

Avenue, contains buildings that generally do not rise above 20 storeys, Times Square's open feeling is now nullified by the 'canyonisation' effect of its flanking tall buildings (Figure 9.3). Times Square today feels more like one of several downtown Manhattan intersections, dominated by international-style tall buildings and traffic. The lack of social space to sit and stand still is certainly to the detriment of any civic or communal feeling the space might have.

Different senses combine to give an overall impression of the space. Ignoring visual aspects, the sounds of Times Square are overwhelmingly from traffic. As tourists build up during the day, and especially in the evenings and during the weekend, street performers, buskers, and the many different languages and accents of users merge into indistinguishable cacophony. The sense of smell is also dominated by traffic fumes, although with a characteristic New York overtone of hotdog vendors' frying.

Legibility

Lynch's notion of legibility was described in his classic work, *The Image of the City* (1960). It explores the meaning of a space to its users by breaking down that space into a semiotic lexicon of codes. The analysis reveals five basic elements, namely nodes, landmarks, districts, edges and paths. Their nature, position and relative importance provide the codes from which meaning can be inferred.

Nodes and landmarks are the most useful elements as regards design and symbolism. Lynch defines nodes as 'strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter', and the 'focus and epitome of a district, over which their influence radiates and of which they stand as symbol'. Landmarks are similar to nodes, except 'in this case the observer does not enter within them, they are external. They are usually a rather simply defined physical object: building sign, store, or mountain. Their use involves the singling out of one element from a host of possibilities' (Lynch 1960: 47–8). A legibility analysis of Times Square sought to understand how its spaces are assembled and perceived.

Using this analysis, the central bow-tie spaces within Times Square are each experienced as separate nodes, some of which contain landmarks. In 2002, landmarks contained in the south bow-tie spaces were the Times Tower, NYPD station, and the armed forces recruiting station. Although these could be entered by all, few people apart from those that worked there did; the important element was their landmark and symbolic value. Travelling north the next landmark in the bow-tie spaces was the Faces Fence (see below), then the statue of George M. Cohan, followed by the statue of Father Duffy (Figure 9.4) and the ticket booth TKTS. The most northern bow-tie space landmark was the advertisements opposite the Times Tower on the Renaissance Hotel. Surrounding landmarks from



9.3 The Times Square canyon

south to north included the Condé-Nast Building, Reuters Building, Toys 'R' Us shop, Marriott Marquis Hotel, and the Morgan Stanley Building.

The other legibility elements (districts, edges and paths) offered other insights. The roads are wide and noisy, and form definite edges, particularly Broadway and 7th Avenue. The pavements offer busy paths for pedestrians, as do the cycle lanes on Broadway and 7th Avenue. Finally, the study area itself represents a definite district as the ambience and design of the surrounding areas are quite different (excluding 42nd Street to the southwest). This is deliberate and a result of the zoning regulations, creating a distinct and valuable identity for place marketing purposes.

Land uses

A land-use survey allows for an assessment of the kinds of functions performed by that space, and how they relate to the space itself. This is important as it is the buildings and their occupants that frame the public space and create much of its symbolism. Times Square BID's own map (Figure 9.1) illustrated the key land uses in the area, at least those considered significant for place marketing purposes. In fact the BID's jurisdiction contains 25 per cent of the total hotel beds in Manhattan, putting tourists in the heart of theatreland and close to transport links.

Concentrating on the square itself, the stretch of six blocks containing the bow-tie spaces and all façades and corners that front onto the blocks