New York Citadel: A Future History of Hudson Yards

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New York Citadel: A Future History of Hudson Yards

Senior Project Submitted to
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of Bard College

by
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“On Manhattan’s West Side, a neighborhood rises. Built from the ground up, Hudson Yards is a triumph of culture, commerce and cuisine; a technological marvel that pairs style with sustainability; a convergence of parks and public space. In this new heart of New York, people come together to work, live and play – to enjoy chef-driven restaurants or shop the world's iconic brands – where experts and icons collaborate on the defining work of their lives, driving Hudson Yards boldly into the future.”

_Hudson Yards Website, 2019._
# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 2

Chapter One: A Brief History of Neoliberal City-building ............................................... 7
   I: Anti-Urban Roots of Neoliberalism ........................................................................ 8
   II: Koch, the Pied Piper (1978-1989) ..................................................................... 13
   II: Giuliani, the Enforcer (1994-2001) .................................................................. 19
   IV: Bloomberg, the Gilder (2002-2013) ................................................................. 21
   IV: Entering the 21st Century .................................................................................. 24

Chapter Two: The Wild Far West and the Tale of Two Cities ........................................... 27
   I: Broaching the Final Frontier ................................................................................ 30
   II: The Socio-Spatial Logic of the Gilded Age ......................................................... 37
   III: The High Line and Pseudo-Public Space ............................................................ 41
   IV: Enter Mr. Ross ................................................................................................ 47

Chapter Three: New York Citadel .................................................................................. 52
   I: Confronting Hudson Yards .................................................................................. 55
   II: Diagnosing Hudson Yards .................................................................................. 69

   IV: Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 74

Photos and Figures ....................................................................................................... 79
Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 90
Introduction

Above the once-derelict railyards of Western Manhattan rises Hudson Yards, the largest, densest, and most expensive private development in the history of the United States and the largest in the city since Rockefeller Center’s completion in 1939. The $20 billion project broke ground on December 4th, 2012, and is slated for completion by 2024. By then, the 18 million square foot project, comprised of 16 mixed-use buildings, will take up 28 acres of urban space.¹

The final design, the product of a massive collaboration overseen by developer Stephen Ross between star architects, engineers, planners, and consultants, promises a harmonious confluence of luxury housing and expansive commercial and retail spaces, in addition to “The Shed,” a cultural event space, and “Vessel,” a monumental interactive sculpture. In the middle of Hudson Yards there will be a public plaza comprised of six acres of open space and greenery. The latest technologies provide the development with its own communications network and power supply, and any garbage collected on the site will be whisked away through pneumatic tubes at 45 miles per hour.² These efforts ensure that the development will act as a self-sustained urban island, whirring with every imaginable form of social and economic activity, and representing the absolute best of everything that a contemporary city can offer.

This, of course, is the point: Hudson Yards is billed as a “new neighborhood,” “a city within a city,”³ and is set apart from the surrounding neighborhood in size, scope, and sheer glittering magnificence. Its high-rises will be among the tallest in the city, thus redefining Manhattan’s iconic skyline.⁴ “It’s creating a mixed-use environment that’s vibrant 24 hours a day, that is diverse in lots of different ways, and has something to offer everybody,” said developer Jay

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⁴ Stevens, Design Boom.
Cross, “I think the dream is to create a new urban environment, the likes of which we haven’t seen before, that’s responsive to the 21st century.”\textsuperscript{5} Clearly, Hudson Yards represents one vision of the ideal city, a concept that has been pursued by urbanists and architects since the first metropolis and that has driven the development of urban architecture and shaped the image of the city both in concept and concrete. The introduction of Hudson Yards to Manhattan’s landscape is a faint echo of the more democratic impulses of the modernist architects, who believed they could wipe away urban struggle with structural perfection. However, as the disastrous failure of America’s post-war urban renewal shows, these types of \textit{tabula rasa} architectural ideations are still susceptible to the complex historical, sociopolitical, and economic forces that converge within the urban grid.

Thus, Hudson Yards represents both the continuation of the tradition of manifesting a given ideal in urban space, as well as the culmination of the processes of local governance and globalized economic development that have defined New York’s urbanization over the past four decades. This understanding involves the social production of space, a theory first formulated by 20th century urbanist Henri Lefebvre, which conceives of urban development as defined by the dominant mode of production, arguing that contemporary urban spaces, as they are conceived, perceived, and experienced, reflect the political economy of the era of capitalism in which they are produced.\textsuperscript{5} Thus, analyzing Hudson Yards as a social product of contemporary capitalism requires an analytical trajectory that moves from process, the mode of production in the current era of global capitalism, to product, Hudson Yards as it represents the ethos of this mode of production. In this way, a dialectic formed between process and product which defines the social condition of


\textsuperscript{6} Henri Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, trans Donald Nicholson-Smith, Maiden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991)
the contemporary city, not only in a political or economic sense, but ideologically and metaphorically as well.

Although it is private, at least $5.6 billion of taxpayer money (around $280 million in direct public investment and over $750 million in special tax breaks) went into the development of Hudson Yards and the special West-Side district in which it resides: says Ross, “Where else have you ever seen this kind of public money for infrastructure to service a whole new development, in the heart of the city, with that much land and no obstacles?” The city’s enthusiastic embrace of the project under Mayor Bloomberg relates to the growth-focused nature of contemporary urbanism that has been guided by neoliberal ideological doctrine since the 1970s, when global and local economic crisis resulted in the reorientation of political power into the hands of financial elites. This turn represented the formal infiltration of the private into the public sphere, and thus the privatization of urban spaces and institutions became the modus operandi of late 20th century urban development.

New York’s transformation during this era, from a decrepit and dangerous center of urban blight to the glittering global superpower of today, represents the spatial outcome of this political-economic restructuring and its development and acceleration over time. Just as power has been concentrated in the hands of the elite few, power spatially makes itself felt in the commercial centers of our cities. The city that has emerged is plagued by socio-economic inequity that is seen spatially in the contrast between “Oz-like pleasure domes,” such as Hudson Yards, and “repressive ghettos and barrios” that are produced in parallel urban processes such as gentrification and privatization which serve to develop urban space unequally.

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8 Justin Davidson, “From 0 to 12,000 Feet,” New York Magazine, October 5, 2012.
The impending presence of Hudson Yards has been celebrated and condemned in equal measure by architects and architectural critics, real-estate developers and local-community members. It is arguable whether the development will become the city’s “greatest gift,” or a “dystopian outpost,” and whether it represents the best of New York, or the worst. However, the superlative character of this elite new development, and its nature as a condenser of spatial practices and urban activity within a centrally located, yet bounded site, mark it as objectively unprecedented in the history of American urbanism, and a lucrative subject of analysis in frames both global and local.

In this project I look at Hudson Yards as it represents the ultimate product of four decades of neoliberal urbanism, as well as a dramatic turning point in the trajectory of contemporary cityhood toward spatial extremes. Looking at Hudson Yards as a socio-spatial product offers a unique opportunity to understand the process, consequences, and trajectory of the contemporary mode of urbanism, both in New York and and other major cities around the world. Ultimately, I argue that the city has been remade in the image of the global elite, a dominant class made up of real-estate developers and corporate leaders, at the greater expense of the democratic right to the city. In this sense, Hudson Yards represents one extreme of how the infiltration of neoliberal ideology into urbanism reveals itself in the spatial order of contemporary cities.

I have organized this project in descending orders of scale, beginning with the macro context of the historical development of New York as a “global city,” to a contemporary journalistic investigation into the elite group of political and economic actors who dreamed and schemed Hudson Yards into existence, before finally approaching the development on a human,

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experiential scale, breaking apart its various elements in order to uncover how its spaces reflect the conditions of its design and the intentions of its designers.
Chapter One: A Brief History of Neoliberal City-building

Neoliberalism, “a force with enough power to grip much of human civilization,” is an economic doctrine that favors the free market, limits public investment, and encourages massive privatization. Since the 1970s, and its confluence of global fiscal crises, neoliberalism has shaped the trajectory of globalized urban development. What began as a utopian intellectual theory was transformed into an explicit political-economic regime in the 1980s until it has eventually become “the commonsense of [our] time.” As it guided the trajectory of the city’s urban development over the last quarter of the 20th century, it served to concentrate wealth and power in the hands of the financial elite—namely the real estate developers and corporations who control the urban landscape of today—while at the same time depriving the rest of the city of democratic access to public space and affordable housing.

Of course, the city has always been a site of socio-economic stratification and class conflict, and has reflected this stratification in its spatial configuration. However, what is new in the era of neoliberalism is the acceleration and institutionalization of the tendency, in contrast to the state-centered managerial approach of industrial urbanism. Also new is the subsequent transformation of the internal spatial organization of the city. As I will demonstrate, since the 1970s, the post-metropolis has undergone a transformation from a cohesive, albeit segregated, whole into a collection of bounded and internalized sites that serve to limit interactions with undesirable aspects of urban life, and reinforce the hegemony of global capitalism through guided consumption. In 2001, urbanists Marten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp offer a framing of this contemporary urban field as an “archipelago of enclaves.”

12 Peck, Jamie and Tickell, Adam “Neoliberalizing Space,” Antipode 34.3 (2002), 381.
the traditional schema of intra-urban forms; concepts like ghettos and suburbs, or the downtown and the inner-city have been reconsidered and adapted into a new language of urbanism which take into account the proliferation of new urban forms that have come about in the global era of “splintering urbanism.”

Hudson Yards indicates one extreme of this fragmentary tendency in urbanism. Akin to the gated community, maybe, or a descendent of the postwar suburb; however, Hudson Yards’ location within the city itself, and its consolidation of all aspects of urban life within its borders, indicates its status as an extreme spatial expression of privatism. In this chapter, I identify the historical origin of this particular impulse towards privatized enclaves and urban megaprojects, beginning with the roots of New York’s fiscal crisis that allowed for the inception of neoliberalism, and then tracing the resulting transformation of the city over the last quarter of the 20th century.

I argue that these spatial processes were informed by the rise of neoliberalism in 1970s New York, which was directed by the emergence of an elite urban class who sought to remake the city in their image, increasing its economic viability at all costs and valuing private development and investment over public good. Out of this history, Hudson Yards emerges as neoliberalism in its extreme urban form; an exclusive, privatized island designed around the interests and desires of the urban elite while capitalizing off of the global tourism industry and the consumption patterns of the new urban middle class.

I: Anti-Urban Roots of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism, as a style of urban governance, works within the broader category of the post-1970s economic shift known as ‘globalization,’ a term which represents the current form of...

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capitalism in the post-industrial era. Globalization is an umbrella term for a number of complex processes that, taken together, to define the city of contemporary capitalism. These largely stem from the rapid development of communication, information, and transportation technologies which serve, in Marxist terms, to annihilate space through time. This conceptualization, shown in the work of contemporary Lefebvre scholar and Marxist geographer, David Harvey (who has aimed in his scholarship to define “the manner in which capitalism produces a distinctive historical geography,”) argues that the geographical, or spatial, restructuring and expansion that such economic shifts entail is the result of capitalism’s ‘spatial fix,’ its tendency to resolve its crises of labor and capital surpluses through geographical expansion and restructuring.

As Johanna Bockman succinctly explains, the emergence of neoliberalism in the 1970s arose in response to a number of worldwide crises; the oil crisis, fiscal crisis, “stagflation,” as well as the spreading popularity of socialism around the world. These crises threatened capitalist hegemony and profit, and thus neoliberal doctrine was formulated in order to restore “the conditions for profitability and capitalist power.” The strategies formulated during this time, touted and popularized by conservative figureheads Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, largely consisted of using the market to govern, “distributing services and benefits according to the market logic of efficiency, competitiveness, and profitability,” while discouraging the expansion of the welfare state.

In this chapter, I frame the development of neoliberal urbanism since the 1970s as it was informed by the ‘spatial fix’ of the previous era’s crisis, namely, the government-subsidized abandonment of the city by the white middle class and aggressive program of urban renewal in

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19 Bockman.
New York guided by Robert Moses. As Harvey points out in his essay, “The Right to the City,”
the history of urbanization under capitalism can be understood as a series of urban crises and their
subsequent resolutions, which occur via urban transformation to the benefit of the dominant class
and the detriment of the have-nots. This cycle reinforces itself as new crises demand new
resolutions which expand in scale and scope with the acceleration of capitalism. In this paradoxical
way, the specific fiscal crisis that precipitated New York’s neoliberal turn came about through the
resolution of the previous era’s crisis.20

In the years following World War II, America was in the midst of a severe housing
shortage, with demand for housing far outstripping supply. Richard Rothstein, in The Color of Law,
describes how racist and anti-urban federal policies formed in response to this crisis aimed at, and
succeeded in, driving a white middle-class exodus from the city.21 In New York, it was urban
planner Robert Moses’ aggressive urban renewal plan that reinforced this process of urbanization
under capitalism. Under Moses, the process of “accumulation through dispossession” underwent a
dramatic shift in power and scope; Moses, says Harvey, “changed the scale of thinking about the
urban process.” With the aid of the aforementioned anti-urban federal policies of the time, Moses
performed a “total re-engineering of not just the city but…the entire metropolitan region.”22 His
aggressive program of “slum clearance,” aided by anti-urban federal policies, ultimately succeeded
in stabilizing the postwar urban housing shortage in New York, albeit “at the cost of hollowing
out the inner cities and generating urban unrest amongst those, chiefly African-Americans, who
were denied access to the new prosperity.”23 By 1960, over 2 million New Yorkers, the majority
white and middle-class, had abandoned the city for the suburbs.24

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22 Harvey, (2008).
23 ibid.
24 Moss, 69.
Thus, New York entered the 1970s drained of tax revenue, and quickly approaching its own fiscal crisis. Burdened with empty and deteriorating housing stock, and plagued with crime and social disorder, its urban landscape was virtually unrecognizable from the sanitized city of today. A pamphlet titled “Welcome to Fear City,” was distributed to tourists arriving at the city’s airports, offering a “survival guide for visitors to the city of New York:” “Visitors were advised not to venture outside of midtown Manhattan, not to take the subways under any circumstances, and not to walk outside anywhere after six in the evening.” Times Square was a place for pimps and prostitutes, Central Park a site of rapes and muggings, and the Meatpacking District, above which Hudson Yards now rises, a depressed post-industrial neighborhood teeming with underground sex clubs. Public transportation was unreliable at best, and became dangerous after dark. Homelessness was widespread, and lack of municipal funding left the homeless without public support. The Bronx was burning, but no one seemed to care. President Richard Nixon even declared the national urban crisis over, and withdrew federal funding from cities, resulting in even more infrastructural decay.

In 1975, the city formally declared bankruptcy. Denied a bailout from the still suburban-focused federal government— “[Gerald] Ford to City: Drop Dead” read a 1975 New York Daily News headline— the municipal government had to turn to New York’s financial institutions for aid. In his 2005 book A Brief History of Neoliberalism, Harvey marks this “iconic” crisis as the point where power shifted from the democratic government to the financial elites. Rather than walk away from the city at the peak of its fiscal crisis, Harvey writes, “they seized the opportunity to

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27 Moss, 26.
restructure it in ways that suited their agenda."\(^{28}\) In this power-grab, New York morphed almost overnight from “a manufacturing center with a welfare state orientation”\(^{29}\) to a city dedicated to the consolidation of financial power to an elite class.

In this way, one ‘fix’ begat another crisis, which was only to be resolved by responding to the lure of privatism that had guided the postwar abandonment of the city. As necessitated by the growth-ethos of neoliberalism, the crisis of 1970s New York demanded the return of the middle-class (and their patterns of consumption) from the suburbs. Thus, the program of urban revitalization set into motion by the city’s elite would transform New York into a city that was safe enough, clean enough, controlled enough, to compete with the comforts of privatism offered by the suburbs. Additionally, the city would have to be made attractive to business investment and the tourism industry, all in such a way that would generate profit for the dominant class.

Suburbanizing Manhattan involved the transformation of its public spaces, aided by the rise of new forms of public-private partnerships, the municipal subsidization of gentrification and real-estate development, and the formation of new forms of surveillance and social control. From these processes, their acceleration and proliferation over time, the new New York emerges as a fragmented landscape of wealth, marked by stark socio-economic stratification. For, as Harvey writes, *any* process of urban transformation under capitalism involves the displacement and exclusion of marginalized social groups. Just as with Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s reconstruction of Paris in 1848, and Moses’ rebuilding of Manhattan in the 1950s and 60s, both examples of “surplus absorption through urban transformation” which inherently occur “at the price of burgeoning processes of creative destruction that have dispossessed the masses of any right to the city whatsoever.”\(^{30}\) Programs of urban renewal operate exclusively through the displacement of the

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\(^{30}\) Harvey (2008).
poor and marginalized populations to the benefit of the dominant class, for “violence is required to build the new urban world on the wreckage of the old.”

Tracing the origin of Hudson Yards from the point of New York City’s neoliberal turn uncovers the twin histories of the city’s political-economic and geographical restructuring. I chronologize the phases of neoliberal urbanism through three distinct mayoral eras in order to show how the adherence to the logic of capitalism first led to the destruction and displacement of previous institutions, people, and spaces which opposed neoliberal expansion, and secondly to the creation of powerful new institutions and corresponding spaces which would reinforce its hegemony.

II: Koch, the Pied Piper (1978-1989)

A little over two years after the neoliberal takeover, in 1977, Edward Koch entered office as the first mayor of the new regime. Delivering his inaugural address at City Hall, Koch implored: “Come East and join us. Come East, and grow up with the new pioneers, grow up with the new City of New York.” He promised a city with “better services for the middle class, and a healthy climate for commerce, business and industry.”

Standing in the heart of the city, Koch was offering the same ideal that had been aggressively marketed to middle class Americans since World War II, and had driven them into the suburbs. At the same time, however, he was securing for the financial elite the soul of the city.

Over the next 11 years, “Koch convinced most New Yorkers of the legitimacy of a new neoliberal order.” Once in power, his primary task was to rebrand New York in order to bring back the middle-class from the suburbs and formally restructure the city’s economy around the

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31 ibid.
33 Soffer, 6.
welfare of the financial sector. This shift from “managerialism” to “entrepreneurialism,” in Harvey’s terms, manifested itself in the rise of new kinds of public-private partnerships, and the diversion of city resources from providing for its own citizens and their welfare, to promoting economic development for its own sake; the aim being to generate revenue by attracting human capital and corporate sponsorship.\(^\text{34}\) In other words, under neoliberalism, the city itself becomes a product; it must be packaged and branded for maximum appeal, and maximum profit.

Thus, Koch’s job was to make the city both “safe and exciting,”\(^\text{35}\) and restore its status as a global economic center. During his time in office, the Koch administration undertook the commodification of New York in two significant ways: by privatizing public spaces, and by subsidizing gentrification. In conjunction, these two processes laid the groundwork for the spatial order of contemporary Manhattan.

As the slowly rebuilding city entered the 1980s under Koch’s fiscally austere guidance, New York’s public spaces were sites of visual degradation. City parks were “turning into sandlots and mud,”\(^\text{36}\) monuments and statues were covered in graffiti, and playgrounds were unusable. Times Square, in the center of the city, “was the apotheosis of free-market economics, answering the demand for cheap and easy access to drugs, porn, and prostitution.”\(^\text{37}\) These spaces had become symbolic of urban decline as a whole, and were pointed to by anti-urban zealots as indicative of the city’s moral and physical decrepitude. In her 1995 book *The Cultures of Cities*, Sharon Zukin offers the term “symbolic economy;” through which she conceives of cities as both

\(^{34}\) Harvey, David, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism,” *Geografiska, Annaler* 71, no. 1 (1989), 3-17.


\(^{36}\) Soffer, 263.

\(^{37}\) Soffer 272.
material and symbolic constructions. “Every effort to rearrange space in the city is also an attempt at visual representation,” and “those who create images stamp a collective identity.”

Prior to Koch, the city was suffering from what Zukin calls an ‘image crisis:’ and “what begins as an ‘image crisis’ of a derelict city leads, on the one hand, to middle-class outrage about the quality of urban life and, on the other, to business people’s anxiety about the investment climate.” This outrage and anxiety, coupled with lack of municipal funding, obligated Koch to introduce the private into the public sphere. The neoliberal rebranding of New York’s public culture meant the privatization of the city’s public space, and subsequently the introduction of new forms of social surveillance and control.

This process began in 1981, when legislation passed to allow the demarcation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) across the city. BIDs allow for private interests to infiltrate the management of public spaces due to lack of municipal funding in the fiscally conservative climate of the decade. In this process, management of public space is transferred from the city to property-owners in the area, who then levy special assessments to those within the district for services such as policing, sanitation, beautification, and marketing. The Central Park Conservancy, a watered down BID in the form of a “private non-profit,” had taken on the task of Central Park the year before. However, the first formal BID was formed in 1984 in the Union Square neighborhood, which by this time had established a reputation as a site of drug-dealing and violent crime. The Union Square Partnership (USP) formed out of concern from adjacent businesses and private institutions such as ConEdison and The New School about how such a reputation would

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40 Zukin (2010), 137.
41 ibid, 141.
impact their revenue.\textsuperscript{42} By providing sanitation services, enforcing public safety, promoting economic development, and branding, the USP succeeded in transitioning the neighborhood from a democratic—albeit gritty—space into a controlled, privatized space for cultural and commercial consumption.

BIDs are a striking representation of the neoliberal shift as represented in local economic development schemes; they exemplify the ethos of privatism which was encouraged within both national and global frameworks in the 1970s and 80s. The rhetoric used to justify the establishment of BIDs stressed the positive impacts private development of public space would diffuse to surrounding communities, without the burden of public taxation. Rather than directly addressing public needs and problems through developing social programs, municipal actors in this era “strive to create incentives to attract private capital in hopes of achieving economic growth which will resolve the various social problems plaguing their communities”\textsuperscript{43} However, research and experience indicates that such “trickle-down” claims should be viewed with skepticism, as “the profit motive may be powerful but it is not easily harnessed”\textsuperscript{44} There is no evidence that economic profit generated by BIDs “spill over” to the general urban public, and, in fact, they often are actively detrimental to vulnerable urban populations. Inevitably, as Hajer and Maarten note, “the preclusion of what cannot be controlled almost automatically leads to the exclusion of certain uses and behavior, and eventually the exclusion of certain groups.”\textsuperscript{45}

Though instituted under Koch, BIDs proliferated in the ensuing decades under mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg, and this process was replicated all over the city. Today, there are 75 BIDs

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{42} ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Barnekov and Rich, 218.
\textsuperscript{45} Hajer and Maarten, 45.
\end{flushright}
in New York, which regulate 127 public spaces. In Naked City, Zukin points out that there is an “implicit bargain” that underlies the 1980s transfer from public to private management of urban space, where “discretely manicured” and well-serviced spaces are offered in exchange for adherence to a distinct set of social norms and behaviors. She argues that the ways in which BIDs operate, as pseudo-public spaces, represent a dangerous shift of power into the hands of private groups and property owners. With such people determining who “belongs” in public space, basic rights such as freedom of speech or public assembly can be withheld with no legal restrictions.

In this way BIDs directly threatens the democratic nature of public space, “[embodying] the private sector’s … role as both a moral and practical authority,” and operate on a basis of exclusion through discrete social control, while at the same time structuring the urban experience around consumption. Thus, through the privatization of public space, undesirables, such as the homeless, the poor, the young, are stripped of their right to the city, displaced by the ever-desirable consumers, and urban spaces become like “the suburban shopping mall: clean safe and predictable.” In short, such public-private strategies for urban growth only serve to benefit private interests at the cost of diverting municipal attention and funds away from addressing the city’s social problems. As Zukin writes, it is “people with economic and political power [who] have the greatest opportunity to shape public culture by controlling the building of the city’s public spaces in stone and concrete.” With the institution of BIDs in the 1981, this power would increasingly rest in the hands of private institutions.

The second major component of spatial re-ordering in the Koch era is the pro-growth mayor’s explicit subsidization of gentrification. In the theory of gentrification outlined by

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47 Zukin (2010), 145.
48 ibid., 128.
economist Neil Smith, the initially micro-level process entered into public policy in the 1980s in its “second wave.”

Under Koch, his biographer writes, “gentrification was a deliberate policy to make the city more economically viable … [he] saw gentrification as a way to revitalize the city by taking advantage of economic processes larger than the city government.”

He did so concretely by funding urban development that turned tenements into middle- and upper-class housing, expanding services to gentrifying neighborhoods, and providing tax-cuts, or “corporate welfare,” for downtown developers.

These developers, such as Donald Trump, profited from the generous tax cuts of the Koch administration and revamped the Manhattan skyline with luxury hotels and office buildings. Between 1981 and 1990, office space was increased by 22 percent due to rapid downtown development. Major construction of housing stock during this era was targeted towards the middle and upper classes as concern for the city’s poor fell to the wayside. The success of these policies caused New York to blossom as a cultural center and establish a global reputation in the information age. Meanwhile, those displaced by gentrification—largely the poor and the black—were pushed to the outer boroughs, away from the valuable retail and residential spaces of the center city.

Over the course of the 1980s, the processes of spatial production that I have outlined above served to change the appearance of the landscape, both by eliminating visible signs of destitution and subsidizing the development of new buildings and institutions. This was precisely the time when attention to the needs of impoverished city residents should have been highlighted,

51 Soffer, 7.
52 ibid.
53 Sites, 42.
as the crack-cocaine epidemic in this decade left many dead, incarcerated, or homeless, and the spread of AIDs further ravaged disenfranchised New Yorkers.\textsuperscript{54} Smith, in a dramatic turn of phrase, describes the process of gentrification as \textit{revanchinist}; the revenge of haves against the have-nots.\textsuperscript{55} This implied violence underlies many processes of neoliberalism in the city. Under Giuliani, this violence oftentimes became explicit, with his “tough-on-crime” style of governance. In this way, the spatial rearrangement of the city carried out under Koch was reinforced by Giuliani in the 1990s, only to be put into hyperdrive by Bloomberg in the 2000s.

II: Giuliani, the Enforcer (1994-2001)

In the years between the Koch and Giuliani tenures, New York suffered a relatively minor recession. For a brief instant, it had seemed as if New York was turning away, if slightly, from neoliberal governance and toward social progress with the election of its first black mayor, Democrat David Dinkins. However, just as in 1975, fear and economic insecurity once again allowed for the neoliberalism to regain control of city politics. Dinkins served only three years, and heavy-handed conservative Rudy Giuliani was elected to office in 1994.\textsuperscript{56} In his seven years of governance, Giuliani continued the process of sanitizing New York that Koch had set upon in the previous decade.

In \textit{Vanishing New York}, Jeremiah Moss offers a 1994 quote from Giuliani that sums up the new mayor’s approach to urban governance: “Freedom is about authority. Freedom is about the willingness of every single human to cede to lawful authority a great deal of discretion about what you do.”\textsuperscript{57} In the Giuliani era, neoliberal interests and the ideal of the free-market infiltrated the

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\textsuperscript{54} Soffer, 11.
\textsuperscript{56} Sites, 55.
\textsuperscript{57} Moss, 112.
\end{footnotesize}
rhythm of day-to-day urban life through constant policing and surveillance. Giuliani based his crime policy on the now-debunked “broken-windows” theory, which states that serious crime can be prevented with the strict enforcement of minor disorders and violations. In practice, this “zero tolerance” policy disproportionately affected the disenfranchised; by targeting graffiti, panhandling, weed possession, and turnstile jumping, Giuliani was in effect singling out the young, the homeless, and people of color. “Throughout the 1990s,” writes Moss, “Giuliani’s policies and police forces assaulted, subdued, and evicted many of the rebels who might stand in the way of the city to come.”

Aggressive policing reinforced the privatization of the city’s public spaces that had begun under Koch, with the effect of “[making] retailers feel more secure, [reducing] the social inconveniences for many residents and shoppers, and [cultivating] the image of a city under control.” The eradication of the illegal sex and drug trafficking that had thrived in Times Square in previous years allowed for its purchase by Disney and subsequent rebranding as a premier tourist capital and ultimate space of consumption. Giuliani’s “para-militarized police force” aided with gentrification too, bulldozing the bohemian spirit of the East Village with violent eviction and demolition to make way for new, more tourist-friendly development.

During the late 1990s, these new forms of “social regulation,” that is, institutional power reinforced by violence, made up Giuliani’s primary growth strategy. By the end of his reign in 2001, Giuliani was credited by some with a massive drop of crime in New York. Visible symbols of the city’s former blight had been scrubbed out with the graffiti on the subway, and the city’s image crisis was further remediated. At the same time, however, Giuliani’s approach toward policing drew condemnation from a large number of New Yorkers. His so-called ‘shoot-first, ask

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58 Moss, 114.
59 Sites, 60.
60 Moss, 73
questions later’ policies created “an environment of terror for communities of color,’ where he garnered the nickname ‘Adolph Jailiani.’ As one black resident recalled: “In communities of color, in LGBT communities, in immigrant communities, his presence was unwelcome and we were glad to see him go.”61 Advocates for the homeless sued the mayor on two occasions during his tenure for his brutal policing regime and massive cuts to the city’s homeless support system.62

Thus, by 2001, the final year of Giuliani’s last term, his controversial policies had alienated a large part of the city and it was almost certain that a social democrat would be elected just as after Koch. However, the attack of the Twin Towers on September 11 reversed this certainty in an instant. In the wake of terror, Giuliani’s tough style of governance seemed suddenly desirable to the citizens and the divisive figure suddenly became a national hero. His endorsement of Michael Bloomberg, a billionaire CEO who had a slim chance of winning prior to 9/11, ensured a neoliberal victory.63 Under Bloomberg’s guidance, the gentrification and privatization of Manhattan underwent a massive increase in speed and scope.

IV: Bloomberg, the Gilder (2002-2013)

The New York that Bloomberg inherited in November of 2001 was in a fragile position economically. In response to a looming economic slump, public leaders such as Bush and Giuliani implored New Yorkers to go shopping, to bolster the economic strength of their wounded city through mass consumption. Bloomberg is characterized by urbanists such as Zukin and Moss, as the mayor who sold New York’s “soul,” what they see as an almost intangible quality defined by social diversity, democratic right to urban spaces, and economic opportunity for all. Zukin describes the ethos of spatial production under Bloomberg as seen in the proliferation of “new

63 Moss, 125.
consumption spaces that respond to changing lifestyles and make the city more desirable,” to make up a city that is a “24/7 entertainment zone, with safe, clean, predictable spaces.”

Moss, in a similar vein, argues that under Bloomberg, gentrification came to mean “full-spectrum real estate dominance.” He offers the term “hyper-gentrification”—a contemporary addendum of Neil Smith’s three-stage process—for the urban processes at play in the 21st century, ones which constitute a complete overtaking of the city by the elite class:

Hyper-gentrification...encapsulates not only the real estate deals, the movement of money, and the displacement of lower-income people and small local businesses. It’s the whole megillah. It’s the return of the white flight suburbanites’ grandchildren and their appetite for a ‘geography of nowhere’...It’s the ugly extravaganza of what New York, and too many other cities, have become—playgrounds for the ultra nouveau riche, orchestrated by oligarchs in sky-high towers...It’s the displacement of the working class and the poor, people of color, artists and oddballs. With Bloomberg, “the apotheosis of neoliberal ideology,” the spectre of Robert Moses returned to guide the hands of contemporary planners; projects such as Hudson Yards (and the Highline park which precipitated it) represent the total overtaking of urban space by the middle class, to the benefit of the Elites, and to the ultimate exclusion of the Undesirables.

In a 2012 survey of urban economies, Richard Florida identified New York as the most economically powerful city in the world, ahead of London, Tokyo, and Chicago, with a gross metropolitan output of 1.3 trillion. Between 2000 and 2010, the city’s population increased by nearly 200,000. However, not coincidentally, the economic resurgence of the city goes hand-in-hand with the shrinking of socio-economic equality. In 2013, Bloomberg’s last year in office, the poverty rate was the highest in a decade, and homelessness was on the rise. By 2016, the median rent of a New York City apartment was $3,185, which adds up to over $38,000 annually in a city with a median income of $50,000. In a new era of neoliberal governance, Bloomberg ensured that New York has become unaffordable for all but the financial elite, the “super-rich.”

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64 Zukin (2010), 23-5.
65 Moss, 100.
Bloomberg’s approach to urban governance was, like Koch’s, to treat New York like a product, specifically a luxury product, and run the city like a corporation. The administration wanted to market New York “as a home for the ambitious, the innovative, the cosmopolitan, and above all the competitive,” leading “to the local emergence of a new, globalized corporate elite.”

Bloomberg continued on with Koch’s and Giuliani’s mission of taming the city; he banned smoking in a number of spaces, both public and private, and increased standards of sanitation, assigning letter grades to restaurants. These small, politically neutral actions overlayed the acceleration of the city’s privatization. The number of BIDs increased to 74 under Bloomberg—the highest number of any city in the country—which poured well over $100 million annually into the private upkeep and control of New York’s neighborhoods. It was his acceleration of real estate development, however, that made him what Moss terms “the supreme political champion” of the financial elite.

In this first decade of the 21st century, “rezoning [became] the city government’s preferred tool of redevelopment.” During his tenure, Bloomberg rezoned 40 percent of the city from industrial to residential and commercial use, among these 109 blocks in Manhattan. As a result, industrial employment in New York dropped twice as fast as for the rest of the country. Gentrification ripped through the outer boroughs; 25,000 buildings were destroyed between 2002 and 2012, although 40,000 new ones were erected. In this way, Bloomberg’s impact on the built environment of New York during this time is equivalent to the drastic remaking of the postwar city. Manhattan’s skyline was made over with the super-tall, super-glossy skyscrapers that have

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70 Moss, 74.
72 Moss, 72.
come to define the aesthetic postmodern architecture, which itself proliferated across the city:

New York began to look like any other city in the world.

IV: Entering the 21st Century

Under Bloomberg, New York entered its second Gilded Age, an era marked by a glossy remaking of the built environment paired with increasing social-economic inequality. The tendency of the urban process towards social segregation and spaces corresponding to social difference is not new; slums and ghettos alongside pockets of affluence have existed since the first city. However, in the postmodern era, this tendency has undergone a transformation in scale and scope which marks Hudson Yards distinctly as its product. Furthermore, the process of suburbanizing the city, in which “the edge becomes the center”73 and the distinction between public and private space is blurred, lend specific, historically unique qualities to the nature of Hudson Yards’ development and the qualities of its form.

I have described how the contemporary era of urbanism is defined by the spatial logic of capitalism, which has been accelerated by the pace of globalization and technological advances over the last quarter of the 20th century. Edward Soja, a socio-spatial scholar, has demarcated six geographical “restructurings” that have come to define the city of postmodernism, a term which refers to “both epoch and condition.”74 In this list, which includes the aforementioned shift within the economic sphere (namely, the advent of post-industrialization and the rise of the service sector) and the phenomenon of globalization, Soja also points to a “radical restructuring of urban form and of the conventional language we use to describe cities”75

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73 Hajer and Maarten, 24.
In other words, the overwhelming proliferation of diverse products, forms of media, methods of communications, political ideologies, and social identities in the globalized era has its spatial parallel in the diverse proliferation of new urban forms. A 2004 article in *Environment and Planning* has a bewildering list of terms to describe new metropolitan forms of the 21st century: exolopolis, for instance, anticity, boomburg, penturbia, rururbia, servurb, technoburb, galactic city, among forty-two others. At the same time however, globalization is associated with a certain standardification of urban space, a growing similarity around the world in how cities look and are experienced; people speak of the aura of “placelessness” as a pervasive and defining quality of postmodern spaces.

These paradoxical expressions of diversification and standardification which make up the contemporary mode of “splintering urbanism” also are expressed in the postmodern condition, which has been diagnosed as “schizophrenic.” Schizophrenia connotes a fragmentation of and dissociation from reality; in socio-cultural terms this is expressed by embracing the irrationality and disorder of the world in a way that directly opposes itself to the modernist veneration of empirical reason and belief in social transformation through science and technology. Although this paper is concerned with the contemporary era, the dialectic between modernist and postmodernist modes of cultural production, particularly in the realm of architecture, emerges as a major component of my analysis of Hudson Yards. In the following chapters I will often refer back to the modernist schema of urban transformation in order to demonstrate how Hudson Yards is in many respects a continuation of the Utopian impulse that motivated early 20th century planners.

With the primary objective of this thesis being to situate Hudson Yards within the contemporary mode of urbanism, the question to be answered in the remaining pages becomes

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where to place the development among the vast array of new urban forms. This necessitates a smaller analytic scale, a deeper delve into the project’s more recent history and context of its inception. In this chapter, I have focused on Manhattan’s transformation since the 1970s through the analytical lens of a global-economic scale, with an emphasis on the mechanisms of neoliberal urbanism. In the following chapter I narrow my scope of inquiry temporally to the 21st century, and geographically to Manhattan’s Far West Side, where Bloomberg’s redevelopment of this area resulted in the inception of Hudson Yards.

On such a scale, abstract economic processes fall to the periphery and we see urban transformation as it occurs through the actions of a number of central, powerful figures who exert various over the transformation and manipulation of the urban landscape, a term which in Sharon Zukin’s conceptualization, not “only [denotes] the usual geographical meaning of ‘physical surroundings,’ but…also refers to an ensemble of material and social practices and their symbolic representation.” Looking at the particular political, social, and economic context that allowed Hudson Yards to enter Manhattan’s landscape further contextualizes the project within its local frame, and will aid in defining the mega-project as a socio-spatial product.

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Chapter Two: The Wild Far West and the Tale of Two Cities

The image of a “tale of two cities” has prominently featured in social-democratic political rhetoric since the acceleration of global capitalism in the 1970s and 80s. It was New York Governor Mario Cuomo who first used the phrase to describe the conditions of the exponentially increasing income gap in America under President Reagan’s neoliberal economic doctrine. In his rousing keynote address at the 1984 Democratic National Convention, Cuomo used this image to rebuke President Reagan’s positioning of America as ‘a shining city on a hill’:

A shining city is perhaps all the President sees from the portico of the White House and the veranda of his ranch. But there's another city; there's another part to the shining city; the part where some people can't pay their mortgages, and most young people can't afford one; where students can't afford the education they need, and middle-class parents watch the dreams they hold for their children evaporate. . . the Republicans called it "trickle-down" when Hoover tried it. Now they call it "supply side." But it's the same shining city for those relative few who are lucky enough to live in its good neighborhoods. But for the people who are excluded, for the people who are locked out, all they can do is stare from a distance at that city's glimmering towers. 79

In 2013, when current New York mayor Bill De Blasio launched his campaign, the progressive and populist candidate revived this imagery to indict the ethos of the Bloomberg regime: “…He [has] simply neglected our neighborhoods and failed. And those who would seek to continue those policies are destined to fail millions of New Yorkers as well,” said De Blasio, standing with his family outside of his Brooklyn home. “Let’s be honest about where we are today. This is a place that in too many ways has become a tale of two cities, a place where City Hall has too often catered to the interests of the elite rather than the needs of everyday New Yorkers.” 80

The crowd, filling the city street with waving signs, cheers.

This image is powerful, not only because it is an apt metaphor that contradicts the posturing of the opposing political side, but because it is tangible on every level of perception and

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79 Gov. Mario Cuomo Keynote Address, 1984 Democratic Convention, American Rhetoric (website).
experience in the cities in which the vast majority of Americans live. It can be seen in Chelsea, the neighborhood adjacent to Hudson Yards, especially to the residents of two public housing projects, Fulton and Elliot-Chelsea. They have seen generational mom-and-pop stores, bodegas, delis and laundromats swept away and replaced with galleries in which they don’t feel welcome, and restaurants that they can’t afford. A 2015 New York Times article describes the position of these Chelsea projects as “islands in a sea of ever-expanding wealth.” At the time of the article’s publication, census figures revealed the average household income in Chelsea as $140,000, nearly five times that of its public housing residents, which numbers about five thousand.  

Although they have reaped the benefits of safer streets and better schools, a 2015 city report recorded a pervasive and profound sense of anxiety and alienation amongst residents. In 2012, The Hudson Guild, the neighborhood’s community center which provides essential services for low-income residents, lost half of its day-care program due to a Bloomberg ordinance. Chelsea’s hyper-gentrification raised the median asking rent to $3,490, the fourth-highest in the city. This has served to drive out even the first-wave gentrifying residents and businesses, the art galleries and restaurants who located to Chelsea in the 1990s. Recent years have also seen the driving out of Chelsea’s once-thriving gay community out of what had once been one of the city’s most established gay neighborhoods. 

The transformation seen in Chelsea can be directly attributed to the Bloomberg administration’s massive redevelopment of the far West Side, a long neglected, formerly industrial and warehouse area that was deemed Manhattan’s “last frontier” for development. This development scheme encapsulated not only Hudson Yards, but also the High Line park, the

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82 ibid.
establishment of which immediately triggered hyper-gentrification in Chelsea and the Meatpacking District. The transformation of these neighborhoods and the development of Hudson Yards is indicative of the overall pattern of “splintering urbanism” that has proliferated in the era of post-1970s global capitalism and produced an *archipelago of enclaves*; these cities-within-cities composing the whole of the postmodern metropolis.

Urbanist Peter Marcuse describes the specific spatialization of such patterns of urbanization in his 1997 article “The Ghetto of Exclusion and the Fortified Enclave”: he outlines the phenomenon of the “increasing separation of the parts of the city from each other, reflecting in space an increasing economic, social, and political separation.”\(^{84}\) Marcuse describes three totalized and bounded spaces in this hierarchy: “the excluded ghetto … the exclusionary enclave of totalizing suburbs, ... [and] the fortified citadel.”\(^{85}\) Marcuse argues that focus on the globalization of cities as a whole tends to ignore their internal structure, which can be found in any number of cities around the world. These three internal spatial developments, ghettoization, suburbanization, and citadel formation, he says, “are intimately connected with one another and mutually reinforcing,” and furthermore, that “they stem from significant changes in national and international structures, and the extent of their manifestation is influenced by the balance of political and economic power among the groupings and classes involved.”\(^{86}\)

I present Hudson Yards as New York’s own citadel (which translates as ‘little city,’) aligning with Marcuse’s definition of “a spatially concentrated area in which members of a particular population group, defined by its position in superiority in power, wealth, or status in relation to its neighbors, congregate as a means of protecting or enhancing that position.”\(^{87}\)

\(^{85}\)ibid, 313.
\(^{86}\)Marcuse, 312.
\(^{87}\)ibid, 315.
Though it is rising to completion on De Blasio’s watch, Hudson Yards directly represents the legacy of Bloomberg, whose top-down approach to urban development often drew comparisons from critics to Robert Moses, the postwar “avatar of technocratic city planning and a leading translator of modernist urbanism into the terms of American culture and politics”^{88} however, building like Moses in the 21st century required a certain degree of illusion in order to align with the new urban values of the era: sustainability, diversity, and authenticity.

The Bloomberg Way, exemplified by the redevelopment of the far West Side, harnessed the desires of the middle class in a way that still reinforced the hegemony of neoliberal urbanism. Looking at the emergence of this landscape, which includes both Hudson Yards and the High Line, involves untangling the process of transformation, looking at both its protractors and detractors, to see who benefits and who is excluded. Urban redevelopment “is the result of, and results in, inequality,” writes urbanist Phil Birge-Lieberman. “In controlling the transformation of the urban landscape, urban regimes possess the ability to determine which environmental imaginaries get constructed, which in turn informs the material appearance of the landscape.”^{89}

Bloomberg’s specific doctrine of planning involved harnessing progressive rhetoric and the myth of the urban frontier in order to promote the city as a luxury brand; out of this, New York emerged as a tale of two cities in even starker contrast than in previous mayorships.

I: Broaching the Final Frontier

The Far West Side, the thirty-nine square blocks west of Ninth Avenue between Twenty-Eighth and Forty-First Streets, had been eyed for redevelopment since deindustrialization and the

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Robert Moses era highway development that shrunk the relevance of the railroad industry. Both Koch and his successor David Dinkins called for the area to be transformed from a “literal hole in the ground into a profitable development project.” Donald Trump bought and successfully developed two disused Manhattan rail yards; one just north of Hudson Yards in 1975 for the Javits Center, and then another, further north, in 1995 for Riverside South. Mayor Giuliani wanted to relocate Yankee Stadium to the West Side Railyards, and drew up plans for a $550 million dollar complex in 1993, but the plan was unexpectedly vetoed by representatives of the Bronx in the city council.

Thus, even as surrounding Chelsea and the Meatpacking District transformed from gritty industrial remnants to hip, profitable neighborhoods throughout the 1990s, the blighted rail-yards remained Manhattan’s “last frontier” until 2001. In this year, an elite group of New York developers, planners, executives, and politicians put forward an ambitious vision of Manhattan as a site for the 2012 Olympics. This plan would be taken up by the Bloomberg administration to become a central component of his plan to make New York a luxury city.

The original Hudson Yards development, as presented by the NYC2012 committee in August 2001, consisted of an 86,000-seat stadium with a retractable dome, along with an Olympic village-style development with two hotels, the new Madison Square Garden, an 80-story “signature office building,” and 8.5 acres of green space and shopping centers. The extension of the number 7 subway line would make the area easily accessed by the greater city. NYC2012, a privately run, privately funded committee was headed by former investment banker Daniel Doctoroff, endorsed by Giuliani, and further bolstered by the clout of members such as urban planner Alexander Gavin

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and former CBS executive Jay Kriegel. The group presented the grandiose plan as an foolproof means of revitalizing New York’s infrastructure and economy, and that its benefits would extend to all the five boroughs and last far beyond the end of the games themselves: "We want to create the best Olympics ever. And we want to do things in New York that people have been dreaming about for a long time,” said Garvin at the time.

However, according to press reports at the time, the public was skeptical and saw the proposal as "a profit-churning ploy by private real estate developers." This was true, as Doctoroff would later admit himself: “The Olympic bid provided a patina of legitimacy to both individual development projects and the drive for a citywide campaign of urban development.”

Residents and community members of Hudson Yards’ surrounding areas protested the Olympic bid for its potential gridlocking and polluting effects. Clare Shulman, the Queens borough president, was quoted as saying, “New York City needs the Olympics like a hole in the head.” In this way, the political opposition that had halted Giuliani’s vision for Hudson Yards threatened NYC2012’s ambitious plans for the far West Side. However, the events of September 11 and the subsequent election of Bloomberg ensured that growth would continue to be the focus of city government and that elites would overpower social-democratic interests.

On entering office, Bloomberg immediately took up NYC2012’s bid, drawn like a pro-growth moth to shining mega-developments, accurately assessing its potential to drive economic growth in the underdeveloped area and in the traumatized city as a whole. Doctoroff was made deputy mayor of economic development and the development of Hudson Yards began in earnest, recorded in a 2001 planning report titled: “Far West Midtown: A Framework for Redevelopment.”

94 Larson, 34.
95 Collins, “Visions of Olympic Glory.”
96 ibid.
97 Larson, 35.
This report cited the need to “remain competitive in the world marketplace” after the attack on the World Trade Center destroyed over 12 million square feet of office space, and framed the development as an opportunity to form a Central Business District that could act as an alternative to congested midtown Manhattan, thus pulling the city’s center west and making the “world’s greatest city even greater.” The report further noted that “Far West Midtown also presents an opportunity to transform what has been for decades a transitional area without a strongly defined urban character.”

This last sentence in particular revealing; they paint the district in terms that suggest a barren post-industrial wasteland, when in fact the Meatpacking District had a distinct character and history that persisted after its economic relevance was destroyed in the neoliberal shift from manufacturing to entrepreneurialism. This demonstrates the tendency of contemporary city-planners described by Friedmann and Wolff in their discussion of the conflicts between “real” and “economic” spaces, to conflate the economic value of a given urban space with its social value. This critique echoes Lefebvre’s critique of the “abstract” spaces of modernism, which ignore the day-to-day social practices of its inhabitants. The report continues: "For decades this area has remained economically stagnant, despite being bordered by some of Manhattan's most vibrant neighborhoods…. City businesses and residents will benefit from the redevelopment of this long-overlooked neighborhood." In the eyes of these planners, Far West Midtown represented the ideal site for a megaproject: a tabula rasa super-block that had once been venerated by modernists before them.


However, the abstracting rhetoric of this report glibly negates the existence of the undesirable populations that populated the era before the neoliberal turn. To be sure, when Koch took office, the area was home to a number of meat-processing businesses that would soon become defunct. However, Meatpacking was also a major center of and home to New York’s thriving LGBTQ community; it hosted a number of underground sex clubs, and was generally considered to be one of the city’s most prevalent safe spaces for queer expression. Since gentrification began in 1985 at the height of the AIDS crisis (under Koch, who sought to regulate the illicit nature of the neighborhood under the guise of public health initiatives), community members have resisted and protested encroaching developments and populations that threatened their homes and livelihood.102

As manufacturing centers faded away, first-wave “risk-aware” gentrifiers (largely young people and artists) moved into the neighborhood throughout the 1990s, attracted by the large spaces and cheap rents. However, the “tipping point” for Meatpacking’s gentrification came in 1999, when fashionable and upscale restaurants came along, followed by high-fashion retailers.103 In a 2000 episode of Sex and the City, Samantha, the high-powered PR exec, moves to the newly hip Meatpacking District but finds herself being kept awake by the transgender sex workers who congregate outside her window: “I am paying a fortune to live in a neighborhood that’s trendy by day and tranny by night!” she complains.

The real-life Samanthas, Meatpacking’s “risk-averse” gentrifiers, formed the neighborhood association Residents in Distress (RID), and successfully petitioned the police to rid their neighborhood of lingering undesirable elements, such as the transgender sex workers. Moss, who in the same era was volunteering at the neighborhoods LGBTQ community center, recalls: “We

102 Moss.
103 Yoon and Currid-Halkett, 22.
were constantly hearing about transgender women getting targeted for harassment and arrest, whether they were at work on the stroll or simply walking through to visit friends. Eventually, the sex workers were pushed far away, into parts of town more dangerous.  

Although the queer history of Meatpacking and neighboring Chelsea is preserved and often celebrated today, it is repackaged and sanitized in such a way as to indulge the desire of the progressive middle class.

Of the 2001 Far West development scheme, which debuted at the tail-end of the Giuliani era, Director of City Planning Joseph Rose said, "This plan anticipates the continued growth of an efficient and dynamic City of unparalleled prosperity. It will take time and perseverance to carry out, but we must remember that earlier generations were able to carry out such plans, and we can as well." Deputy Mayor Tony Coles said, "I congratulate the Department of City Planning for doing an excellent job of presenting a vision so crucial to the City's economic future." Thus, by the time Bloomberg officially entered office, the administration was positioned to move forward with the $1.2 billion stadium plan, and pushed for the neighborhood’s rezoning. Even with apathy on the part of New York at large toward hosting the Olympics and active opposition from local activists and the state legislature toward the prohibitively expensive stadium, the Bloomberg administration managed to rezone the eastern half of the Hudson Yards site “to facilitate high-density office, residential, and commercial development” in November of 2004. Thus, even though the New York State Assembly Speaker ultimately vetoed the stadium plan that summer, Bloomberg and Doctoroff had ensured that a massive mixed-use development would come to fruition on Manhattan’s West Side.

104 Moss, 190.
106 Ibid.
107 Larson, 36.
108 Williams, “The Evolution of Hudson Yards.”
Even before Stephen Ross and the Related Company took the reins of Hudson Yards design and image, the mechanisms of the Bloomberg administration revealed in the site’s development exemplify the ethos of neoliberal urbanism; namely, the integration of state and corporate interests and their pro-growth incentive to dramatically reshape the city along the lines of global capital. Hudson Yards is the result of a process where, despite vocal and concrete opposition from state leadership, the city managed to actively fund, with public money, an elite and private group’s massive redevelopment of public land “in ways that ran counter to the local community’s own desires and with very little public oversight or input.”\(^{109}\) The 2004 re-zoning also provided for the construction of the High Line park which, although envisioned and promoted by local community members for local interests, once taken up within the Bloomberg machine ultimately ensured Chelsea’s hyper-gentrification and prepared the area for the implementation of Hudson Yards.

As urban anthropologist Julian Brash wrote, “The opportunity to plan and design an entirely new district, encompassing a wide mix of uses, waterfront development, and the development of an open space network, awoke the Robert Moses or Baron Haussmann lying in the hearts of elite urban planners.”\(^{110}\) By positioning Meatpacking and the far West Side as a virgin and unconquered territory, the Bloomberg administration, largely composed of elite financial actors such as Doctoroff, engineered an opportunity to construct a city that reinforced their economic hegemony and reflected their own desires and interests. The mythology of the urban frontier already played into by gentrifiers and drivers of gentrification from previous eras, as “an ideological justification of middle-class appropriation,”\(^{111}\) was embraced by Bloomberg and his planners in their successful conquering of the Wild West. Reminiscent of the modernist

\(^{109}\) Larson, 35.

\(^{110}\) Brash, Julian (2006, 113), cited by Larson, 35.

architectural paradigm of the urban “super-block,” Hudson Yards came into being as a certain kind of utopia, one that ultimately eschews any corresponding notion of populism or accessibility.

II: The Socio-Spatial Logic of the Gilded Age

Almost immediately upon his election (in the direct aftermath of 9/11) Bloomberg emphasized the remaking of the city’s built environment as a primary tool of economic rehabilitation: “To capitalize on [our] strengths, we’ll continue to transform New York physically …to make it even more attractive to the world’s most talented people. New York is the city where the world’s best and brightest want to live and work.”112 While the suburbanites had been targets of Koch and Giuliani’s approach to urban revival, the “best and brightest” whom Bloomberg courted was the newly emerging “creative class,” the grandchildren of those who had fled from the city in previous decades, and who now sought the culture and (some of) the chaos of the city.

The concept of the creative class was introduced by Richard Florida in a 2002 book, in which he argued that “urban fortunes increasingly turn on the capacity to attract, retain, and even pamper a mobile and finicky class of ‘creatives,’ whose aggregate efforts have become the driving force of economic development.”113 Florida’s thesis has been enthusiastically taken up by cities all over the country, and incorporated into schemes for urban revival. The creative class demands the three T’s: Technology, Talent, and Tolerance, and are drawn to urban spaces which are “open, diverse, dynamic, and cool.”114 However, as many critics have pointed out, while the creative class strategy seems like a fresh, humanistic alternative to the 20th century renewal schemes, it still works within the resilient schema of neoliberal urban development, and thus is still “framed

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114 ibid.
around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption, and place-marketing.”

In other words, the “creative class” paradigm is no social revolution, but rather a revised marketing script for those at the helm of the entrepreneurial city.

In reality, these “bourgeois bohemians” Florida derides are not so different from their suburban predecessors; they still “don’t want to live like their parents do [in the suburbs] ... but prefer to lead a comfortable life” says Zukin, “[They] don’t mind a little dirt on the streets as long as they feel safe.” Creatives, Florida says, crave those “magnetic qualities of place,” and sites featuring “play and consumption,” but really only in the form of marketable, photogenic “experiences.” As one study undertaken by the city of Cincinnati reported: “Creative class members are looking for experiences, not commitments. Their busy schedules and tangential approach to life constrain them from joining organizations or taking on new responsibilities. Instead, they seek out activities . . . where they can make quick, temporary, and stringless attachments” For urban policy-makers, this means cultivating the experience, or image, of “authenticity” in neighborhoods, while still maintaining the forms of social control that underlie the process of gentrification and promise comfortable, clean urban space.

In this way, although creatives appear to model democratic inclusiveness, they still reflect the class exclusiveness of traditional suburbians. While they might seemingly reject the blandness of suburbia, like the historical bourgeois, creatives have to been shown to self-segregate in like-minded enclaves “with little concern for the wider social consequences [of gentrification],” says Peck. The creatives’ “openness to cultural diversity may indeed be more of a lifestyle choice than a political trait,” he continues, pointing out that the cities which Florida touts as creative havens,

115 Peck, 741.
117 Cincinnati Tomorrow, Creative City Plan. (Cincinnati: 2003), 15.
118 Peck, 758.
though economically successful, contain the same if not more socio-economic inequality than other cities without a creative agenda. “Creativity plans do not disrupt these established approaches to urban entrepreneurialism and consumption-oriented place promotion, they extend them,” argues Peck.

Referring back to the modernist schema of urbanization, the ethos of postwar urban (so-called) renewal re-emerges in the “revitalization” of once-industrial areas like the lower West Side, selectively maintaining their “gritty” qualities to appeal to the creative yearn for authenticity, while still configuring them as sites of capital and consumption and displacing those of undesirable socio-economic status. As Zukin says, “The major difference between Moses’ time and ours lies in a shift from the ideal of the modern city to that of the authentic city.”\textsuperscript{119} The postmodern ideology of cultural production opposes itself ideologically to the “abstraction” of modernist social engineers; however, as Harvey has demonstrated via his theory of spatial fix and the right to the city, the economic logic of gentrification and privatization ensures the same socio-spatial result; inequality and stratification that threatens to turn Manhattan into “one vast gated community for the rich.”\textsuperscript{120} In Chelsea and Meatpacking, we see how the marketing of the authentic ideal led to the creative destruction of any authentic qualities that the city, or neighborhood, might have possessed.

Thus, the contemporary mode of urbanism is not an alternative to the notorious “urban renewal” of the modernist eras. As Alan Smart has argued, the minimalist ethos and functional symbolism of modernism made spaces of power easy to identify (he points to the United Nations Headquarters as an example), but postmodern cultural practice, as described by Baudrillard, is “manipulative, aleatory process, a labyrinthine practice of signs, and one that no longer has any

\textsuperscript{119} Zukin, 2010, 26
\textsuperscript{120} Harvey (2008).
meaning.”

The rhetoric is revised, the process more obfuscated, the facade of power more difficult to impasse, but it is merely an acceleration of the processes of post-1970s entrepreneurial governance: the adaption of the landscape to satisfy what is essentially “the eye of the tourist” with “synthetic experiences [replacing] historical, social, and cultural meanings” of place.

The same processes of gentrification and privatization, of sanitization and social control, undertaken by Koch and Giuliani as an essential tool of growth-focused urban development in the 20th century were wielded by the Bloomberg administration in the first decade of the 21st. These municipal practices were further accelerated along with the pace of globalization by the advent of the Internet and tech industry. The emergence of a new urban middle class, as privileged consumers, demanded the illusion of social progressivism and anti-corporatism in the marketing of the administration’s goals; this reorientation would define the language and practice of Bloomberg’s urban development paradigm and approach to public-private partnerships. In the 21st century, the science and engineering venerated by modernist progressives is replaced by “technology,” that which promises expediency and convenience while still upholding popular urban values such as environmental sustainability and social tolerance. Contemporary art and architecture, which often aesthetically opposes itself to the brutal austerity and inhumanity of modernist forms, is now being commodified on a larger scale than ever and touted by urban elites as cultural capital and symbols of both power and populism.

Through an aggressive rebranding of the city as a luxury product, merging private interests with public space, cultivating corporate relationships, and courting both the global elite and the newly emerging creative class, the Bloomberg administration dramatically remade New York both materially and symbolically in the first decade of the 21st century. In the specific development of

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122 Marten and Hajer, 46.
the Far West Side, this was demonstrated by the language and marketing used to promote the High Line park, particularly in the emphasis on arts and design and the strategic highlighting of particular historical characteristics of the area. Capitalizing on Chelsea’s historical character as a space of queer culture and artistic community made the Far West Side development easy to incorporate into the rhetoric of promoting tolerant, diverse, “artsy” and gay-friendly spaces, but managed to evade the more complicated questions of class and the viability of privately operated public space.

III: The High Line and Pseudo-Public Space

The High Line park runs through Chelsea and Meatpacking from the relocated Whitney Museum on Gansevoort and Washington Streets for nearly a mile before ending at the Hudson Yards site. Before the park entered the greater development scheme of the Far West Side, it had existed only conceptually as a community project for the private group “Friends of the High Line,” (FHL) founded by Chelsea residents Joshua David and Robert Hammond in 1999. David and Hammond, both gay men, throughout the process of promoting the High Line they stressed the “queerness” of the project: “The High Line is totally gay,” said Hammond, and touted Florida’s creative class theory to bely the proposed park’s “publicness” as a gift to the local community and the city as a whole; in this process, Robert and Hammond positioned the High Line as healthy piece of social infrastructure, and themselves as neighborhood activists.123 However, as Darren Patrick notes in their queer analysis of the park, David and Hammond were not just anybody; they were white, wealthy, and sophisticated individuals with connections to deep-pocketed New York celebrities and leaders of the fashion and art worlds.124

124 ibid.
FHL held its first fundraiser in December of 2000, at which the presence of Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick served to brand the park as a “celebrity project” in the New York Post. Soon other celebrities, including Martha Stewart, Edward Norton, Calvin Klein, Diane von Furstenberg, and various other members of the city’s elites became involved in the project. In 2004, it was officially incorporated into the Far West redevelopment scheme. In Kevin Loughran’s critique and history of the High Line, he describes how “as the Friends of the High Line continues to gain momentum and financial support, idealistic sentiments were cast aside for pragmatic realpolitik.”

Patrick argues how the depoliticized positioning of the park as a “good, gay, and green development” in the logic of the creative class ignores the intersections of class, race, and gender within the wider LGBTQ community as well as obscuring of how the project has “further commercialized, securitized, parodied, sanitized and all but eliminated one of the few historically active and active zones of public … sexual diversity.”

With its formal introduction into Bloomberg’s urban vision, the High Line and its governing organization came to exemplify the public-private partnership which sprang up in the wake of neoliberal disinvestment in public services. The results of this, as seen in the Koch and Giuliani eras, are increasing policing, surveillance, and other forms of social control seen in the city’s public spaces, which gradually become more and more unequal. Constructing the High Line (which opened in three phases in 2009, 2011, and 2015 consecutively) ended up costing a total of $238.5 million, $123.2 million of which came from the City of New York, and $20.7 million from the federal and state governments. FHL and other private benefactors contributed $44 million, footing less than 20 percent of the bill. In terms of operating costs per acre, the High

125 Loughran, 78.
126 Patrick, 145.
127 Brash, Julian, “Park (In)Equity.”
Line is the most expensive park in the city, totaling $672,000, which is over 70 times greater than the average city park.\textsuperscript{128}

Loughran, in his 2011 ethnography of the park, describes the High Line as an archetypal neoliberal park, a luxury public space designed to draw tourists and wealthy consumers to Bloomberg’s New York: “Today’s urban spaces are the province of global capital and culture, where the ‘community’ is transnational and the ‘control’ is elusive, privatized and panoptic.”\textsuperscript{129}

Lefebvre wrote of urban planning as doctrine, as the practice of an ideology with its results recorded in stone and concrete. The High Line represents the Bloomberg doctrine through its curated facade of publicness, greenness, and diversity, which disguises the forces of commodification and social control.

In my first year at Bard, the High Line was exciting conceptually to me, as an adaptation of a defunct industrial space for public use, and I made a point of visiting it on my first trip to the city. On a beautiful fall day, I ascended the steps to the High Line by the Whitney Museum and immediately found myself propelled along the structure by a bustling crowd of visitors. The park’s path was too narrow to admire the view of the Hudson; visitors stopped to take photos framing themselves against the city skyline but had to quickly move on because of the lack of open space and the movement of the crowd.

As opposed to other city parks, benches on the High Line are narrow and backless, indicative of “hostile architecture” that prevents long-term loitering or occupation. This is an example of the so-called “prickly space” that has emerged as a method of social control in contemporary urbanism; this type of urban design creates a condition in which “there is no place

\textsuperscript{129} Loughran, 50.
in the contemporary urban landscape for the homeless to be.” Overheating in the autumn sun, I looked over the crowd for the striped umbrellas of those ubiquitous hot-dog carts that sold $1 water to thirsty park-goers. I only found an artisanal coffee stand where I grudgingly purchased an overpriced iced coffee.

Loughran’s expansive analysis of his 2011 visit to the park offers a justification of my inability to categorize the park as a public space in my previously held understanding. Furthermore, Loughran identifies features of the park that escaped my initial perception: most importantly the discreet force of private security guards and the demographic makeup of the park’s visitors—young, white adults. Loughran compares the style of movement of the High Line to that of a conveyor belt. In addition to the surveilling private security guards (who, according to their emblazoned shirts, were employed by a company named ‘Citadel Security’), Loughran noticed a maintenance worker collecting plastic bottles from a park recycling bin. She explained to him that FHL guidelines mandated this in order to discourage the presence of homeless in the park.

Aspects of the High Line’s design, coupled with the discrete methods of surveillance and exclusion noted by Loughran, illustrate the methodology of private groups, such as The Friends of the Highline, to maintain social control of their spaces. The aim of such control is to maximize the park’s capacity for profit, which depends directly on the consumption patterns of a specific urban class. With hostile architecture, exclusionary pricing, and institutionalized surveillance and maintenance of public space, the Friends of the High Line are working to disrupt the patterns of urban undesirables, particularly the homeless, who typically frequent a city’s public spaces to panhandle, sleep, or collect recyclables for profit. The park’s designation as a space of

131 Loughran.
consumption is bolstered by the park’s corporate sponsorship by companies such as Uniqlo, AT&T, and Calvin Klein; their presence is visually represented with the mammoth billboards with which the park’s visitors are visually confronted on their stroll through the park.

I address the High Line as it both literally and mechanically foreshadows Hudson Yards and the way it exists within the urban fabric. Particularly, the High Line shows how the culture economy works within greater capitalistic aims to attract the consumer demographic to urban spaces. In his essay, “Loving the High Line: Infrastructure, Architecture, and the Politics of Space in the Mediated City,” Alan Smart performs a rhetorical analysis of Bloomberg city planner Amanda Burden’s account of “saving the High Line.” The speech was given in a 2014 Technology, Entertainment, and Design (TED) talk. Smart’s analysis sets up a parallel between contemporary mechanisms of architects and planners and those of the modernist era against which postmodern architecture is supposed to resist. Burden sets up her approach to urban design as an alternative to those architects and planners who saw public space as bleak, subjectless plazas that would serve as “plinths” for their architectural creations. In her practice, she claims, they take into account the desires of communities and the complexity of urban life.

However, as I have mentioned, this populist and holistic rhetoric of postmodern urbanists runs counter to the demands of the economic and political systems in which they operate. As Manfredo Tafuri concluded in the late 1970s, “the hegemony of global capitalism will ultimately succeed in co-opting anything architects produce.” Smart’s analysis highlights Burden’s positioning the practice of urban design as a “uniformly positive process in which creative actors insert or ‘place’ designed objects into empty spaces,” and her abstraction of human subjects into vague terms like “the public” or “community.” At the same time that she is describing the

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133 Smart, 42.
vibrant humanism and social sensitivities that defined the High Line’s design and incorporation into the urban landscape, her generalist rhetoric obfuscates more complex questions of inequity and displacement as well as the reality of the political forces that actually ensured the High Line’s existence and complicate its viability as a truly public space:

Despite the upbeat affirmedness of Burden’s TED talk, this process was not as simple as the conversion of a piece of utilitarian, into a symbolic, culture affirming, social space... Just as the building of CBS and Bloomberg Media involved the synthesis of social relations, communications systems, and material infrastructure, Burden’s city is an infrastructural machine, engineered to produce value. The primary value produced here is, however, symbolic and constitutive of subjectivities. In this, the progressive modernist project of using built forms to effect ‘social engineering’ is shifted to one of more explicit political-economy, in which relational structures are designed to transform conditions both cultural and material.134

Since its official introduction into the Manhattan cityscape in 2009, the High Line has been a massive economic success. After only two years, it spurred $2 billion in new development and generated $900 million in tax revenue.135 The real-estate boom catalyzed by the park and allowed for by the residential rezoning manifested itself in the rapid construction of starchitect mega-towers by the likes of Zaha Hadid and Frank Gehry, densely clustering and cluttering in and around the High Line, and the rapid appreciation of neighboring land value (103 percent) in an example of the so-called halo-effect of real-estate appreciation.136 As is the nature of neoliberal accumulation by dispossession, this development boom succeeded in pushing out the small but established local businesses that had defined the previously industrial neighborhood, namely auto-body shops, warehouses, diners, scrap yards, and gas stations, and with them the working class people who worked at and patronized them. “I’ve never seen such a landscape change so quickly,”

134 Smart, 46.
135 Loughran, 55.
said one real-estate broker in 2013, “It’s like they’re building a whole city within the city.” Of course, they were, Hudson Yards had somewhat quietly broken ground in the year before.

**IV: Enter Mr. Ross**

Back in 2008, however, with the High Line positioned to successfully anchor hyper-gentrification in Chelsea and the transformation of the Meatpacking district, the development of Hudson Yards moved forward. As Justin Davidson wrote in a recent *New York Magazine* article:

> At Hudson Yards, the path to the ribbon-cutting followed an inexorable trajectory based on impregnable financial logic. Underutilized space must be reclaimed for its highest and best use. The MTA needed cash. Costs were high, so potential profits had to be too. The most efficient way to finance and engineer the project was to hand it off to a single developer, who was only ever going to build a city as a luxury product. Each decision made the next one essentially foreordained. 

The deal that Bloomberg and Doctoroff brokered with the MTA prior to the state’s veto of the stadium plan ensured $2 billion from city expenditure to fund the extension of the number 7 line to the Hudson Yards site. After the Olympic bid fell through, Bloomberg and Doctoroff concocted a plan called “value capture:” “The city would take tax money collected on the site and siphon it off to pay off the cost of the subway extension and traffic infrastructure, with the goal of making the site more attractive to developers who could create an entire new neighborhood on the failed stadium site.”

In 2008, Bloomberg formally opened up the site for bids from private developers. Initially, Tishman Speyer secured the site, but the ensuing economic recession caused this deal to break down. Related Companies stepped in with $1 billion, and thus the vision of Hudson Yards was transferred to be within founder and chairman Stephen Ross’s control and thus was destined to

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137 Moss, p. 236-239.
138 Davidson, Justin. "I Have a Feeling We’re Not in New York Anymore." Intelligencer. February 18, 2019.
become his particular fantasy of a city: a profit-churning, luxurious enclave in the heart of the city. Aside from being one of the richest developers in New York (and a close friend of Doctoroff), Ross represented the ideal developer for this neoliberal mega-project for his unique ability to move easily between the now intermeshed worlds of public and private financing. This public-private savvy of Ross’s comes from his personal background.

Born in 1940 in Detroit, Michigan, Ross has accrued his $7.7 billion net worth since the establishment of Related Companies nearly 50 years ago. After receiving his B.S. in accounting from the University of Michigan Business School in 1962, he went on to pursue a law degree at New York University, graduating in 1966. He began his career as a tax attorney in a Detroit firm, but moved back to New York to try his hand at corporate finance in Wall Street. However, after being fired (for the second time) in 1972, he decided to jump into the New York real estate world. Specifically, into the low-risk endeavor of 100 percent federally subsidized affordable housing. His experience as a tax attorney allowed him to secure additional profit by syndicating and selling the tax shelters that accompanied the projects to wealthy investors. In this way, by the end of that year he had turned a $10,000 loan from his mother into nearly $150,000 and founded the Related Housing Companies.

Ross went on to construct a total of 5,000 affordable housing units throughout the country by 1980. “The narrow margins encouraged Ross to build efficiently and exactingly, while doing public-private work gave him a fluency with government bureaucracy,” said Carl Swanson in a recent New York Magazine profile of Ross. Soon he moved into office development, then market-rate housing, then retail development, finally entering the world of mixed-use

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141 Swanson, Carl, "How Stephen Ross Became the Most Powerful City-Shaper Since Robert Moses." Intelligencer. (February 18, 2019)
developments with the $1.7 billion Time Warner Center at Columbus Circle. This project, which was financed with “the biggest loan for a non-government-funded project in commercial real estate history ($1.3 billion from GMAC, the former financing arm of General Motors),” was completed in 2003, at 55 stories and 2.8 million square feet.\textsuperscript{142} Currently, Ross’s home is the development’s 8,300 square foot penthouse. Related Companies is based in one of its office towers; during his limited leisure time he can dine out at any number of the restaurants within the site. “I don’t even go outside sometimes,” he admitted to Swanson, “[but] I do own a coat.”\textsuperscript{143}

Despite his wealth and position of power in the New York real estate world, Ross does not position himself as a Donald Trump figure, as a tough, ruthlessly business-minded man, oriented only toward the accumulation of more wealth and power. Ross may be a billionaire, but he has a social conscience: he has donated hundreds of millions to the University of Michigan; with $30.5 million in 2014 he started the Ross Center for Sustainable Cities with the World Resources Institute; within the NFL (he become owner of the Miami Dolphins in 2009), he spearheaded the Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality,\textsuperscript{144} “a national nonprofit that educates and empowers the sports community to eliminate racial discrimination, champion social justice and improve race relations.”\textsuperscript{145}

However, this personal philanthropy is belied by his history of shady business practices that prioritize profit over low-income communities. Even now, Ross and his company have come under fire for similar practices in the development of Hudson Yards. In the spring of 2018, Related came under public scrutiny for warring with labor unions in the development construction process. Picket lines formed in front of the construction site, and an inflatable pig stood for some

\textsuperscript{142} Brennan, \textit{Forbes}.
\textsuperscript{143} ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Swanson.
months in front of the number 7 line’s entrance. The unions accused the company of aggressively pushing back against union standards to avoid the higher cost of wages and benefits. Gary LaBarbera, president of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York, condemned Related for “[continuing] to look for deeper and deeper concessions, while they’re selling condos for $32 million.”

Even more recently, in April of 2019, CityLab reporter Kriston Capps published an expose revealing how Hudson Yards was partially financed through a program intended to aid the urban poor. Through EB-5, a government immigration program which enables wealthy foreigners to obtain visas in exchange for real estate investments, Related raised at least $1.2 billion for their project. In theory, EB-5 is designed to stimulate development in impoverished urban areas, and thus requires investment to target an area with a substandard level of employment: “To qualify, Related needed a work-around to bypass the distressed-area requirements—a pass that New York authorities were happy to issue.” Through a “form of creative financial gerrymandering,” which linked the luxury development with public housing projects in Harlem, Hudson Yards was officially recorded as being in a needy area; and thus reaped the benefits of EB-5.

These issues are indicative of the maniacal pro-growth ethos of economic actors and neoliberal governance. But also, when placed in contrast with Ross’s displayed commitment to social justice, they reveal yet another portrait of the fractured psyche of late capitalism and the paradox of postmodern cultural production. This is the same contradiction, or illusion, embodied by the desires of the creative class and the place-makers who market to them. The fragmentation and schizophrenia that defines the postmodern era exists between burgeoning social awareness

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147 Capps, Kriston. "The Hidden Horror of Hudson Yards Is How It Was Financed." CityLab. April 12, 2019
and acknowledgement of difference that is ultimately betrayed by the economic logic demanded by the acceleration of global capitalism. Postmodernism’s claim “to embrace history, respect context, endorse ‘popular’ forms of culture, and elaborate vernacular typologies,” Paul Walker Clarke has noted, raises certain questions: “Whose history? Whose notion of context? Whose vernacular? Whose popular culture?” In the case of Hudson Yards, this question is easily answered: Ross’s.

This signals the place-marketing and commodified cultural experiences that would also manifest in the development of Hudson Yards. But when control passed into the hands of Stephen Ross and Related, it was inevitable that the final project would represent his singular vision. In building this “city within a city,” Ross has constructed and marketed his own anti-urban lifestyle to those who can afford it. “This is New York as it should be,” he has said, “With everything you want at your doorstep.” Sherry Tobak, Related Companies’ senior Vice President confirmed, “We’re not just selling a building,” she says, “The reason why people are living here is because of the lifestyle we are offering.”

The promise of Hudson Yards is that of a New York that is better than New York, an ideal simulacrum of the city that presents all the benefits of urban agglomeration-- culture, choice, excitement, spectacle--without the rough edges. The construction of this facade--and what lies behind it--the inner-workings of this micropolis, is the focus of this final chapter.

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Chapter Three: New York Citadel

Looking at the rendering of Hudson Yards in its final form (see figure 3.1), the term citadel certainly seems apt. Its collection of sixteen towers, glossy and glittering, rise above the surrounding city, which seems squat and drab in comparison. Phase One of the project, which opened in March of this year, is comprised of six buildings, one residential, and the rest mandated for commercial, office, and mixed-use; the “Vessel,” a permanent interactive art installation; “The Shed,” a performance and cultural space; a one-million-square-foot shopping center, which will house 100 stores and 20 restaurants, and a public plaza with six acres of open and green spaces. The total square footage of this phase is nearly 11.9 million. The second phase, to be completed in 2024, will add an additional 6.2 million square feet to the project and includes a waterfront park, seven residential buildings, an office complex, and a K-8 public school (see figure 3.2).

Though citadels have existed as an urban form for centuries, Marcuse identifies two new characteristics of these contemporary citadels. First a walling-out, those symbolic or material features which allows the forms to be more and more cut off from their surroundings, and a totalizing trend, in which all necessities for daily life, workplace, residences, and sites of culture, and consumption are internalized within the site’s boundaries. In one framework, such mega-projects embody the “re-bundling” the city, which was scattered by spatial separation of urban forms and functions under modernist urbanism. Jon Jerde, a prominent mega-project architect of the late 1990s, confirmed this view, defining his craft as “[reassembling] the city from its current disarray.” He added, “We create colonies of cohesion.”

I stated in my first chapter that the aim of this thesis was to situate Hudson Yards, Manhattan’s first citadel, within the context of contemporary “splintering” urbanism. In my first chapter, I looked at the project is its historical economic and political contexts, both global and

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local, defining it as the socio-spatial product of neoliberal urbanism which, accelerated by globalization, served to socio-spatially fragment the city over the latter half of the 20th century. In my second chapter, using a narrower temporal and geographical frame, I drew a parallel between the paradigms of modern and postmodern urbanizations, their ideologies, aesthetics, and modes of cultural production to identify a central paradox of postmodernism and its mode of cultural production, as the veneer of pervasive populist rhetoric obfuscates and abstracts the systems of power which underlie urban development.

The accelerating global and economic processes of the neoliberal era has led inevitably to “style of postmodernism,” being identified by Zukin, echoing many others cultural critics, with “with the triumph of contemporary, multi-national capitalism.” Thus, while the industrial city acted as a spatial map and reflection of society, the contemporary city does the exact opposite, obscuring networks of power and social relations through architectural spectacle and heterogeneity. Similarly, whereas in the modern era the urban planner sought to impose order (the Cartesian grid) onto perceive chaos of society, in today’s city, urban actors disguise social order, i.e. hierarchy with the projection of aesthetic chaos.

While I have discussed the material and symbolic role of the built environment in an abstract sense, architecture also serves to frame our day-to-day life and experience of urbanity, for as Lefebvre says, “the city is not only a language, but a practice.” Within Lefebvre’s trialectic theory of socio-spatial production, ‘spatial practice,’ that is, space as it is experienced, acts to synthesize the paradoxical nature of space as it is conceived (by planners and architects and represented on blueprints and renderings) and perceived space, which occurs when conceived is brought onto the urban field through the social production of space; in this process, he argues,

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conflicts and contradictions between conceived space and perceived space emerge which are indicative of the nature of the dominant mode of socio-spatial production.\textsuperscript{153}

Modernist architects, such as Le Corbusier, loom large in the account of Lefebvre’s account and critique of urbanism under modernism, but the figure of the postmodern architect has been conspicuously absent from my account of Hudson Yard’s socio-spatial production. This is because the death of modern architecture also shattered the conception of the architect as social engineer, as realizer of Utopia. As Zukin notes, architects have had to grapple with the same socio-economic shifts of those who produce material goods; namely, “the abstraction of value from material products to images and symbols, global markets, and a shift in the major source of social meaning from production to consumption.”\textsuperscript{154} The result, as we see in the case of Hudson Yards, architects of this era of capitalism adopt a more entrepreneurial role, recognizing architecture as a commodity, and themselves as producers.

In this way, Hudson Yards, came about as an architectural assemblage via Ross’ curation of “a drop-dead list”\textsuperscript{155} of brand-name corporate architects, whose process is not that of conceiving space, per se, but tailoring a built environment to Ross’ vision of the urban ideal: a contained, exclusionary space, sanitized, safe and designed around consumption. The role of urban design, then, is to produce a spectacle of authenticity, an illusion of public that is bolstered by the populist rhetoric of postmodern culture. “The city historically constructed is no longer lived and no longer understood practically,” writes Lefebvre, “It is only an object of cultural consumption for tourists, avid for spectacles and the picturesque. Even for those who seek to understand it with warmth, it is gone.”\textsuperscript{156} If this is true, that the city has been reduced to a ‘virtual object,’ then the

\textsuperscript{153} Lefebvre, (1974).
\textsuperscript{154} Zukin (1991), 41.
\textsuperscript{155} Davidson, “From 0 to 12 Million Square Feet.”
\textsuperscript{156} Lefebvre, “Writings on Cities,” 148.
aim of this chapter is to prod at this projection; to understand Hudson Yards beyond that image of urbanity that it desperately projects.

In 1984, Frederic Jameson went to visit the Bonaventura Hotel in Los Angeles; he too was concerned with the experience of urban space in the postmodern era, particularly of architecture which opposes itself ideologically and aesthetically from the Cartesian, elitist, and Utopian modernists of the previous era. He presented a “cognitive mapping” of the space as a means of processing the economic landscape in the contemporary city; in his words, “to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of the city’s structure as a whole.” On March 15th of this year, the first phase of Hudson Yards opened to the public, and I travelled to the city with Jameson, Lefebvre, and the promises of Ross and Cross in mind. In the following section I present my own cognitive map, hoping to reconcile the Hudson Yards that has been neatly contained within the screen of my computer, as it has been represented, with Hudson Yards as it has been propelled into the space of daily life.

I: Confronting Hudson Yards

I approached the development from the subway stop at Penn Station a few blocks away, entering “The Shops at Hudson Yards” through its street entrance on West 33rd and 10th Avenue. Waiting for the walk sign, I craned my head upwards, attempting to capture the entirety of the building across from me within a single perspective. This is hard to do. 30 Hudson Yards, now the third-tallest building in the city, juts upward toward the sky in angular sections up to its altitude of 1,268 feet (see Figure 3.3 and 3.4). I could see “the Edge,” the not-yet-open observation deck (which will be New York’s highest public balcony at an elevation of 1,000 feet).

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157 Jameson, Frederic, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” New Left Review 1, no. 146 (July/August 1984), 90.
protruding from the top of the building, facing the rest of Manhattan. The bluish glass-plated building cannot be penetrated by the gaze, taken in as an object as itself. Instead it reflects the sky and the buildings around it. Jameson’s spectral analysis of this ubiquitous feature of postmodern architecture notes that the effect is “a peculiar dissociation of [the building] from its neighborhood, it is not even an exterior, inasmuch as when you seek to look at the hotel’s outer walls you cannot see the hotel itself, but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it.”

This architectural feature, which serves to repel the surrounding urban field and those in it, is representative of Hudson Yards’ larger identity as a citadel, and indicates that tendency of walling-out noted by Marcuse. From my perspective, that of outside looking in, Hudson Yards presents itself as impenetrable. What I assumed to be the mall itself, a wide rectangular building which rests between 30 and 10 Hudson Yards (see figure 3.5) has no signage, no glass at all; it is paved with what resembles sheets of corrugated metal, in what must be an homage the “industrial past” of the site, that which is constantly referred to in reverential terms in Hudson Yards media. I had to double-check the navigation on my phone to make sure I was at the proper entrance, as no renderings I had seen of the mall had provided a visual reference for identifying the mall from this perspective.

It was only when I was within a few feet of the entranceway that elegant silver letters spelling “The Shops,” confirmed I was in the right place. As an architectural site, Hudson Yards has been represented as mammoth, glittering, colossal, and stupendous in photos and renderings. However, as if it is some secret club, its distinctly demure street presence effectively disguises its means of entering to anyone who is not actively looking for it; perhaps someone like this man who

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158 Jameson (1984), 82.
159 I used a GoogleMaps screenshot here, as at the time I did not even recognize this as part of Hudson Yards and neglected to photograph it.
is rummaging for recyclables across the street (see figure 3.6). This is an explicit strategy of the so-called “defensive architecture” that has come to exemplify postmodern urban design; it has its roots in a rash of “stealth houses” in Los Angeles, where the status of wealthy homeowners is concealed with inconspicuous or shoddy facades. Other prevalent postmodern design methods of exclusion include “illegible entryways” and “enclos[ing] public space, as opposed to the modernist tendency to place buildings within public space.”

The contemporary citadel does not need walls, only the suggestion of them.

As I neared the entrance, I noticed the first (of many I would see) touch-screen kiosks (see figure 3.7). In friendly font, it directed me to connect to the free WiFi available throughout Hudson Yards. I passed, for now, and entered the building. The interior of the mall, designed by Elkus Manfredi and containing Manhattan’s first Neiman Marcus, embodies the erratic aesthetic of the space. In various shades of gray and silver, without clear chromatic divisions between them, architectural elements are diverse and multidirectional, merging rather than delineating. The floors are a marbled gray and white, a patchwork of different shaped, sized, and patterned tiles. Slim rectangular black signs hang from the ceiling, looking as if they will help you catch a flight, but actually directing the shopper to various attractions in glowing Helvetica: “30 Hudson Yards,” “Shops,” “Restaurants,” “Plaza” (see figures 3.8-3.0) There are over a hundred shops inside here, advertised as “everything you’re looking for,” but consisting largely of luxury apparel brands: Coach, Dior, Louis Vuitton, Fendi. There are a few more affordable outlets such as H&M, Gap, Zara, and Uniqlo, but they are vastly outnumbered. In addition to the retail, there are number of cafe/bakeries, bars, upscale restaurants, and the comforting presence of security officers. One wall-panel displays the companies based in the neighboring 30 Hudson Yards in gold plate: Warner Media, HBO, Wells Fargo, CNN, and Related.

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160 Ellin, Nan, 172
According to the opening day’s press release: “The Shops & Restaurants pay homage to the industrial past of the West Side. Inside, steel and dark wood evoke the rail yards that once dominated the area and natural stone floors and exposed support structures contribute to the rough-hewn, urban elegance of this vertical neighborhood.”

From my vantage point on the ground, nothing about the mall’s interior was either “rough-hewn,” “exposed,” or “industrial.” I saw the dark wood, but it was glossy and luxurious in feel, and blended into the overwhelming silver aluminum/steel that coated the mall’s interior; the only support structures I saw were galvanized metal pillars, much like other malls I’ve visited. “We don’t want this to feel like a mall,” insisted Howard Elkus back in 2012. Perhaps, neither do the shoppers and other members of the public wandering through it. Ignoring their wants, it does.

The overwhelming aesthetic is gloss and glow; rather than display individual color schemes all the storefronts are all-black cubes with their names projected in the same white glowing letters. This served to make the already disorienting and unnavigable space even more so. The thick and frantic crowd moving around me in conjunction with the thumping bass from an invisible sound system compounded this. Thankfully, they thought of this; if you approach one of the kiosks (which resemble touch-screen obelisks) you can search for a destination and it will text directions to your phone.

These kiosks are the most visible indicator of Hudson Yards’ status as the country’s first “quantified community,” a vision that has been helped along by Dan Doctoroff’s company SideWalk Labs. There are 30 of them scattered throughout the site, and they can be used to book restaurants and buy Vessel tickets, in addition to easing navigation through the site. However, as I found out after my visit, the kiosks also include two invisible cameras with sensors, which,

162 Davidson, “From 0 to 12 Million.”
according to Cross, will collect data for advertisers: “We can say how many people looked at this ad, for how long. Did they seem interested bored, were they smiling?” Soon, says Cross, microphones within the kiosks will be activated, allowing you to “talk” to the machines. What about, Cross didn’t say, only noting that it will be like “HAL 2001,” a casual reference to the sentient computer of cinematic renown who ends up killing his operators.

Ross and Related have made it clear that “harnessing big data” will be an essential part of Hudson Yards’ success: “We have all these sensors, and we’re setting them up so that we’re collecting more data than probably any other place,” said Ross in 2017. While he cites “[enhancing] the employee, resident, and visitor experience” as the primary goal of such technologies, critics have noted that there are no legal regulations that restrict how private companies use or store data, such “absent community control” presents a dangerous precedent for a supposedly public space.

This was all unbeknownst to me, however, and I used the navigation feature to find a coffee shop in blissful ignorance of being surveilled (see figure 3.11). If it is true, as Rem Koolhas has argued, that “shopping... is the last remaining form of public activity,” this makes the shopping mall the exemplar of public space, and my purchase of a $6 iced coffee a meaningful act of public participation. Shopping malls, along with theme parks, have been a central focus in the critique and analysis of postmodern spaces as displays of the contemporary city’s tendency towards simulation and spectacle and the subversion of ideal civic life into a culture of commodity and consumption: such “spaces of seduction” cultivate an image of urban communal life, but

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163 Jeans, David, “Related’s Hudson Yards: Smart City or Surveillance City?” The Real Deal, 15 March 2019.
166 Graham and Marvin, 264.
here, those “without the passport of money are simply in absence.”\textsuperscript{167} While such spaces have in previous decades have been designated to the edge of urbanity, Hudson Yards’ recreation of the mall experience in the context of the city is representative of a movement, described by Margaret Crawford, in “the world of the shopping mall … has become the world.”\textsuperscript{168}

In such a shopping- mall world, the primary mechanism of urban design, then, is the “creation of urbane disguises,” the cultivation of the experience of place which “is at pains to assert its ties to the kind of city life it is in the process of obliterating.”\textsuperscript{169} Ross, Related, and their spokespeople go to great pains to deny that the “Shops and Restaurants” are a mall, as New Yorkers are historically averse to such structures. “It’s just like any street,” a Related executive earnestly explained to a reporter before the opening, “It’s just that our sidewalk runs vertically through the project.”\textsuperscript{170}

I argue that Hudson Yards manufactures an illusion of urbanity, through a series of curated cultural experiences. On my visit, I encountered the site-specific art and design exhibition titled \textit{HYxOffTheWall}, which consists of thirteen “interactive/3D installations” peppered throughout the building. One of these consisted of a wall covered with squares of reversible sequins; on one someone had written their Instagram handle, imploring “add me.” I watched, as in another square, a more perceptive young woman traced out the words: “EAT THE RICH” (see figure 3.12) The juxtaposition seemed apt.

Another part of the spectacle within the mall were two instances of “spontaneous” public performance. On one of the upper levels, people crowded around a group of young black

\textsuperscript{169} Sorkin, Michael, \textit{Variations on a Theme Park}, xiv.
teenagers who had broken out into a complex step dance to the thumping beat from the invisible
DJ set. The largely white crowd, some weighed down with shopping bags stopped, took photos,
videos, applauded. Later, in the main atria, I caught the performance of another dance group, also
black, who were attempting to pull in members of the crowd to join them. They were
unsuccessful; people were content to watch (see figures 3.12 and 3.13)

Later, I looked at a Hudson Yards press release regarding these events, and noted that they
made sure to stress the specific cultural associations of the artists and performers involved. In the
case of HYxOfftheWall, they stress the influence of Hudson Yard’s “rich history and geographic
location,” on the works; “All artworks relate back to the site’s past, present or future expressed in
the artist’s distinct point of view.” The first dance group I saw was from the Ailey School: “an
NYC-founded performing arts community using the beauty of the African-American heritage and
other cultures to unite people of all races, ages and backgrounds.” The second was The
D.R.E.A.M. Ring, described as “a community-oriented dance company performing the Brooklyn-
born street dance style Flexn,” and apparently sponsored by Lulu Lemon.171

On the surface, the emphasis on racial and cultural variety in this marketing language could
be construed as a displayed commitment to diversity on the part of Hudson Yards, but knowing
what we do about the creative class strategy there is undoubtedly a bottom line at stake.
Additionally, the presence of language that which obfuscates any complex understanding of racial
difference with the uncontroversial goal of “unity” indicates the leveraging of performative black
identity as a strategic tool to imbue culture into a cultureless site. Exploiting racial identity as a
specific tool of simulation might be relatively new, but as early as 1989, Harvey noted that in the
entrepreneurial city:

[The] urban terrain is opened for display, fashion, and the ‘presentation of self’ in a

171 “The Shops & Restaurants at Hudson Yards to Open…”
surrounding of spectacle and play. If everyone, from punks to rap artists to the ‘yuppies’ and the haute bourgeoisie can participate in the production of an urban image through their production of social space, then all can at least feel some sense of belonging to that place.  

Thus, rather than rely on the inherent qualities of place imbued with a historical, naturally evolved urban place, Hudson Yards had to resort to the construction of vitality through designed interactivity in order to align with the safety and security demanded by those middle-class consumers of place. The often-repeated framing of Hudson Yards as a new gathering space for New York, a “vibrant and dynamic” space for social engagement, is bolstered by claims to culture. HYxOffTheWall and the performances are temporary, but the design-studio Snarkitecture, known for being at forefront of the “Instagram museum trap” phenomenon, will soon be permanently installed in the mall, and host a series photogenic installations, or rather “cultural experiences” year-round. The conflation of culture and commodity reaches a level of self-parody: as “each installation will be accompanied by a unique retail experience …. as well as one-of-a-kind collaborations with brands from around the world.”

Such blatant commodification of contemporary art, thickly veiled with the rhetoric of a public gathering, extends beyond the mall and throughout Hudson Yards as a spectacular whole. As Peck says, “Rather than ‘civilizing’ urban economic development by ‘bringing in culture,’ creativity strategies do the opposite: they commodify the arts and cultural resources, even social tolerance itself, suturing them as putative economic assets to evolving regimes of urban competition.”

174 Peck, 763.
After a while spent in the dizzying endless mall, I navigated my way out to the plaza to the main attraction: the Vessel (see figures 3.14-3.16). Even after having studied this development for nearly a year, I was nonetheless taken aback by the sheer size of Thomas Heatherwick’s “stairway to nowhere;” a copper-colored, honeycomb-shaped, interlocking set of 154 flights of stairs. From the outset, Ross knew he needed something monumental to tie the site together and act as another destination to attract crowds and attention: he demanded not just “a modern-day Trevi fountain,” but also a “three-hundred- and-sixty-five day [Christmas] tree,” an “icon” for New York akin to Paris’s Eiffel Tower.

Ross was drawn to the monumentality of Thomas Heatherwick, a British artist nicknamed the “billionaire whisperer,” whose works are nearly always obscenely expensive and colossal in size: among them the Olympic Cauldron of the 2012 London summer games and the “Seed Cathedral,” a $32 million pavillion representing the United Kingdom at the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. Cross describes the relationship between the two as “loving:” “Thomas sees Stephen as the ultimate patron, and I think Stephen sees Thomas as the ultimate genius.” Thus, beginning in October 2013, the Vessel came into fruition as a collaboration between the two men; between Ross’s desire for monumentality and Heatherwick’s tendency toward conceptual, material, and financial extremes.

Ross “fell in love instantly,” with Heatherwick’s creation “My guys around here thought I was out of my goddam mind. It was too big, too this, too that. ‘How are we going to build it?’ ‘What’s it going to cost?’ I said, ‘I don’t care.’ The cost, I figured, would be seventy-five million.”

The final cost was $200 million. The steel sections of the Vessel’s landings were fabricated by an

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175 Davidson, “From 0 to 12 Million.”
178 Parker, 2018.
Italian company near Venice and shipped via tugboat to be constructed on site. Confusingly, Heatherwick told Parker that he wanted the structure to be “skeletal” and “raw” (saying, “The world seems, to me, to have become too shiny, too polished.”) yet rejected the use of real copper as it would weather. Instead, Heatherwick Studio mandated the use of a “very fine copper-colored finish to aluminum, in a process that has also been used to apply color to iPhones.” The result, of course, was pure polish, maximum shine.

From my perspective, the structure is the obvious centerpiece to the plaza; Ross might have overcorrected, as its monumentality nearly overtakes the the entire development itself (see figure 3.17). He has expressed his hope that Vessel will organically garner an affectionate nickname from New Yorkers (so far, one that has stuck is “Shawarma”). It does attract: people throng around it, either taking photos of the thing itself, or of themselves, in front of or reflected in the sculpture’s surface. A sign standing in between the shops and the Vessel lists “Vital Behaviors” for the structure. Among them: no sitting, no food or beverages except water in a closed plastic container, no smoking, vaping, and no pets (see figure 3.18).

In the marketing of the Vessel, the ideal of Hudson Yards as a landscape for the people emerges too. The whole idea of the structure, according to Heatherwick, is that it “will act as a new free stage set for the city and form a new public gathering place for New Yorkers and visitors.” Ross too, has expounded on the value of public space, and frames the Vessel as a gift to New York at large, for “the public,” for everyone. Additionally, he attempts to associate the sculpture directly with New York as a place, that is “Like New Yorkers, Vessel is not passive. It embodies our city’s energy, activity and movement.” However, I note that Heatherwick has

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179 ibid.
182 ibid.
contradicted this narrative of the Vessel (as a means of unification) in traditional anti-modernist rhetoric: “All you can try to do is design something that will be an unusual experience… I do feel that this is a different category of social device. There’s no goal of relevance, no goal of making order.”

The Vessel-- its conception, design, and the experience of it-- speaks to the complicated nature of privately-operated public space, or what Mike Davis calls “pseudo-public spaces.” It parodies Hudson Yards itself; a spectacle without content, defined by its relation to patterns of consumption and designed as an experience which is marketable and engineered to the projected desire of the visitor, all of which is being concocted under the patronage of a billionaire. I won’t argue the merit of the Vessel’s artistry in this paper, but suffice to say, the structure fulfills far more than an aesthetic or conceptual purpose. Luis Fernández-Galiano coined the term ‘architainment,’ as a descriptor for the globalized architectural style of corporate patronage that manifests itself in “landscapes of wealth” such as Hudson Yards. The Vessel is the perfect centerpiece for Hudson Yards in more ways than one.

I intended to climb the six-story-high interlocking sets of stairs, but unfortunately the ticketing system was fully booked, and apparently will be so for months. Instead I sat down on one of the concrete ledges which formed the perimeter of a vast expanse of flowers in dirt (there were no formal benches in the plaza, indicative of “prickly space”), and watched people move around and within the Vessel, and in and out of the shops (see figure 3.19). I was next to a bored-looking man with an NBC press pass and video camera, who was seemingly waiting for something to begin. I eventually logged into the WiFi network, which was prominently advertised as free and open on the kiosks. However, I had to give my first and last name, email, and zip-code before I was admitted to the virtual aspect of the Yards.

\[183\] Parker, (2018).
After a while in the plaza my attention gradually gravitated away from the Vessel, and I realized I was privy to the entire architectural moment that comprises this phase of the master-plan (see figure 3.20). In 2018, Pederson likened the interaction between the site’s’ buildings to guests at a cocktail party: “They have a responsibility not to stand off in the corner by themselves, but they have a responsibility to gesture and talk with each other.” Landscape architect Thomas Woltz, elaborating on Pederson’s analogy, described the master plan as a party of “mastodons, pineapples, sheds, swizzlesticks and bubble mats.” If aggressive heterogeneity was the intent, then the plan is a success: to the visitor, there seems to be little formal cohesion between the buildings, save for the ever-present steel-and-glass exteriors that define contemporary downtown areas (see figure 3.21).

Nestled in between 10 and 30, the glass-plated front of Elkus’s mall is translucent and glamorous. As opposed to repelling the viewer’s gaze like the back of the building, This translucency indicates that you, in this plaza, are now actually in Hudson Yards; you belong now (see figure 3.22). The building is topped with an angular, and copper-colored cornice. To its left, within the plaza, is Diller Scofido + Renfro’s the Shed, an “adaptable and expendable cultural venue” that is designed with a translucent, bulbous canopy, a “telescoping outer shell,” which can double the capacity of the space in the case of larger events. I noted that the structure oriented at an awkward angle which allows it to feed into the lobby of 15 Hudson Yard, yet another glass-plated super-tall, a 70-story luxury residential tower co-designed by DS+R; as of 2019, the penthouse is listed at $32 million (see figure 3.23).

The architectural fusion between the Shed and 15 Hudson Yards highlights a conflict in Hudson Yards between private and publicly operated space. Accommodating, but not operating,

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the Shed was part of the deal made between Related and the city, and thus, although in Hudson Yards, the Shed is technically on city-owned land. The venue is programmed and run by its own “independent non-profit cultural organization,” also called the Shed. As he recalled recently, Ross recoiled when he saw the initial placement of the building, back in 2010, “I thought, there’s no way in the world!...It’s going to block my retail.” The compromise with the city resulted in the re-orientation of the building to be parallel with Thirtieth Street, and for its integration with 15 Hudson Yards. Also, DS + R was asked to co-design the residential tower. The firm had never designed a commercial building before; Liz Diller, in 2018, called this arrangement a “deal with the devil.”

Of 10 and 30 Hudson Yards, William Pederson said he imagined two buildings “that play off each other, in what could be described as a dance of sleek giants.” However, unlike many pairs of building conceived as such (the original World Trade Center comes to mind), 10 and 30 Hudson Yards are dissimilar in height and shape. The shorter 10 Hudson Yards, which provides a pathway to the High Line, slopes toward the river, while 30 Hudson Yards, which contains an entrance to the 7 subway line, slopes towards the rest of the city (see figure 3.24). “One of the paintings I admire most is The School of Athens,” Pedersen said in a 2012 interview, “You have great historical and intellectual figures gathered together in dynamic groups of interchange, gesturing to each other. That’s the architectural assignment for each of us.”

This painting was not what first came to mind as I sat in the plaza; the social interactions I observed were fully contained within their own microcosms, be they familial, romantic or platonic. (see figures 3.25 and 3.26) I stayed for a long time in Hudson Yards, nearly four hours. Mostly I

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188 ibid.
190 Davidson, (2012).
sat in that spot, facing the Vessel with the mall to my left and the river to my right. Every so often I traversed around the plaza and wandered through the floors, but kept returning to my post. I tried to find some sort of schema into which to place and organize my observations, but I could only sit quietly and collect the images as they came. There were multiple groups of young people, taking photos of each other against the Vessel with bulky cameras, backs turned away from the sun lowering above the Hudson. Men in suits, also clustered in groups around the Vessel (see figure 3.27).

“The plaza is the node where the site’s conflicting forces reveal themselves: the tension between public and private, between city and campus, between democratic space and commercial real estate,” Justin Davidson noted in 2012. Employees with black polos, wide smiles, and handfuls of pamphlets. Maintenance workers in blue polos, sweeping up debris in peoples’ wake, which largely consisted of discarded stickers stamped with a graphic of the Vessel and the day’s date. There were a lot, a lot, of dogs. Everywhere. Inside and outside the mall. Three construction workers taking a break a few feet away from me: the back of their neon yellow shirts read “Building New York” (see figure 3.28) Childs told Davidson that ideally, “everyone [will have] ownership of Hudson Yards, whether you’re arriving in your $100,000 limo or pushing a shopping cart full of your belongings.” I noticed three men in black windbreakers (emblazoned with the slogan “Securing Your World”) walking at a different pace than the rest of the crowd, stopping every so often to observe and talk into their walkie-talkies.

Finally, I left Hudson Yards, and walked towards the $3 million extension of the 7 line, beyond which the second phase of the project is rising into view. This particular subway station was entirely different than any other I had traversed through in New York. There is an elegant metal and glass canopy overhanging the entrance, which is probably three times wider than the

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101 Davidson (2012).
norm. A mobile charging station with a touch-screen sits next to the entrance. A young man is plugged in and chatting on the phone. Bright new escalators, not damp concrete steps, transport you into the station, which, like Hudson Yards as a whole, is expansive and chrome-plated (see figures 3.30-3.33). After waiting for a few minutes on the nearly-empty platform, I got on the train to return to New York.

II: Diagnosing Hudson Yards

In the preceding chapters, I have drawn a historical arc spanning a stretch of time from New York as a decrepit whole (or hole, maybe) in the 1970s to the socio-spatially fragmented New York of today, in order to explain the conditions underlying the emergence of Manhattan’s first mega-project. The spatial dynamics of the contemporary metropolis have been driven by the overwhelming ethos of a reinvigorated privatism, enabled by new mechanisms of urbanization which define neoliberalism. I have argued that neoliberal city planning since the 1970s results in a built environment which is in essence anti-urban; an urban landscape which is antithetical to the concept of the public domain that the city has historically embodied. Through public-private partnerships, contemporary urban designers have mimicked the “pull of the periphery,” producing safe, clean spaces in a Faustian bargain that trades security for freedom.

What we have witnessed in this history, from the historical origin of the market’s infiltration into urban governance, is a “paradigm shift from a city of production to a city of consumption.”\textsuperscript{192} Within this economical shift is the ideological break from modernist ideology, a conscious rejection of the visions of its social engineers and its mode of cultural production. This break, however, is however more aesthetic than ideological. Today, architects take on more servile roles to developers like Ross, but there is still a vision to which their design caters; one based upon

\textsuperscript{192} Zukin (1991), 45.
the dominant mode of production which benefits the dominant class at the cost of the right to the
city. Based on my visit to Hudson Yards, I conclude that through the production of curated
cultural experiences, Hudson Yards attempts to artificially induce the experience of the urban in an
environment that is palatable to the suburban conception of public, that is, maintained by tangible
and virtual methods of surveillance. This indicates that within the consuming middle class, there
exists at least a projected desire for urbanity. Whether or not Hudson Yards will fulfill that desire
will have to be seen.

Of the Bonaventura Hotel in 1984, Jameson concludes that the hotel “aspires to being a
total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city…. [to which there] corresponds a new
collective practice, a new mode in which individuals move and congregate, something like the
practice of a new and historically original kind of hyper-crowd.”\(^{193}\) This summation of the site, as a
consumerist micro-cosmos, or a *heterotopia*, to use Foucault's term for a “place of the other,”
echoes my own analysis of Hudson Yards in this thesis, that which has been validated by both my
own experience of the site and bolstered with the disdain of leading architectural critics in the
flurry of negative headlines since the project’s opening: “Hudson Yards is a Billionaire’s Fantasy
City,”\(^{194}\) “Hudson Yards is the Hotel California of New York,”\(^{195}\) “Hudson Yards Broke My
Heart,”\(^{196}\) “Hudson Yards is New York’s Biggest Newest Slickest Gated Community.”\(^{197}\)
A satirical piece from *The New Yorker* titled “My Hudson Yards Shopping List” includes “an
apartment to sit empty forty-eight weeks of the year; College-acceptance letters; admission to an

\(^{193}\) Jameson (1984), 86.
\(^{194}\) Davidson, (2019).
art installation at the Shed about socioeconomic mobility, followed by a talkback and truffle tasting with the artist,” and “poverty-noise-cancelling headphones.”

This negative barrage does not affect the confident tone of Related, as on their website they confidently state:

Hudson Yards has become the cultural center of Manhattan’s New West Side. A template for the future of cities, this new neighborhood has not only changed the way New York looks to the world, but the way the world sees New York.

This speaks to one point of Jameson’s which does not conform to my own “cognitive mapping,” namely that the Bonaventura negated the Utopian impulse of modernist architectural endeavors:

The gamble of the modern was that this new Utopian space… would fan out and transform [the surrounding city] by the very power of its new spatial language. The Bonaventura, however, is content to ‘let the fallen city fabric continue to be in its being’... no further effects, no larger protopolitical Utopian transformation, is either expected or desired.

Other critics have echoed this inference of postmodern urbanism, speaking of the “exhaustion of Utopian energies.” However this conclusion is rejected by the rhetoric of Hudson Yards’ marketing, as a “template for the future of cities,” as more than just a collection of buildings, and by Ross himself: “I think people will come and look at it and say, ‘I want a Hudson Yards in my city.’”

Of his role as a developer, Ross has said, “I’ve always believed, whatever you do, you want to be best-in-class.” This philosophy of “bestness” must have been heavily emphasized in the development process, as it is a pervasive theme in the language of its promoters. “Every building is going to be best in class,” said Jay Cross in 2012 when

199 Jameson, 81.
201 Bailey, “Stephen M. Ross to Architects…”
attempting to explain the masterplan, “That’s the common thread.”\textsuperscript{202} Overseen by Ross, the best architects, with their best buildings, produced “a dynamic mixed-use environment with the best of shopping, open space, living and working all in one place.”\textsuperscript{203} Of course, invisible to the eye, is Hudson Yards as an “engineered city” (see figure 3.) All of this, of course, is augmented with the veneer of populism, the promotion of city for the people, "We will be the new center of New York, the new heart of New York,” said Cross, “Every New Yorker will have a reason to go to Hudson Yards, and every New Yorker will love Hudson Yards. That's got to be the goal.”\textsuperscript{204}

This indicates that the utopian project of urbanism has not been exhausted, as Jameson and his contemporaries concluded from the vantage point of the 20th century, but rather the role of utopian engineering has merely been shifted from the architect to developer. What might be new today, based on how Hudson Yards has been developed and presented — while not a total regression to the grand social project of modernism—is at least the re-emergence of the desire of the \textit{ideal polis}: a utopian vision engineered into reality, albeit for private interests. Whether or not Hudson Yards, and what it represents, will spread out and transform the surrounding city, and the urban field in general remains to be seen.

There have been three central narratives in the presentation of Hudson Yards as the city of tomorrow. First, there is that of the creative city, one that centralizes cultural experiences and brings together those best and brightest, second, that of the “smart city,” a sort of techno-utopia which is not only environmentally sustainable but responsive to the needs of its inhabitants, and finally, overlaying all of these, is that it is a “city for everyone.” These utopian narratives of

\textsuperscript{202} Davidson, “From 0 to 12 Million…”
\textsuperscript{204} Davidson.
Hudson Yards, merit a close observation, especially that of the techno-utopia, which has far-reaching implications regarding privacy and security in the digital age.

Contrasting this language and layered intent of its conceptualizers—both Ross as visionary as well as his architects and designers—the gap between what Lefebvre calls conceived, or abstract, space and the space of daily life seems like a yawning abyss. As Foucault says, “Power is tolerable only on the condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.”

If the fall of Pruitt Igoe in 1972 signified the death of modernism as a social project, perhaps the rise of Hudson Yards, and its universal condemnation indicates the beginning of the end of the facade of postmodern architecture as a populist alternative.

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IV: Conclusion

“A preference for broad strokes, for the distortion and flattening of character, and for the reduction of events to narrative, has been for well over a hundred years the heart of the way the city presents itself: Lady Liberty, huddling masses, ticker-tape parades, heroes, gutters, bright lights, broken hearts, eight million stories in the naked city; eight million stories and all the same story, each devised to obscure not only the city’s actual tensions of race and class but also, more significantly, the civic and commercial arrangements that rendered those tensions irreconcilable.

Joan Didion, “New York: Sentimental Journeys”

I have framed this thesis as a “future history” of Hudson Yards, but drawing a neat conclusion about what is unfolding in the present is a difficult task. What I can say, having delved into the historical roots and economic context of the project, is that Hudson Yards represents the triumph of the elite in New York’s tale of two cities. Thus, as the development rises, traditional markers of urban egalitarianism, such as social and racial diversity, housing affordability, and access to public spaces and transportation, will continue to erode.

The night before Hudson Yards opened to the public on March 15th, Stephen Ross threw a lavish, invite-only, party in the Shops & Restaurants. Entertainment included a marching band, tap dancers, and circus performers; Liza Minnelli serenaded the gathered guests with a rendition of “New York, New York.” New York’s top real-estate brokers rubbed shoulders with A-list celebrities and award-winning chefs. Champagne toasts were made in honor of a dream, almost 15 years in the making, that was finally coming to reality. “This is like Sim City on steroids,” commented one guest, a real-estate broker, “But real.”

The narrative of New York presented by Hudson Yards highlights the glamor of the city— all those wealthy and beautiful milling around the site the night of March 14th— while ignoring all the nuances and tensions that exist outside the project’s boundaries; those which have accompanied and accelerated in turn with the accumulation of this wealth. Hudson Yards promises a New York that is safe, sanitized and exclusive; Hudson Yards is the “suburbs with pizzaz.” While Hudson Yards claims that the project is a gift to those who would flood the mall and public spaces the next day, its true benefactors were those celebrating the night before, reveling in their exclusive access.

The new New York leads the nation in income inequality, its top 1% estimated in 2016 to be earning 45 times more than the bottom 99%. In the city’s new Gilded Age, New York is an economic powerhouse, its 1.6 trillion GDP is the highest in the nation. At the same time, however, more than half of all its residents can’t afford their rent, and the city has more homeless residents at any point since the Great Depression. In other words: at the peak of its prosperity, New York is experiencing all the symptoms of a housing crisis. In my first chapter, I said I aimed to contextualize Hudson Yards in contemporary urbanism. These statistics lay bare what the institution of Hudson Yards really represents.

In the majority of this thesis I have focused on only one side of the battle for New York’s soul, those who have controlled the descent of New York into a late-capitalist cityscape and not on those who are being displaced and excluded. Those who have been disenfranchised will have to tackle the institution of neoliberalism itself in order to reclaim the right to the city that has been stripped from them, painting the task of wresting control of the trajectory of the city’s development from the financial elite as Herculean. However, protests and outcry over the negative

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209 Smith and Cowen, 35.
effects of gentrification and uneven development are emerging as prominent voices in the global urban community even as the dust from the construction sites of mega-developments still settle. The battle is not over yet.
Figure 3.1: “The plan for Hudson Yards is not just about erecting tall buildings or bricks and mortar; it is about creating dynamic spaces to be used and enjoyed by residents and workers, and a celebrated destination for visitors from across the City, the region and the world.”

Figure 3.2: Hudson Yards Master Plan
Figure 3.3: 

Figure 3.4: Hudson Yards viewed from Hudson River.

Figure 3.5

Figure 3.6
Figure 3.7

Figure 3.8: Atrium View of Shops and Restaurants

Figure 3.9

Figure 3.10
Figure 3.14

Figure 3.15: Upper Level View from the Vessel

Figure 3.16
Figure 3.17

Figure 3.18

Figure 3.19: Plaza looking South
Figure 3.20

Figure 3.21

Figure 3.22: The Shops and Restaurants, Looking East from Plaza
Figure 3.23: The Shed and 15 Hudson Yards

Figure 3.24: From right to left: 10 and 30 Hudson Yards
Figure 3.30: Hudson Yards viewed from the Empire State Building.
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