

more on duty at night. This meant that during the day illegal peddlers and buskers (mainly breakdancing kids) could sell and perform at certain times without interruption. Despite this, there was a constant to-ing and fro-ing between performers and safety officers (sometimes involving the NYPD), although the BID management confirmed that it is very rare for performers to be arrested. By contrast it is policy for public safety officers to move pan-handlers on immediately, although in practice this is done with a stated warning of a couple of minutes.

Acoustic buskers can perform without a licence, but amplified buskers have to apply for a licence from the NYPD, which involves an audition. Street vendors selling food must have a permit from the Consumer Affairs and the Food Departments of the city government, while non-food vendors must have a permit from the former only. Permits are often site- or district-specific.

The positions of CCTV cameras in the bow-tie spaces are shown in Figures 9.7–9.9 and 9.11–9.13. Officially, the BID had only one camera, placed outside the visitors' centre with a panoramic view of most of the study area. Most of the other CCTV cameras were owned by the traffic division of the NYPD. There were also a few private cameras, one on the 47th Street side of the Morgan Stanley Building and a few others well-hidden from view in private buildings.

### User behaviour

Detailed observation of the users of Times Square revealed, particularly up to lunchtime, that most were alone. The majority of these people in the week were white-collar office workers on their way to work, typically between 8.00–9.00am, and then at noon on their lunch break. Apart from smoking in corners outside the lobbies of their office blocks, these people did not engage with other users of space, and were always moving through Times Square at speed.

The second main user group, tourists, built up in numbers from lunchtime through the afternoon, until just before curtains went up on Broadway. At that time all the pavements and bow-tie spaces were packed. This pattern is repeated in reverse after the curtain comes down as people spill out on to the streets and gradually disperse. From 11.00pm activity slowly subsides until it is relatively quiet by 3.00am. At all times tourists stayed in groups and only interact with other groups when street activity took place, particularly busking.

The observation revealed that busking played a critical role in preventing Times Square from degenerating into a dystemic space;<sup>1</sup> creating instead the necessary activity and space for engagement between the diverse range of space users to occur. The example revealed how implicit codes in

the fabric of the case study area collectively produced an ambience, and distortions to that ambience, that are understood and interpreted by users. A sample of activities is included in Table 9.4.

## Conclusions

Times Square conforms to some of the characteristics ascribed in the literature on contemporary public space (see Chapter 3). Three major negative aspects were identified during the study: the displacement of 'the other', a restriction of impromptu activity, and an increasingly artificial and dystemic environment. All three are associated by critics with a reduction of civility and community, as well as with an overall homogenisation of public space. They reflect a general trend towards the increasingly commercialised public realm epitomised by Times Square.

In Times Square the analysis of place, activity, and signage suggests a space that plays its role on a global stage but is heavily commodified in its use and marketing. Here to some extent 'the other' has been displaced through commercial gentrification, and the lack of places to sit, stand still, or loiter is part of that process. In discouraging 'the other' from the public space, elements that foster civility and community are also removed. Moreover, the absence of sections of society has led to a homogenisation of ambience and function.

The attempts at restricting impromptu activity, largely through surveillance and control mechanisms, have a similar effect. Through the displacement of 'the other' and the removal of spaces to loiter, impromptu activity is discouraged. Because surveillance and control prevent this on a day-to-day basis, Times Square has become a more predictable experience.

A third major negative aspect is the dystemic and artificial environment produced by the factors already discussed and by the commodification of the space. Rather than simply being a space in which to be, public space becomes a space in which to consume. The consumption emphasis of Times Square and the dominance of global entertainment outlets, with standardised designs as well as products, introduce a corporate, impersonal and delocalised feel to the space.

However, while the dominance of office headquarters of multinational companies and financial institutions and of global fast-food and restaurant chains and retailers creates a space much like other central districts in other world cities, Times Square still retains several elements that make it unique. These include the interior and exterior design of some of the multinational chains, the presence of some small business, the