



2.15 Bryant Park with New York Public Library in the background

tradition, with many design features conducive to health, morality and civility, as they saw it. Various other smaller scale parks and squares were designed and built throughout the rest of the nineteenth century.

One of these, Bryant Park, is a park square in midtown Manhattan, on 42nd Street (Figure 2.15). The park site originally contained a reservoir surrounded by public space, and became the site for the 1853 World's Fair. After troops were stationed there in the American Civil War the area became a public park, named after the leading advocate of the creation of Central Park, William Bryant. In 1911 New York Public Library was opened adjacent to the park (www.bryantpark.org).

The recent history of Bryant Park typifies the approach to public space in New York. Zukin (1995) suggests that New York is marketing itself through culture and a commercial economy based on cultural symbols and links these ideas with the increasing privatisation of urban public spaces, claiming that cultural symbols and design can be used to include or exclude certain social, cultural and racial groups. As post-industrial New York cut much of the funding for the parks department in the 1960s, amid general social decay Bryant Park became a haven for 'undesirables' such as drug dealers and the homeless. Latterly the park has been taken over by the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, a private company that manages and decides on commercial and design issues related to the park (www.bryantpark.org).

By reclaiming the park for office workers through 'pacification by cappuccino', Zukin (1995: 31) notes that 'The cultural strategies that have been chosen to revitalise Bryant Park carry with them the implication of controlling diversity while re-creating a consumable vision of civility'

That the square is utilising cultural symbolism through design to attract and deter specific social, cultural and racial groups is, for some, evident not just in the cappuccinos but in the expensive restaurant, bar and grill, an open-air cinema screen sponsored by HBO, that shows old Hollywood movies in the summer, and in the Google-sponsored wireless network. To add to the deterrents, the park features benches that prevent lying down and sprinklers that prevent lying down on the grass. Private security regulates activity and behaviour and keeps out 'undesirables'. Bryant Park certainly illustrates the notion that public space in New York is increasingly consumed, something very different from the diverse traditions and cultures that arrived in the United States from Europe.

Downtown space 1: skyscrapers and corporate space

Rem Koolhaas (1978: 18) tells a story of a city without a manifesto, which the author then retroactively constructs and analyses. The construction of the gridiron system on Manhattan Island is described by Koolhaas as 'the most courageous act of predication in Western civilisation'. The gridiron divided Manhattan into real estate blocks suitable for speculation, essentially privatising the whole island, in much the same way as the aristocratic landlords did in London.

Girouard (1990), in describing the rise of New York, noted that the only substantial urban public space in the plan was a 'parade ground' between 23rd and 24th Streets (Girouard 1990: 314). New York emerged into Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee's (1998: 5) 'walking downtown phase' of development as mercantile economies industrialised, creating the first specialised central business district (CBD) in the Wall Street area. At this time the squares and markets of the old colonial settlement in the south of Manhattan were now replaced by businesses – banks, insurance companies, trust companies – located around Wall Street and the new stock exchange.

Merchants and outdoor markets felt the pressure to move from Manhattan's harbours to establish stores on Broadway, New York's Main Street. With the loss of public space under the 1811 gridiron, avenues and streets became increasingly valuable urban public spaces in New York. Retailers were aware of this and store windows and advertising began to adorn the streets. Stores grew in size quickly, and department stores began to appear, such as Macy's in 1857. Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee (1998: 6) observe that it was department stores that brought women into a downtown area that previously had been a largely male domain. These interconnected themes produced a city where public life had begun to commercialise.

In the eighteenth century people gathered at the town centre to participate in civic functions or public events. One century later, people came to the CBD to conduct their own business. Buying, selling, trading, and window shopping became the primary activities conducted in American city centres.

(Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998: 7)

The commercialisation of urban public space produced two distinct types of downtown urban public spaces. First, there is the entertainment downtown: the theatre and shopping districts of 5th Avenue, 42nd Street, and Times Square. Today in New York, and many other cities, this is the symbolic downtown. Second, the business district, creating skyscrapers that gave way, via zoning regulations, to public space requirements.