehry would be drawn into the design orbit of the icon when executives of Warner Brothers, which had leased the building for a Warner Brothers Studio store, asked him to let his imagination range freely on a facade design. His proposal, too, would have stripped the tower down to its steel skeleton, then draped it with a layer of metal mesh that would go up and down, billow and gather in folds, the entire “show” manipulated by a giant clockwork mechanism visible through the skin and programmed to provide a continuous animated spectacle day and night. Echoing Venturi’s reference to the Statue of Liberty, architectural critic Herbert Muschamp described Gehry’s design as “a Statue of Liberty for an era when Times Square had become the city’s Ellis Island, a symbolic port of entry for many of the city’s newest arrivals. At least, it’s a terrific symbol of the creative freedom for which the city stands.” Herbert Muschamp, “Heart of Whimsy in Times Square,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1997, C11.

30. The board roster read as a who’s who in the world of civic culture in New York: Kent Barwick, Jonathan Barnett, Norton Belknap, Paul Byard, Giorgio Cavaglieri, Alexander Cooper, Joan Davidson, Gordon J. Davis, Lewis Davis, John Dobkin, Michael George, Brendan Gill, Harmon Goldstone, John Guare, Hugh Hardy, Benjamin Holloway, Philip Howard, Karl Katz, Ming Cho Lee, Marilyn Levy, Reynold Levy, Ruth McAneny Loud, Richard Menschel, John Merow, the Very Rev. James P. Morton, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Frederic Papert, Charles Platt, David Prager, Tim Prentice, Nicholas Quennell, Carole Rifkin, Robert Rubin, Ross Sandler, Whitney North Seymour, Jr., Carl Spielvogel, Hoyt Spelman, III, Stephen C. Swid, David Teitelbaum, Helen Tucker, William Turner, Cyrus Vance, Margot Wellington, Elliott Willensky, William H. Whyte.

31. William R. Taylor, “Broadway: The Place That Words Built,” in *Inventing Times Square*, 212-231, at 216.

32. Gregory F. Gilmartin, *Shaping the City: New York and the Municipal Art Society* (New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1995), 455.

33. MAS, minutes of board meeting, July 11, 1985.

34. MAS, minutes of board meeting, October 17, 1985.

35. Hugh Hardy, author interview, January 9, 1997.

36. Hardy’s infatuation with the city, theater and Times Square in particular, began early in his life, as a youngster whose romance with the place can be traced, he said, to “that tender age when I used to sit alone in the balcony of just about every theater in Times Square watching second-run movies.”<sup>36</sup> “A star-struck theater devotee from the days of his childhood,” he started out as a young architect designing stage sets for the well-known designer, Jo Mielziner, at the Vivian Beaumont Theater in the 1950s. “The 1950s was a rare moment in entertainment history,” he recalled, “when everybody identified with it, with the musical *Oklahoma!*” Theater came to define not only his personal experiences and professional work—which by the early 1980s included designs for the Dance Theater of Harlem, the Joyce Theater, the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Majestic Theater—but his deeply held views on city life. In a short profile for *The New Yorker*, Brendan Gill explained the nature of the connection: “A principle that Hardy has championed... is that a community in which theater flourishes is in good health, while a community in which theater languishes is, whether it’s aware of it or not, ill.” Times Square was certainly the last place one would look for “any manifestation of the sacred” he wrote. “For

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Hardy, however, the theater is an intrinsically sacred activity.” (Brendan Gill, “The One-Man City: Hugh Hardy: The Latter-day Stanford White,: *New Yorker*, December 9, 1996, 124-127, at 126.) Hardy was a new kind of architect who took the term “arts” seriously in the Municipal Art Society.

37. MAS, minutes of board meeting, October 17, 1985.

38. Gilmartin, *Shaping the City*, 456.

39. This event occurred more than three years prior to the much-publicized public extravaganza “Stand against the Shadow” in Central Park rally staged by the MAS to protest the much despised proposal for the redevelopment of the Coliseum at Columbus Circle. For this event, thousands of New Yorkers arrived with black umbrellas in hand and traced the path of “the shadow” that be cast by the project’s two imposing towers (68 and 58 stories tall) across Central Park, shading acres of the city’s most prized open space.

40. MAS, minutes of board meeting, July 11, 1985. Also, see Peter Bosselman, *Representation of Places: Reality and Realism in City Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 106-119 (Times Square), 122-137 (Downtown San Francisco).

41. Peter Bosselman, “Times Square,” *Places* 4 (1987), 55-63, at 60.

42. MAS, minutes of board meeting, October 17, 1985.

43. Paul Goldberger, “Will Times Square Become a Grand Canyon? *New York Times*, October 6, 1985, H31.

44. MAS, minutes of board meeting, September 5, 1985.

45. MAS, minutes of board meeting, July 11, 1995.

46. The first put up in May posed the question, what should be done about Times Square? The second, on display in September 1985 for four months, exhibited the winning designs for the Times Tower Competition sponsored by the Society. A third put up in February 1987, after approval of the new design regulations, focused on Mayers & Schiff’s designs for Jeffrey Katz’s new signpost building (Two Times Square). In a chain of continued advocacy, others followed: an exhibit of the 42DP theater exteriors in October 1988 and between November and December of 1990, a photo exhibit of The New Amsterdam Theater documenting the shocking decay of the once magnificent theater.

47. MAS, *The Livable City*, 11 (June 1987), 11.

48. 42DP, Inc., NYS UDC, NYC EDC, *42nd Street Now!: Executive Summary*, 1993 (preliminary), 2.

49. “A New Opening for Times Square” [editorial], *New York Times*, August 10, 1992, A16; “Glad Reprieve for Times Square” [editorial], *Newsday*, August 9, 1992, 23; “Times Sq. revival should center on consumer uses” [editorial], *Crain’s*, August 10, 1992, 8.

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50. Anthony Bianco, "A Star Is Reborn: Investors Hustle to Land Parts in Times Square's Transformation," *Business Week*, July 8, 1996, 102-106, at 104.
51. Paul Goldberger, "The New Times Square Magic: Magic That Surprised the Magicians," *New York Times*, C11-12, at 12, as cited in an unpublished student-award paper, Susan Crowl Silberberg, "The Urban Design Politics of the 42nd Street Development Project, or Tweety Bird Meets Donald Duck: How the 42nd Street Development Plan Went to Seed," paper for MIT Urban Design Politics 11.302J, Fall 1996.
52. David W. Dunlap, "Long Delay Likely In Rebuilding Plan for Times Square," *New York Times*, August 3, 1992, A1, B2, at B2.
53. When it looked probable that he would lose his lawsuits against the project, Durst bought the leases to eight 42nd Street theaters in May 1989, after the city gave up an attempt to buy them from the Brandts. It was another tactical lever into the project. Based on his interests as a leaseholder, Durst would be party to any settlement as part of the relocation process once the property was condemned. Before the theaters were condemned, the Durst Organization reported pumped close to \$7 million into the first stage of an "alternative" plan for the redevelopment and rehabilitation of the historic theaters. The Obie-Award winning "CROWBAR," was staged at the Victory and rock concerts were held by Ron Delsener in the Lyric and HBO filmed a Carly Simon special in the Apollo (also known as the Academy).
54. David D. Dunlap, "Times Square's Future May Be Found Back at Its Roots," *New York Times*, August 4, 1992, B1.
55. Reportedly, project officials had made clear their intentions to avoid sponsoring direct competition with the Broadway theaters. The 42nd Street theaters were generally smaller and in considerably shabbier shape, Robertson explained; at the time, only the New Amsterdam and the Apollo were the considered exceptions capable of becoming a direct rival to the major theaters owned by Shubert, Nederlander and Jujamcyn. Though hardly an iron-clad guarantee, especially with the availability of \$18.2 million from TSCA for the renovation of two nonprofit theaters, the public pledges of limited competition appeared reasonable at a time when dismal economic conditions on Broadway made new theater ventures very difficult. Even more compelling a factor contributing to their support was the widespread opinion among theater industry interests put forth at the public hearings on the *DSEIS* that the revitalization of 42nd Street was critical to the theater industry since the perception that the area is unsafe "inhibits audiences."
56. Luc Sante, "Sin and Spectacle," Robert Campbell, "Let It Be Itself," Susan Orlean, "Street Life," *New York Times*, October 16, 1993, 23.
57. "Whither 42nd St.; Better rethink those office towers" [editorial], *Newsday*, October 13, 1993, 50.
58. Press release from State Senator Franz S. Leichter, "Senator Leichter Blasts Times Square Office Tower Deal," August 2, 1994; Thomas J. Lueck, "Financing for Times Square Leads to Harsher Criticism," *New York Times*, July 28, 1994, B3.
59. Thomas J. Lueck, "Must Show Go On?," *New York Times*, August 8, 1994, B3.
60. Dunlap, "Long Delay Likely In Rebuilding Plan For Times Square," B2.