



Introduction

The City That Lost Its Soul

It was a story of origins—a creation story, in fact—a tale about the modern rage for perpetually new beginnings, fresh starts and makeovers; in short, a story about the genesis of genesis.

—Herbert Muschamp, *New York Times*, February 28, 2007

In the early years of the twenty-first century, New York City lost its soul. Some people doubt that the city ever had a soul, because New York has always grown by shedding its past, tearing down old neighborhoods and erecting new ones in their place, usually in a bare-faced struggle for financial gain. Others just shrug because, today, all big cities are erasing their gritty, bricks-and-mortar history to build a shiny vision of the future. Beijing, Shanghai, and other Chinese cities are clearing out the narrow, rundown alleys in their center, removing longtime residents to the distant edges of town, and replacing small, old houses with expensive apartments and new skyscrapers of spectacular design. Liverpool and Bilbao have torn down their abandoned waterfronts and turned aging docks and warehouses into modern art museums. In London, Paris, and New York artists and gentrifiers move into old immigrant areas, praising the working-class bars and take-out joints but overwhelming them with new cafés and boutiques,



The “timeless” urban village: Elizabeth Street, NoLIta, 2001. Photograph by Richard Rosen.

which are soon followed by brand-name chain stores. A universal rhetoric of upscale growth, based on both the economic power of capital and the state and the cultural power of the media and consumer tastes, is driving these changes and exposing a conflict between city dwellers’ desire for authentic origins—a traditional, mythical desire for roots—and their new beginnings: the continuous reinvention of communities.¹

To speak of a city being authentic at all may seem absurd. Especially in a global capital like New York, neither people nor buildings have a chance to accumulate the patina of age. Most residents are not born there, neither do they live in the same house for generations, and the physical fabric of the city is constantly changing around them. In fact, all over the world, “Manhattanization” signifies everything in a city that is *not* thought to be authentic: high-rise buildings that grow taller every year, dense crowds where no one knows your name, high prices for inferior living conditions, and intense competition to be in style. Lately, though, authenticity has



taken on a different meaning that has little to do with origins and a lot to do with style. The concept has migrated from a quality of people to a quality of things, and most recently to a quality of experiences. *Time* magazine named authenticity one of the ten most important ideas of 2007, partly because of the promotional campaign of two marketing gurus, James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II, whose work emphasizes this journey from things to experience, and partly because of the anxiety fueled by social theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Jean Baudrillard, who say that, through technology, imitation of novelty, and the normal hype of consumer culture, experience is increasingly seduced by appearances. Viewed through either of these lenses, a city is authentic if it can create the *experience* of origins. This is done by preserving historic buildings and districts, encouraging the development of small-scale boutiques and cafés, and branding neighborhoods in terms of distinctive cultural identities.²

Whether it's real or not, then, authenticity becomes a tool of power. Any group that insists on the authenticity of its own tastes in contrast to others' can claim moral superiority. But a group that imposes its own tastes on urban space—on the look of a street, say, or the feeling of a

neighborhood—can make a claim to that space that displaces longtime residents. To be sure, a group that can afford to pay higher rents can also be reasonably sure their claim will win: artists displace manufacturers in live-work lofts, and are displaced in turn by lawyers and media moguls who buy these lofts as luxury condos; a gourmet cheese store or quirky coffee bar replaces a check-cashing service or take-out food shop, and is in turn displaced by a chain store that pays many thousands of dollars each month for the location. But this power over space is not just financial. Even more important, it's *cultural* power. New tastes displace those of longtime residents because they reinforce the images in politicians' rhetoric of growth, making the city a 24/7 entertainment zone with safe, clean, predictable space and modern, upscale neighborhoods. The sociologist John Hannigan says that the more spectacular new urban cultural spaces—a Disneyfied Times Square or a hipster district of art galleries, performance spaces, and vegan cafés—promise the safe excitement of “riskless risk.” I prefer to think about a more ordinary domestication by cappuccino, with wilder places getting an aesthetic upgrading by the opening of a Starbucks or another new coffee bar. The tastes behind these new spaces of consumption are powerful because they move longtime residents outside their comfort zone, gradually shifting the places that support their way of life to life supports for a different cultural community. Bistros replace bodegas, cocktail bars morph out of old-style saloons, and the neighborhood as a whole creates a different kind of sociability. Against the longtimers' sense of origins newcomers pose their own new beginnings.³

Who can say, though, that these new spaces are not authentic? New stores and new people produce new urban *terroirs*, localities with a specific cultural product and character that can be marketed around the world, drawing tourists and investors and making the city safe, though not cheap, for the middle class. It wasn't always this way. Life in the original “urban village” of ethnic and working-class neighborhoods before the 1960s was a re-creation of tradition. In the gentrified and hipster neighborhoods that have become models of urban experience since then, authenticity is a consciously chosen lifestyle and a performance, and a means of displacement as well.⁴

The desire for an authentic urban experience began as a reaction to the urban crisis of the 1960s, when American cities were routinely described as

hopeless victims of a fatal disease. They were losing their more affluent and ethnically whiter families to the suburbs. Public schools, parks, and streets were shoddy and uncontrollable. Elected officials worried about a growing budget gap between the services they were required to provide and the taxes they could collect from a poorer population, and a disastrous perception gap between the central city's image of glamour and sophistication and neighborhoods that were being abandoned by landlords, residents, and businesses.

In truth, cities were losing their competitive advantage. Government policies after World War II helped suburbanites more than city residents, and white middle-class families who could afford it, often with U.S. government-backed mortgage loans, moved outside cities to larger homes, backyards, and better schools. Corporate headquarters also deserted the city for the suburbs, where they spread out along the highways to create sprawling new business districts surrounded by parking lots. Bankers invested in new steel and auto plants in Italy, Korea, and Brazil, and airplane, clothing, and electronics factories sought large shop floors and cheaper labor first in the suburbs and then overseas. Working-class neighborhoods in Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston, as well as in New York, were caught between postwar optimism about social progress and an inability either to understand or to confront their postindustrial fate.

With public officials beginning to believe that cities suffered from an image crisis, they reached out to business executives to forge a new strategy for growth. Cities would target investors and visitors—people with money—by rebuilding the center and making themselves look as attractive as suburbs. Beginning in the 1970s, developers of downtown shopping centers turned derelict industrial and waterfront land into profitable attractions to compete with suburban malls. Culture—the theaters and museums that display a city's unique creative product—pursued a wider audience outside the urban center. In the 1980s, with financial firms and the real estate industry playing leading roles in reshaping the local economy, especially in global cities like New York, cultural districts, ethnic tourist zones, and artists' lofts presented a clean image of diversity for mass consumption. By the 1990s the commercial success and global media prominence of some of New York's neighborhoods, notably SoHo and Times Square, seemed to justify the rhetorical promise of their new beginnings.⁵

But city officials forgot about the city's origins. "Origins" refers not to which group settled in a neighborhood earliest; that would be difficult if



not ridiculous to prove, since every city is built up of layers of historical migrations. “Origins” suggests instead a moral right to the city that enables people to put down roots. This is the right to inhabit a space, not just to consume it as an experience. Authenticity in this sense is not a stage set of historic buildings as in SoHo or a performance of bright lights as at Times Square; it’s a continuous process of living and working, a gradual buildup of everyday experience, the expectation that neighbors and buildings that are here today will be here tomorrow.⁶

A city loses its soul when this continuity is broken. It begins with little changes you suddenly notice in your own neighborhood. The local hardware store or shoe repair shop closes down overnight; steel gates shutter the window where cans of Rustoleum and wrenches lay in the sun; a “For

Rent” sign replaces the tattered Cat’s Paw logo for leather lifts and the ancient, hand-lettered sign “Not Responsible for Shoes Left Over 30 Days.” Laundromats disappear, for the neighborhood’s new residents are buying two small apartments or an entire four-story house, knocking down the walls to make bigger rooms and installing their own washers and dryers. The sports bar where the Italian owner always had the TV tuned to a soccer match yields first to a video store and then to a Starbucks. The serial repetition of small stores that defined the city’s neighborhoods for so long is gradually broken up, imploded by new investment, new people, and “the relentless bulldozer of homogenization.”⁷

These changes are not only visible, they reshape our everyday routines. Some are welcome, like savoring a latte instead of a scorched black caffeine brew, though they may be costly, like paying double the old price for the latte or triple the old price for a pair of rubber lifts because the new shoe repair shop several blocks away has to pay a higher rent. Some changes make you feel like a stranger in the neighborhood where you have lived for years, when the local drugstore where the pharmacist knows your medications is replaced by a Duane Reade or CVS and you never see the same cashier twice. “So complete is each neighborhood,” E. B. White wrote in 1949, “and so strong the sense of neighborhood, that many a New Yorker spends a lifetime within the confines of an area smaller than a country village. Let him walk two blocks from his corner and he is in a strange land and will feel uneasy till he gets back.”⁸

It isn’t only the stores; the people are different too. In some neighborhoods artists, actors, computer software writers, and musicians—the hipperati—are hanging out in sidewalk cafés, eating brunch at 2 p.m., and heading off at midnight to performance spaces in warehouses and music bars. In other areas of the city, editors, professors, lawyers, and writers are wheeling baby strollers, talking on cell phones, and window-shopping in small design shops; these “bourgeois bohemians” prefer to lead a comfortable life, especially after they have children, but don’t want to live like their parents do—especially not in the suburbs—and don’t mind a little dirt on the streets as long as they feel safe. In the areas where hipsters and gentrifiers live there’s a new cosmopolitanism in the air: tolerant, hip, casual. And that isn’t bad. But little by little the old ethnic neighborhoods they have moved into are dying, along with the factories where longtime residents plied their trades and the Irish bars, Latino bodegas, and black soul food restaurants where they made their homes away from



New luxury construction on the Bowery, 2008. Photograph by Richard Rosen.

home. The people who seemed so rooted in these neighborhoods are disappearing.

As recently as the 1980s many of these areas still looked shabby; houses were abandoned, vacant lots were covered with garbage and worse. “There goes the neighborhood” pointed to a downward slide from modest shops and homes to poor tenants, high crime rates, and gritty streets. Now it’s the Bowery transformed from Skid Row to a boulevard of boutique hotels, Harlem with cafés, Williamsburg with condos on the waterfront. We often call these changes gentrification because of the movement of rich, well-educated folks, the gentry, into lower-class neighborhoods, and the higher property values that follow them, transforming a “declining” district into an expensive neighborhood with historic or hipster charm.

At first these changes are limited to the oldest *ur*-neighborhoods close to the center of the city, where gracious brownstone or redbrick houses have fallen on hard times and where artists and writers, and occasionally lawyers and professors or museum curators, indie band members, and graphic artists, come to live, looking for the good life at a moderate price, as the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu says about the aspirational consumption of people who work in cultural jobs. This could be Greenwich Village in the 1920s, Brooklyn Heights after World War II, Park Slope in the 1960s, SoHo after 1970. Some years later, though, depending on how generously financial

markets have rewarded big investors and their advisors, property values rise all over the city, and the new beginnings gradually spread from the center to other neighborhoods. In gentrified areas the merely affluent upper middle class sell their nicely restored houses and apartments to the superrich. The British geographer Loretta Lees calls this process “super-gentrification.” But when one neighborhood after another goes upscale and new residents are not just fixing up old houses and lofts but also moving into newly built luxury condos and mom-and-pop stores are replaced by bank branches, trendy restaurants, and brand-name chains, we’re looking at more than a single trend of gentrification. Neil Smith calls this “gentrification generalized.” I think that it is really a broad process of re-urbanization, with changes that loosen the grip of old industries and their ways of life and expand the space taken up by white-collar men and women and their preoccupation with shopping and other kinds of consumption; bringing new residents, their tastes, and their concerns into the city’s mix; and creating not just an economic division but a cultural barrier between rich and poor, young and old. This is what happens when a city loses its soul.⁹

Ours is not the first generation of city dwellers to mourn a loss of origins. In *Gotham* Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace point out that New Yorkers have had to deal with the erosion of the city’s physical fabric at least since the great building boom of the mid-nineteenth century. Manhattan is a “modern city of ruins,” the *New-York Mirror* wrote in 1853. “No sooner is a fine building put up than it is torn down.” *Harper’s Monthly* declared, “A man born in New York forty years ago finds nothing, absolutely nothing, of the New York he knew.” In the early 1900s, sailing into New York Harbor from the old world of Europe, the novelist Henry James added his voice to these laments. He deplored the tall buildings—at that time, ten stories high—towering over the spire of Trinity Church near Wall Street. Despite the solid steel and granite of their construction, the baby skyscrapers looked to his eyes like temporary place-holders on the crowded “pin-cushion” of Lower Manhattan. They badly need a sense of history, James wrote. Unlike “towers or temples or fortresses or palaces”—all powerful reminders of a city’s ancient origins—New York’s tall buildings lacked “the authority of things of permanence or even of things of long duration.”¹⁰

With these words Henry James sounded themes that resonate to this day: hostility to overbuilding, desire to hold back rapid change, and distaste for an aesthetic of standardization—distaste for a city, and a neighborhood, that looks like any other. Like the mid-nineteenth-century Parisians who

mourned the way Baron Haussmann rebuilt that city over its medieval origins, James drew an aura of regret around the landscape of memory and feeling that was being destroyed by a surge of new construction fueled by economic growth and the flexing of muscle by entrepreneurs who ran the steel industry, railroads, and banks. Less consciously he also bore witness to the arrogance of an entire era of modernization and to the arrogance of state power when politicians help real estate developers to change the use of prime parcels of urban land in order to make money.

Henry James's critical themes were submerged first by prosperity and easy credit for construction, and then by the Great Depression and the Second World War. The need to divert capital to other needs imposed a thirty-year lull on the tearing down and building up of all U.S. cities. After World War II ended, however, peacetime conversion of the economy brought new investment in highways and suburban housing and, with pressure from local public officials and developers, in rebuilding the centers of cities, which by now looked tired and worn in contrast to the new ranch houses and shopping malls of Levittown and the San Fernando Valley and failed to project an impressive image of the United States as a global power. During the Great Depression business leaders and national lobbying groups for the real estate industry had continually called for government investment to remove the "blight" of cheap tenements, entertainment streets, and single-room-occupancy hotels that clustered on a derelict Skid Row around the big cities' central marketplace of city hall, bus station, and department stores. Unlike President Franklin D. Roosevelt, they didn't call for adequate housing for the urban poor. But after the war local business leaders and elected officials were willing to take federal money to build new public housing and government centers, as long as they could also tear down neighborhoods where the urban poor and working class lived to build corporate office towers, luxury housing, cultural centers, and hotels. Title I of the federal Housing Act passed by Congress in 1949 included a provision for funding these projects, as well as the expansion of urban universities, and it enabled developers and public sector entrepreneurs to make the city grow as they desired.¹¹

This vision of the city provoked opposition and even outrage. Henry James's critical themes reemerged, but from a far more populist point of view. He had never liked the immigrants, namely Jews, who in his time thronged the streets of the tenement districts of the Lower East Side. Critics of urban renewal, though, added what we would now call positive goals of affordability and diversity to James's hostility to overbuilding.

In Boston the sociologist and urban planning researcher Herbert Gans wrote a stunning indictment of how local elites needlessly destroyed the Italian working-class district of the West End, coining the term “urban village” to depict the close-knit, family-based, ethnic community that was displaced in the name of slum clearance. Even more famously, in New York the journalist and community activist Jane Jacobs published a call to arms against the fatal machinery of modern urban planning, which brought in the bulldozers and “cataclysmic money” of urban renewal projects to destroy old, but still vibrant, neighborhoods. By the early 1960s, with urban renewal moving forcefully ahead, its opponents developed a modest, street-level defense of urban authenticity to confront the arrogance of both modernization and state power, which threatened to sweep away people as well as buildings.¹²

The men and women who spoke up for authenticity in the 1960s were a mixed group socially, culturally, and politically, and they argued for somewhat different visions of the city. They included three different groups: historic preservationists, often, like Henry James, members of the upper class who deplored the destruction of old buildings that embodied urban memory; community preservationists, political activists and socially conscious intellectuals such as Jacobs and Gans, who defended the right of all poor people not to be displaced by new building projects, and especially opposed “Negro removal,” the targeting of those who, because of racial discrimination, were least able to move to new homes in the suburbs; and gentrifiers, who since the 1940s had begun to move into poor neighborhoods, buying and restoring late nineteenth-century houses with “great symbolic value” to nurture an urban lifestyle untainted by modernity. As democratic reformers, gentrifiers came into conflict with the white ethnic groups on whom old-style Machine politicians relied, while fearing, and being feared by, their poorer black and Latino neighbors.¹³

Membership in these three groups—historic preservationists, community preservationists, and gentrifiers—often overlapped. This gave them not only a critical mass but also a critical position in the interconnected networks of politics, media, and design. Their successful campaigns led to a series of important public policy changes that made Jane Jacobs’s vision of urban authenticity more prominent. First, New York, followed by other cities around the world, passed local historic preservation laws; these established official landmarks preservation agencies and a system of public hearings to oversee, and sometimes prevent, the tearing down of old buildings and

districts. During the 1970s historic landmark designations enabled both the majestic Beaux Arts Grand Central Terminal and the rundown, industrial loft buildings of SoHo to survive developers' plans to demolish them. Second, planners of high-rise public housing projects gradually shifted to designs for low-rise buildings that were less visibly warehouses for the urban poor. By the early 1970s liberal opposition to the aesthetics of "the projects" and their social concentration of poverty joined a conservative movement to eliminate state spending for public housing, which effectively ended large-scale efforts to keep the urban poor in the central city. Eliminating plans for the tall towers and sprawling campuses of public housing projects minimized their potential as both physical and symbolic barriers to upscaling, while reducing the potential power of the poor—in terms of numbers—to oppose gentrification. A third change concerned gentrifiers such as Jane Jacobs herself. While they increased in numbers, they developed into an influential political force and, less expected but even more important, into an image-maker for the city. Neighborhoods like the West Village, Brooklyn Heights, and Park Slope created a model of aesthetically interesting, inner-city living that by the 1980s would attract and retain a post-postwar middle class of professionals, artists, and intellectuals—a "creative class" before the name was invented. These significant changes nonetheless left a gap between celebrating the authenticity of historic houses and acknowledging the authenticity of the lower-class families who lived in them.¹⁴

Jane Jacobs seemed to bridge this gap by praising both the city's social diversity and its physical fabric. Arguing against modern planning strategies that favored tall towers surrounded by empty parks, wide streets built for auto traffic rather than pedestrians, and large-scale development by demolition and new construction, Jacobs emphasized the authentic human contacts made possible by the city's old and unplanned messiness. She praised crowded sidewalks for keeping people safe, shabby buildings with low rents for incubating small new businesses, and mixed uses—housing alongside stores, offices, and manufacturing—for exerting greater aesthetic appeal than the "dullness" that was so palpable in homogeneous corporate office districts, public housing projects, and residential suburbs. The much-quoted set piece in the first section of Jacobs's best-selling 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*—an hour-by-hour description of the "intricate sidewalk ballet" on Hudson Street, outside her window—dramatizes the neighborly interdependence of local shopkeepers, housewives, schoolchildren, and customers at the corner bar, all patron

saints of social order in the city's neighborhoods who were either scorned or ignored by the powerful forces that controlled urban renewal.

Jacobs also argued for authenticity as a democratic expression of origins, for a neighborhood's right, against the decisions of the state, to determine the conditions of its own survival. *Death and Life* raised an alarm against the arrogance of state power, especially as it was personified by Robert Moses, the larger-than-life administrator who headed the most important state and city redevelopment agencies in New York City from the 1930s to the 1960s. In these positions, supported by political leaders on all levels of government, Moses oversaw the planning and building of a huge number of public works, from public beaches and swimming pools to bridges, highways, and parks, as well as public housing projects. These projects modernized New York City in many ways: linking it to the national highway system so that cars and trucks could move goods and workers around the region, replacing shoddy tenements with new apartment houses, and creating green space and playgrounds amid thousands of acres of asphalt. As residents of many neighborhoods discovered, though, public works could exact a heavy price from those who lived near them. Moses insisted on placing new highways in the middle of active neighborhoods, destroying homes and parks if they stood in the way, and refused to pay attention to community residents' pleas or complaints. Though other public sector administrators were equally intolerant of opposition and also controlled massive amounts of government funding, Moses had a bigger public image and a willingness to directly antagonize anyone who dared to criticize his decisions. He became the supreme villain who threatened both the neighborhoods' small-scale social networks and the city's diverse historical character—a twentieth-century Baron Haussmann who would destroy all reminders of New York's uneven origins in his pursuit of sanitized, efficient new beginnings.¹⁵

Jacobs, her neighbors, and her allies managed to bring down Robert Moses by defeating three of his projects that would have changed the physical fabric of Lower Manhattan. These conflicts began in the early 1950s, when Greenwich Village residents protested Moses's plan to build a road through Washington Square Park, a fairly small green space in the heart of the Village, not far from where Jane Jacobs lived. Led by Shirley Hayes, whose children played in the park, and joined by Jacobs and her family and by other writers and critics who lived in the community, a grassroots movement challenged Moses by collecting names on petitions, writing editorials

addressed to local government officials, and loudly disrupting city planning meetings. Moses tried to insult the activists, especially the women, by calling them mere “mothers” who had neither experience nor expertise in city planning. But when the mothers won the support of the city’s Democratic Party political boss Carmine De Sapio, who also lived in the Village, the road plan was voted down by the citywide Board of Estimate, and Moses suffered a stunning loss. A few years later, faced with similar grassroots opposition to his plan to build an expressway across Broome Street, which would have destroyed a large number of nineteenth-century loft buildings across a wide swath of the neighborhood that soon became known as SoHo, Moses suffered another big defeat at the hands of artists, historic preservationists, and the same Greenwich Village residents, including Jacobs, who had fought him on Washington Square Park. In the third battle, a plan to tear down old houses and warehouses near Jacobs’s home in order to build high-rise, low-income public housing, Moses lost again.¹⁶

Robert Moses enraged people not just because of his arrogant manner or the architectural designs he chose; his use of Modernist urban planning principles struck deep into the heart of a traumatized liberal community. The Allies’ bombing of Dresden, Berlin, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki and the German air attacks on London during World War II had shown how easy it was to destroy the historic heart of cities. Though postwar governments in the United States did not try to murder thousands of urban dwellers, they did aim to annihilate the material landscape of the past, and the same gut feeling of terror caused by the threat of the atomic bomb could be aroused by the rubble of districts razed for urban renewal. Even E. B. White, celebrating postwar New York as “both changeless and changing,” wrote, “The intimation of mortality is part of New York now: in the sound of jets overhead, in the black headlines of the latest edition.” And it wasn’t only New York: “All dwellers in cities must live with the stubborn fact of annihilation.”¹⁷

Less morbidly, but with no less sincerity, distaste for Modernism grew because the stark designs were cheapened and standardized after they were adopted on a massive scale as the dominant postwar architecture for buildings ranging from corporate headquarters and government offices to public housing projects. When every new building looked like the same big glass box, old redbrick buildings and cobblestone streets gained cultural distinction. Those who chose to put down roots in the old city identified with origins rather than with new beginnings; their choice signified

rejection of the homogeneous mass culture of both the corporate city and suburbia. While this view looks backward to Henry James's aristocratic disdain of mass culture, it also looks forward to the downtown artists of the 1970s and 1980s, who celebrated the city's grit and grunge. But it speaks with special relevance to the political stalemate of the 1950s: rejecting the dominant Modernist landscape at that time struck a blow against political conformity. Middle-class liberals who had been silenced by McCarthyism found a voice and a place to protest by reclaiming the city's streets. Claiming to speak for urban authenticity was, in their case, a cry for democracy.

Defeating Robert Moses's plans did more than end his career; it changed the way new development was planned. Between the late 1950s and the early 1970s New York City voters transformed the approval processes for big development projects to require more public input. Both public sector and private sector plans now had to pass through a series of public hearings, beginning with land-use hearings at local community boards that were established in the 1970s as a result of the grassroots activism that challenged Moses's power, and moving up by stages to the City Planning Commission, City Council, and Mayor's Office. At least in theory the voice of the authentic city—a voice that speaks of origins rather than of new beginnings—would be heard.

During the next decade another cry for the “great symbolic value” of authenticity arose in a different form and in a younger generation. No less a product of its time than the conflict between Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses, the counterculture would also have a huge, though less direct impact on the shape and character of cities. By the beginning of the 1970s broad political protest expressed by radical youth movements against the Vietnam War, consumer society, and mainstream concern with social status had simmered down to an individual concern with lifestyle goals of liberation and personal authenticity, or what the sociologist Sam Binkley calls “getting loose.”¹⁸ While many advocates of a looser lifestyle abandoned cities to live off the land in rural communes, others moved into low-key urban neighborhoods where college students, artists, and workers, including Latinos and blacks, would tolerate, exploit, or grudgingly coexist with their bohemian ways. Some ex-hippies became entrepreneurs, selling drugs, psychedelic posters, and used clothing, and gradually the consumer products and spaces that went along with the hippies' looser lifestyle became visible symbols not just of a more interesting *way* to live, but of a more interesting *place* to live. Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco and the

East Village in New York marked spaces of social diversity and cultural experimentation; they also indicated how the counterculture's conflict with modernization could create excitement around a city's old neighborhoods. In a curious and unexpected way, the counterculture's pursuit of origins—by loosening the authentic self and bonding with the poor and underprivileged—opened a new beginning for urban redevelopment in the 1970s, alongside gentrification and gay and lesbian communities.¹⁹

The allure of newly hip neighborhoods spread through the power of alternative media. Years before “edgy” became another word for “hip” and the Internet was invented, independent weekly newspapers like the *Village Voice*, followed by the *East Village Other*, *SoHo Weekly News*, and *East Village Eye*, put gritty downtown streets on the must-see itinerary for anyone who wanted to be in the know about new cultural trends. At the same time, new urban lifestyle media for the middle class, led on the East Coast by *New York* magazine, created a buzz around the remaining small shops selling ethnic foods in old neighborhoods—a traditional Italian cheese store in Little Italy, a pickle maker on the Lower East Side—and taught readers how to buy “the best for less” in the city's new wine shops, boutiques, and ethnic restaurants. The way *New York* depicted the sensual variety of urban life glamorized the old neighborhoods, showing them as great places for consuming authenticity—the authenticity that modernizers and suburbanites had lost.²⁰

By the 1980s new communities of artists stretched through the old districts of Lower Manhattan, and by the 1990s they extended across the East River to Brooklyn and Queens. The concentration of artists in SoHo, the East Village, and Williamsburg confirmed these areas' distinctive appeal and emphasized their otherness to the enforced homogeneity of both the suburbs and the city's corporate center. These neighborhoods were intensely cool, identifiably local, and ethnically diverse. Their physical and social distinctiveness connected residents to the city's origins, embodied by the tenements and loft buildings of *ur*-neighborhoods downtown, and engaged their yearning for a looser self. The cultural process of distilling value from the city's origins created the sense of authenticity nurtured by *New York* magazine and increasingly also by the *New York Times*, as these media developed the new form of writing called lifestyle journalism.

Jane Jacobs expressed the appeal of this new sense of urban authenticity better than anyone. It's not surprising that she was a journalist by profession, but in writing about the social uses of authenticity she became

a theorist of the streets, neighborhoods, and districts that make up a city's complex system of interrelated parts. *Death and Life* celebrated the human capacity for regulating social life by the simple routines of walking to school, shopping in mom-and-pop stores, watching through the window to make sure neighbors and passersby get through the day and night. Jacobs discovered that the social life of common spaces depends on variety, the density of crowds, and the liberty to devise unanticipated uses. Working with her neighbors, she showed that a bottom-up activist movement can force powerful government agencies to back down. Strangely, though—and here is the great problem with her work—Jacobs failed to look at how people use capital and culture to view, and to shape, the urban spaces they inhabit. She did not see that the authenticity she admired is itself a social product. In a review of *Death and Life* published when the book came out, Herbert Gans criticized Jacobs for falling victim to the “fallacy of physical determinism.” She hones in on the physical characteristics of buildings, he said, “ignor[ing] the social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to vitality or dullness.” Neighborhoods that Jacobs admires, Gans pointed out, such as the North End of Boston and New York's West Village, are *white ethnic* neighborhoods with a *working-class* culture.²¹

This culture shapes the ballet of the street that Jacobs describes. She delights in telling us about Mr. Halpert and his laundry, the Cornacchia family's deli, Mr. Goldstein's hardware store, the Dorgene restaurant (where the poet Ezra Pound once dined with the editor of the *Hudson Review*), Mr. Slube's cigar store, Mr. Koochagian's tailor shop, and Mr. Lofaro the greengrocer, as well as the barbershop, drugstore, dry cleaner, locksmith, pizzeria, and café. Rereading her description now, we see that Jacobs is painting an idyllic picture of small town life in the midst of the big city. It's an urban imaginary like Disneyland's Main Street, also dating from the 1950s, with an equally rosy postwar view of local shops, their European immigrant owners, and residents living above and around them. Jacobs's view perpetuates the image of the New York City block as a microcosm of social diversity. This is the block we know from films, from the tenements in 1930s movies like *Dead End* to the brownstone houses in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, filmed in Greenwich Village in the 1950s, and Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, filmed on a brownstone block in Brooklyn in the 1980s.

Jacobs's image of her block is just as much a social construction as the movie image of a New York City street. It is a product of its time, the end of the second generation of the great wave of Southern and Eastern European

immigration, and of its location in New York's postwar political economy, with rent control enabling many of the tenants to stay in their apartments and a lack of new investment keeping the small-scale houses that Jacobs likes from being replaced. Jacobs's block is a modernized, sanitized version of the urban village; it's the West End of Boston without Italian Americans and with residents who have better jobs. It could be a remake of *The Honeymooners*, the 1950s television comedy in which Jackie Gleason and Art Carney play a bus driver and a sewer worker in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, but now they are sharing their neighborhood with journalists, artists, and architects. Jacobs fails to recognize the growing influence of her own perspective, to see that families like hers are gradually moving to the West Village's nineteenth-century houses because they appreciate the charm of the area's little shops and cobblestone streets. She doesn't seem to realize that she expresses a gentrifier's aesthetic appreciation of urban authenticity.

What is also missing from Jacobs's image of Hudson Street is an awareness of the importance of capital in the broadest sense: the economic capital that for a hundred years bypassed this part of the Village, leaving small shops and short blocks in place; the social capital of local immigrant entrepreneurs, who open restaurants, dry cleaners, and hardware stores in our time as well as in hers; and the cultural capital of gentrifiers like Jacobs herself, and of many urban dwellers today, who find their subjective identity in this particular image of urban authenticity.

I should say that I am one of those urban dwellers. I would like "origins" to speak for the politics of the underprivileged, to offer an objective standard of authenticity that defends their right to the city. I am all too aware, though, that I belong to the city's "new beginnings." I define my identity in terms of the same subjective kind of authenticity that Jane Jacobs admires, while seeing that it displaces the poor by constructing the habitus, latte by latte, of the new urban middle class. This self-awareness doesn't deny that tastes reinforce social distinctions. I like traditional, small food shops with moderate prices, but I don't shop at dollar stores or bodegas. Yet the means of consumption on which the new urban middle class depends are destroying the city of the working class. Our pursuit of authenticity—our accumulation of this kind of cultural capital—fuels rising real estate values; our rhetoric of authenticity implicitly endorses the new, post-Jacobs rhetoric of upscale growth.

“I’m not even going to start playing the authenticity game,” the novelist Hari Kunzru writes about his role in the upscaling of Broadway Market, a shopping street in Hackney, his gentrifying neighborhood in the East End of London. Like Elizabeth Street in NoLiTa or Smith Street in Cobble Hill, Broadway Market has recently changed from being a working-class shopping street with an inexpensive butcher, baker, and other local stores to a high-price location for niche-market shops. “I came to Hackney,” Kunzru says, “for reasons that I guess are not dissimilar to a lot of the bike-riders, creative slackers, live-workers and thrift-store princesses I nod to on the street: because it is full of weird places and eccentric people and has a grubby glamour to it that has not yet been stamped out and flattened into the same cloned corporate hell-hole as the rest of Britain.” “But the thing is,” he admits, “I am partial to a nice piece of raclette.”²²

How many shopping streets have been transformed by cafés, bars, and gourmet cheese stores for people who want to consume differently from the mainstream culture? Who go for better coffee not to Dunkin’ Donuts but to Starbucks, which tries to live down the fact that it’s a chain, or, even better, to an anti-Starbucks, a dark little café where the tattooed barista knows how to foam the milk just right, the beans are organically grown on bird-friendly trees and purchased through fair trade, and you can connect to Wi-Fi along with other customers who share your tastes? This is the authenticity that Kunzru is talking about. It is produced not only by new residents, but by new retail entrepreneurs who speak to these new residents’ social and cultural needs. They have gradually replaced Jane Jacobs’s neighbors and changed the city’s streets.

New retail entrepreneurs often move into a neighborhood as residents and can’t find a place to buy a good latte or a magazine store that carries *Wired* or the *New York Times*. “I realized early on that the neighborhood was on the brink of change,” says a store owner who came to Williamsburg to live in the 1990s, “and I knew one thing we were lacking was a good wine store.” Another says, “There were a lot of people interested in film, but the neighborhood lacked a good video store.” Retail store owners who belong to a neighborhood’s new population and share their needs represent the interests of a *cultural* community that contrasts with that of longtime residents.²³

Other new retail entrepreneurs come to a neighborhood for the *economic* opportunity, because they see that the population is beginning to change to men and women with a higher social profile and more disposable

income and they want to start a business that caters to their tastes. This is especially true of the second wave of new store owners, who don't live in the neighborhood themselves; they often see a changing neighborhood as a good place to open a branch of a small boutique they have already started in another gentrifying locale.

New retail entrepreneurs are also, in a sense, *social* entrepreneurs. By opening places of sociability where new residents feel comfortable—and longtime residents do not—they help to create a neighborhood's new beginnings. Polish residents of Williamsburg don't go to bars that feature indie rock bands or indoor miniature golf. But hipsters and gentrifiers don't wire money to Warsaw or Pueblo or stand around all night at an all-male, working-class bar. The new consumption spaces that they patronize—music bars, cafés, boutiques, vintage clothing stores—reinvent the urban community.²⁴

New retail entrepreneurs don't have to be elitist. You find the same mix of cultural, social, and economic motivations among new immigrant entrepreneurs: the men from northern India who open sari shops on Seventy-fourth Street in Jackson Heights in Queens; the Salvadoran women who cook and sell pupusas from carts at the Red Hook ball fields in Brooklyn; the West African restaurateurs who create a Little Senegal in Harlem. All these new beginnings mark emerging spaces of urban authenticity.

We can see “authentic” spaces only from outside them. Mobility gives us the distance to view a neighborhood as connoisseurs, to compare it to an absolute standard of urban experience, to judge its character apart from our personal history or intimate social relationships. If we are connected to a neighborhood's longtime social life, especially if we grew up there, we are likely to recall how it was back in the day; we are less likely, though, to call it *authentic*. Just thinking of authenticity in this way recalls its usual meaning, according to which an expert objectively evaluates the origins of a piece of art, an antique rug, or any other object we can isolate like a specimen, examine, and compare with other examples of its category. In contrast to the subjectivity that comes from really living in a neighborhood, walking its streets, shopping in local stores, and sending children to local schools, the other kind of authenticity allows us to see an inhabited space in aesthetic terms. Especially when we look at a rundown neighborhood we ask, Is it interesting? Is it gritty? Is it “real”? Like the criteria

we use while shopping for consumer products, these standards objectify the authenticity that we desire. We are often seduced by appearances and assumptions. How many times do we think, the cheaper the beer, the more authentic the bar? Or, the grittier the streets, the more authentic the neighborhood? How we think about these questions makes an ethical as well as a social statement about the way we want to live, and so our stand on urban authenticity is ultimately subjective because it refers to us. Are we Levis (West Village) or True Religion (Meatpacking District) jeans? Are we organic food co-op (Park Slope) or mass-consumption Costco (Bay Ridge)? Pathmark (East Harlem) or Whole Foods (East Village)? Which is the authentic space for our authentic self?²⁵

These are peculiarly modern questions. In Western culture the idea of authenticity arose between the ages of Shakespeare and Rousseau, when men and women began to think about an authentic self as an honest or a true character, in contrast to an individual's dishonesty, on the one hand, and to society's false morality, on the other. As a social theorist Rousseau developed a structural understanding of the authenticity of individual character. Men and women are authentic if they are closer to nature—or to the way intellectuals imagine a state of nature to be—than to the institutional disciplines of power. While this view continues to inspire people to abandon the false lifestyle of modern society and form a commune, it also offers psychic consolation to social groups who have neither wealth nor power. German intellectuals, who in the eighteenth century were less integrated into courtly life than their French counterparts, were reconciled to the difference between themselves, rich in cultural capital, and the princes who controlled state power and patronage as a difference of authenticity. Unlike the frivolous, Frenchified “civilization” of the courts, the intellectuals’ “culture” was serious, virtuous, *authentic*. It gave them a sense of moral superiority. Though these intellectuals did not hold power, their claim to authenticity foreshadowed the way more ambitious groups would eventually use the term as a means of excluding others.²⁶

The habit of identifying authenticity with the downwardly mobile gradually spread from Germany to France and from university towns to cities, where major art collections, theaters, and publishers thrived and artists and intellectuals could sell their work. Most artists who produced paintings or novels or journalism for these urban markets were not well paid. They lived from contract to contract, earning money, like factory workers of the time, by the number of pieces or column inches they produced.

These artisans of words and images, the first “creative class,” lived in working-class quarters not just because they were rebelling against the conformity of the bourgeoisie; they couldn’t afford to live in better neighborhoods. Like earlier German intellectuals who scorned the princely courts, and like French writers who left Paris for the garrets of London before the French Revolution, poets and novelists living *la vie de bohème* in mid-nineteenth-century Paris contrasted authentic, lower-class urban life, especially the tenuous lives of the most marginalized groups, criminals and gypsies, with what they saw as the overly comfortable, totally conformist lives of the rich. Writers romanticized the shabby and sordid, and often diseased, outcast lower class, and this romantic image became a source of their artistic inspiration.²⁷

Despite all the social and economic improvements since that time, nineteenth-century bohemians’ attitudes live on in new hipster districts and gentrified neighborhoods. From Baudelaire’s prose poems to the musical drama *Rent*, the slums so feared by the righteous middle classes continue to appeal to artists and writers because of their reservoir of danger and decay as well as their tolerance of, or unwillingness to police, cultural diversity. By the same token, rundown nineteenth-century houses and small shops are appealing to many people with middle-class cultural tastes because they embody the aesthetic distinction of objects that are, on the one hand, simple, handmade tokens of craftsmanship and, on the other, living history. As Thorstein Veblen said more than a hundred years ago, these quirky marks of distinction are cast into relief by the sameness of mass production. And as the journalist David Brooks says today, the “gentry” don’t want “opulent, luxurious, . . . magnificent and extravagant,” they want “*authentic*, natural, warm, . . . honest, organic, . . . unique.” To the use-values of longtime residents and the exchange-values of real estate developers, bohemians and gentrifiers add aesthetic values.²⁸

Although gentrification was just beginning in the United States and England when Jacobs wrote *Death and Life* and still lacked an American name, Herbert Gans had some idea of what the next stage of modernity would bring. In the preface to *The Urban Villagers* he tells us that the first residents of the luxury apartment houses that replaced the West End’s tenements are just moving in. If they are like the middle-class people of Gans’s generation, the second generation of the Great European Immigration, “their tastes are no longer ethnic, but not yet esoteric.” They don’t want to live in a neighborhood like the West Village; they want to move to the

suburbs. They won't patronize the old-fashioned corner store that Jacobs loves, even if it still exists; they prefer modern supermarkets and shopping malls. One day, though, when they realize that their choices result in a homogenized, and even an inauthentic experience, they will return to the old ethnic foods and at least a simulation of the old ethnic neighborhoods. They will rediscover the charms of the Italian Market in South Philadelphia, the North End of Boston, and Manhattan's Lower East Side. Like future loft dwellers and brownstone townhouse owners, the new West Enders will lay claim to the bricks and mortar of the historic city, indulging in a collective amnesia about the earlier eras of factory work and mass migration that made these neighborhoods come alive. The urban authenticity to which they will aspire won't be inborn or inherited; it will be achieved.²⁹

These desires were given wings by an inflow of investment capital from globalization and deregulation. During the 1980s, when governments loosened restrictions on overseas investment, foreign money flowed like Perrier into New York real estate markets, coming mainly from Western Europe, Japan, and Canada. Despite sharp setbacks in the following years due to stock market crises, changing domestic conditions in other countries, and, exceptionally, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, the influx of foreign investment has continued to grow, even during the financial crisis that began in 2008. Trophy buildings in Midtown Manhattan were captured by foreign investors, first by the Japanese, then by Middle Easterners with a surplus of petrodollars, and most recently by dollar-rich Russian business barons and Chinese firms. Foreign investors pay high prices for luxury condos and mansions on the Upper East Side but they also buy rent-controlled apartment houses in socially marginal areas of the city, such as the Bronx, the city's poorest borough, where they empty the apartments and raise the rents or demolish the buildings and replace them with taller, sleeker towers when the city government gets around to rezoning the areas.³⁰

Rezoning has become the city government's preferred tool of redevelopment. Since the first years of the twenty-first century it has opened the door to the type of development that private investors think will be most profitable while giving a nod of approval to Jane Jacobs's kind of authenticity: upzoning to taller buildings on the wide avenues and waterfront, downzoning to three-, four-, and five-story houses on the narrower, gentrified side

streets. In reality these restrictions privilege both developers and supergentrifiers. They broaden the sweep of demolition and new construction while making the historic districts and small-scale neighborhoods that represent the city's origins rarer, more precious—and more authentic.

Hudson Street turned toward a more precious kind of authenticity in the 1990s, three decades after Jacobs and her family had moved to Toronto. Foreign investment in New York City property was running high, Wall Street salaries and bonuses were climbing into the stratosphere, and media moguls were buying brownstone houses in the West Village and SoHo lofts as East Village artists were packing their bags for cheaper lofts in Williamsburg. Near Jacobs's old home the rough and casual character of the old ethnic neighborhood, a reflection of the working docks that ended their useful commercial life by 1960, had vanished. That working life was still active around Fourteenth Street, in the old meat market, where wholesale butchers and meatpackers unloaded animal carcasses from one set of trucks and loaded porterhouse steaks and ground chuck onto other trucks from late night till the next afternoon. But by 1990 the meat market was on its way out. Since the 1970s raunchy gay bars followed by trendy restaurants had attracted a different crowd, and the pressure from this new nighttime economy, as well as from all the nearby Greenwich Village attractions, and the growing desire on the part of city officials and well-heeled residents to "reclaim" waterfront districts had turned the area from prime meat to prime real estate. During the 1990s the Meatpacking District became a visibly chic, and remarkably expensive, place to live, which also reshaped Jacobs's old neighborhood a few blocks to the south.

Hudson Street is different today from what it was in Jacobs's time. Although the two short blocks on either side of her old home are still filled with small stores, most of the old merchants are gone. Local customers now are likely to be Hollywood actors and editors of fashion magazines. Gone too are many of the specialized, local services the old stores offered. Now there are eight restaurants, two bars, a café, a convenience store, and a nail salon, as well as a shoe store, a children's boutique, and three empty storefronts. Today Mr. Goldstein's hardware store is the New York branch of Belly Dance Maternity, a small Chicago chain selling "hip maternity clothes for stylish moms to be." Dorgene is still a restaurant, but now it's the Hudson Corner Café. Mr. Halpert's laundry disappeared around 1980, the storefront hosting an endless series of restaurants. The butcher shop changed names and probably owners in the 1960s, and by 1990 the nail

salon took its place. The drugstore lasted until the mid-1980s; now customers who need to fill a prescription walk one block uptown to the nearest branch of the Duane Reade chain or one block downtown to Rite Aid. Only a few establishments remain from Jacobs's time: two schools, though the archdiocese sold St. Veronica's to an independent private school in 1970, after most of the old Irish and Italian families who sent their children to the Catholic school had died or moved away and new, affluent residents swelled the demand for secular private school education; and the White Horse Tavern, a well-known watering hole recommended by many guidebooks. In 2005 the ground floor of Jacobs's former house was occupied by a fancy cookware store; three years later City Cricket had moved in, selling "one-of-a-kind, hand-made, antique treasures for children," a precious, though quickly changing kind of authenticity. Now the store is empty.

Bricks and mortar remain in place only as long as real estate developers aren't interested in building something new there. Unlike Herb Gans, though, who blamed an unholy alliance between developers and white ethnic politicians for destroying the West End, Jane Jacobs blamed the death of lively blocks on urban planners, a relatively powerless group who only work for developers and government agencies. It is true that in the first half of the twentieth century Le Corbusier and other architects popularized designs for superblocks and disdained narrow, crowded streets. But developers and state agencies built these designs, and, with her intelligence and progressive political activism, Jacobs should not have ignored the power of capital that they wielded. Yet for one reason or another, perhaps because she was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and was associated with the media empire *Time-Life*, or because of the lingering aftershocks of McCarthyism, she chose not to criticize the interests of capitalist developers who profit from displacing others. "Private investment shapes cities," she wrote, "but social ideas (and laws) shape private investment."³¹

Today city planners swear loyalty to Jane Jacobs's vision. Her goal of preserving the city's physical fabric by maintaining the small scale and interactive social life of the streets has been translated into laws for preserving much of the built environment. But these laws go only part of the way toward creating the vibrant city that Jacobs loved. They encourage mixed uses, but not a mixed population. They never speak of maintaining low rents on commercial properties, so they cannot combat the most common means of uprooting the small shop owners who inspired Jacobs's ideas about social order and the vitality of the street. More and more of

the owners, in any case, are chains; there are few traditional shopkeepers left. The city government has overturned communities' plans for low-key, mixed development that place a priority on maintaining existing tenants and uses, and responds with "affordable" units only if a community rises up in protest, as Harlem recently did, when longtime residents and store owners challenged the rezoning of 125th Street for high-rise office buildings and apartment houses. Despite the mandated public hearings, both local and citywide, on changes in land use, city government agencies most often endorse the prior decisions of the City Planning Commission, which tends to approve big new development projects supported by the mayor. In one of the most important contemporary projects in New York, the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site, a state agency, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, controls the process without a public vote or even a deciding voice for the local community board. The largest contemporary redevelopment project in Brooklyn, Atlantic Yards, on a site Robert Moses picked for urban renewal many years earlier, stirred a lot of public protest but was derailed only by the collapse of financial markets in the subprime mortgage crisis.³²

The major difference between Moses's time and ours lies in a shift from the ideal of the modern city to that of the authentic city. To the extent that the city planning commissioners honor Jane Jacobs's vision, they say, "If you allow the character of a neighborhood to be eroded, the people who live in that neighborhood will leave the city."³³ Whose character, though, is most authentic? If authenticity is a state of mind, it's historic, local, and cool. But if authenticity is a social right, it's also poor, ethnic, and democratic. Authenticity speaks for the right of a city, and a neighborhood, to offer residents, workers, store owners, and street vendors the opportunity to put down roots—to represent, paradoxically, both origins and new beginnings.

Neither the West Village nor New York as a whole is typical of all cities. What happens there, though, offers both a big vision and an advance warning of changes to come. Because New York is a media center, images of its neighborhoods, shops, and streets are broadcast globally in films, television series, and videos posted on the Internet. Because New York was also one of the first cities to undergo an extensive branding process, beginning with the Big Apple slogan and the "I ♥ New York" public relations campaign of the 1970s, what happens there is a road map for other cities eager for a makeover. But if all of New York's neighborhoods are made over with

generic chain stores, expensive houses, and ever taller towers, it will be too late to bring back the “authentic” urban experience of Mr. Goldstein’s hardware store, the residents of modest means, including artists, and the men and women who work with their hands for a living. If we don’t confront the question of what we have already lost, how we lost it, and what alternative forms of ownership might keep them in place, we risk destroying the authentic urban places that remain.

New York’s growth in recent years has both created and depended on new consumption spaces that respond to changing lifestyles and make the city more desirable. Our tastes as consumers—tastes for lattes and organic food, as well as for green spaces, boutiques, and farmers’ markets—now define the city, as they also define us. These tastes are reflected in the media’s language and images, from lifestyle magazines to local wikis and food blogs; this discourse, which has become more participatory through the Internet, forms our social imaginary of the “authentic city,” including the kinds of spaces and social groups that belong there. Filtered through the actions of developers and city officials, our rhetoric of authenticity becomes their rhetoric of growth. We need tools to talk about these changes.

Looking at wikis and blogs acknowledges that media discourse, along with economic power, state power, and consumer culture, shapes the contemporary urban experience. It’s not just that old media keep running articles about how important web-based media have become, and that we know in our own lives how true this is, but that the circulation of images about the city, and about who has the right to be in specific places in the city, from neighborhoods to public spaces, is fueled to a great extent by the self-referential online conversations in local blogs. Posts are not always positive or politically correct. But they are spontaneous (or seemingly spontaneous) attempts to express common feelings of loss, quest, and anxiety about the city, and they show an urgency to convince unseen readers. Though I do not think that online communities have replaced face-to-face interaction, I do think it is important to understand the way web-based media contribute to our urban imaginary. The interactive nature of the dialogue, how each post feeds on the preceding ones and elicits more, these are expressions of both difference and consensus, and they represent partial steps toward an open public sphere in troubling times.

Lately there has been a rumble of interest among urban writers about how to analyze the social impact of these new media. Nobody knows. The usual methodological problems are compounded by the Web's anonymity, the predominance still of more affluent and highly educated users, the difficulty of judging accuracy and objectivity or, on the other hand, of interpreting subjectivity and, in the case of locally based blogs, not knowing where posts are really made. But they do express the writers' immediate experience of the city in all their apparent sincerity and naïveté. Look at one of the first posts, on Chowhound.com, to draw widespread public attention to the Latino food vendors in the Red Hook ball fields: "As usual, I pointed and bought, but [I] don't have much of an idea exactly what each item was." There is no better way to suggest the cultural confusion between native-born and immigrant New Yorkers, the willingness on both sides to find common ground, and the limitations of that exchange to items for consumption. Yet this exchange and the post about it are also a means of working out who has a right to a specific urban space—determining, in the narrow case, the food vendors' right to sell food at the ball fields and, in a broader sense, their right to the city.

Though it is clear to anyone who has spent even a day in any big city that urban spaces have been reshaped in recent years by consumer culture, those who write about cities haven't focused on how these changes occur, how they are experienced on the ground, and what their social consequences are for both specific areas and the city as a whole. When I look at New York's changing neighborhoods, in the three chapters on "uncommon spaces," I am struck by the instrumental role places of consumption, and media coverage of them, play. Everyone knows that art galleries and performance spaces fueled SoHo's transformation in the 1970s and 1980s, but retail chain stores made another big change in the 1990s, and not an altogether good one. Indie music bars and ethnic restaurants brought attention to Williamsburg, a terrific farmers' market and restaurants stabilized the East Village, new boutiques and chain stores (including the omnipresent Starbucks and H&M) helped to create Harlem's new identity. All of these changes also raised real estate prices, and, as beneficial as each store may be to certain groups of consumers, many acted as a wedge of displacement against traditional, locally owned stores before, in some cases, being displaced themselves. Yet each form of commercial culture constructs a new form of authenticity that anchors the claim of new groups to live and work in that space. Consumers' tastes, backed by other resources, become a form of power.

During the past thirty years, food has emerged as the new “art” in the urban cultural experience, with places to sample many different tastes. The three chapters on “common” spaces show how central an urban attraction food has become: farmers’ market at Union Square (okay, so I’m a supporter), the pupusas at the Red Hook ball fields (I don’t even eat most fried food), and the growing of organic vegetables and herbs at many community gardens (this is not something I do myself). In each case the sale, preparation, or growing of food traces struggles that are at this book’s heart: between different social groups and the city government, between different social groups in the same physical space, and between each group’s initial identity as marginalized and its later identity as “authentic.” These struggles also express a right to the city. I could not make up the post on Mark Bittman’s blog by the guy who guiltily admits that he likes the Swedish meatballs sold at IKEA as much as the Salvadoran pupusas sold at the ball fields. Yet this single posting makes my point (initially made, in a different way, by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu): tastes for different kinds of food are a means of consolidating, if not always taking, power.

This brings me to a final virtue of using authenticity to talk about the city: it forces us to think about time as well as space. Authenticity involves time, though, in three different ways. First, the appeal of authenticity suggests that we cling to the ideal of a timeless city that never changes, and we use this ideal, represented by cultural images of a specific historical period, as an absolute standard for judging urban experience. But second, our mental images of authenticity do reflect change, for each generation has an experience of the city in its own time that shapes what its members think about the houses, stores, and people that “belong” on a block, in a neighborhood, and in the city as a whole. Third, thinking about authenticity shows the importance of time in the broadest sense because city dwellers are increasingly concerned with making their way between the promise of creation and the threat of annihilation, whether by urban renewal or gentrification, by warfare or ecological disaster.

In the following chapters I show how origins and new beginnings create a sense of authenticity in both “uncommon” spaces, neighborhoods with distinctive histories and traditions, and “common” spaces, such as parks and community gardens that are meant for broad public use. I focus on these spaces not just because they have played a prominent role in the reshaping

of New York City during the past thirty years, but because each illustrates a different aspect of what we mean when we say that an urban experience is “authentic.” Each chapter moves from place to place and season to season on the streets, like the unfolding of the narrative of the 1948 film *Naked City*. Instead of pursuing a murderer, though, this book pursues the idea of authenticity.

Each chapter focuses on a different dimension of authenticity the way it is understood today. Chapter 1 begins with Brooklyn and shows how this borough’s longtime reputation for authenticity changed during the 1990s from rough and gritty to hip and cool. Chapter 2 takes up the theme of race, looking at Harlem, which in the past few years has been gentrified, rezoned, and redeveloped by new market-rate apartments and stores. Harlem is a large area with a varied population, but the recent increase in white residents makes it fair to ask if this urban ghetto can keep its authentic character as both poor and black. From Harlem we move downtown to the East Village, and chapter 3 shows how new restaurants and shops have shifted the neighborhood’s strong sense of local authenticity from political and cultural rebellion (“Die Yuppie scum”) to trendy consumption (organic produce, cocktail bars).

These uncommon spaces lead us in turn to the city’s “common” spaces of public parks, streets, and community gardens, where a timeless ideal of authentic public space that is free, democratic, and open to all is reinterpreted by different modes of private stewardship. I begin in chapter 4 at Union Square, which has been managed since the 1980s by a privately controlled Business Improvement District. Paradoxically, despite the BID’s reliance on private security guards and revenue-producing activities, Union Square has become a more “authentic” public space than the publicly controlled World Trade Center site, two miles away. In chapter 5 I go to Red Hook, an old industrial area on the Brooklyn waterfront, and see how the “authenticity” of a small group of Latino vendors who have been selling food in the ball fields since the 1970s has created another kind of private stewardship of public space in contrast to a nearby IKEA store. In chapter 6, I visit a community garden in East New York, one of the poorest areas of the city, and observe how the “authenticity” of the citywide community garden movement has changed since its origins during the 1970s from political protest to urban food production. Taken together, these three public spaces offer models for authentic urban places that provide a permanent right to the city, though not without conflicts and inequalities.

In the conclusion, I look at what has been gained and lost with the creation of the city of “destination culture”: a social as well as a physical transformation by the combined powers of private investors, the state, the media, and consumer tastes. Returning to the work of Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses, I conclude that there is not so great a difference as we often assume between the cultural values that they pursued. Though Jacobs fought strenuously to preserve an ideal vision of the urban village, and Moses just as strenuously fought to replace it with the ideal of the corporate city, their ideas have been joined to create the hybrid city that we consider authentic today: both hipster districts *and* luxury housing, immigrant food vendors *and* big box stores, community gardens *and* gentrification. Though this city pays its respects to both origins and new beginnings, it does not do enough to protect the right of residents, workers, and shops—the small scale, the poor, and the middle class—to remain in place. It is this social diversity, and not just the diversity of buildings and uses, that gives the city its soul.

EBSCOhost®

This page intentionally left blank

EBSCOhost®