

concentration of entertainment functions, the interactive and automated signage, and of course the urban form of the space itself.

Similarly, the BID management system reinforces a duality of character in the public space. While it provides many elements that reinforce a sense of civility and community, it is financed for, and by, large corporate interests, which actively promote their commercial ends. Nevertheless, the consumption itself has also created scope for fostering civility and community, through the existence of cafes, restaurants, and shops in the area that provide the type of third-place environments for civility and community for those that can afford to consume.

Notwithstanding all the pressures for homogenisation, the activity behaviour table (Table 9.4) depicts a rich variety of activity occurring in Times Square. This partly reflected the management of the area which was not 'zero tolerance' (whether or not intentionally), and which instead gave some leeway to some who might be defined as 'the other' or strangers as well as vendors and performers.

Performers and vendors in particular managed to survive and even thrive because of the indented corners of some blocks in the framing spaces (aided by the widening of elements 8 and 11 – see Figure 9.5) around the bow-tie, and particularly in front of the Marriott Hotel (element 4). Performers were also helped by the lack of CCTV used by the BID and police, often allowing time to perform before being spotted. The fact that many spontaneous/irregular activities happen in spite of the restricted space, overt control and direct competition with established high-profile entertainment attractions is testament to the vigour and positive nature

of Times Square as a public space. Many of the decried characteristics of contemporary public space were certainly in the ascendant, but the essential elements of what gives Times Square its vibrancy and ambience were still also in evidence.

Finally, the social, racial, and cultural mix of users remained very diverse, though it did seem biased in favour of the middle classes and tourists, both characteristics which were to be expected. Many of the vendors and performers, both legal and illegal, were ethnic minorities and once would have been defined as 'the other' in Times Square. The sanitising of ethnic culture through such activities as breakdancing for tourists might have been appropriated in a way that place-markets New York as the centre for African-American street culture, but this can arguably benefit all involved: the performers, the businesses, and the tourists. By making the place more up-market the BID has contributed to the displacement of the ethnic minorities who socialised and hung-out in the area in previous decades. This would suggest that the 'other' has not so much been removed but rather sanitised into something more controllable and less threatening.

Note

- 1 An environment for purely impersonal and abstract relationships: Wallin 1998.