WEST SIDE STORIES:

EVERYDAY LIFE
AND THE SOCIAL SPACE OF
WEST FORTY-SIXTH STREET

By

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Abstract

WEST SIDE STORIES: EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE SOCIAL SPACE OF WEST FORTY-SIXTH STREET

By

CHRISTIAN M ANDERSON

Advisor: Professor Cindi Katz

This is an ethnographic study of macro-structural change from the vantage point of everyday life on a few blocks of a single street in the Hell's Kitchen/Clinton neighborhood of New York City. The study tells stories from daily life on several blocks of West Forty-Sixth Street between Eighth Avenue and the Hudson River as documented over three years of close observation. These stories show how the actions of some residents serve to lubricate outcomes like privatization, rising housing costs, discriminatory policing, displacement, and eviction. These outcomes then negatively affect others who have less power—particularly undocumented migrants, the elderly, the poor, and people of color. This finding is complicated by the fact that people here are not acting malevolently, but more often than not out of well-intentioned common sense ideas about community, quality of life, and progress. What this means, I contend, is that processes like gentrification, neoliberalization, and inequitable urban development are not simply imposed from outside by macro forces such as real estate capital or top-down urban policy. I argue that these processes are also deeply contingent on everyday life—on the daily actions, ideas, and subjectivities of ordinary people in places such as West Forty-Sixth—which act as a kind of social infrastructure. This situation presents a mash-up of spatial, political, and structural questions about hegemony and power that span the intimate and the global in scope while complicating existing understandings of urban space and everyday life.

Acknowledgements

So many people contributed to this dissertation in so many different ways that I am not quite sure where to start. Before I began graduate school I thought of a PhD as a marker of individual achievement. Now, fresh through to the other side of the whole process, I look back and see how very wrong that perception was. The path up to this point was filled with moments where, frankly, if not for the brilliance, hard work, patience, and care invested in me and my work by others, I would have fallen short. As I sit here reflecting on the thoroughly collective and contingent character of the whole enterprise I feel an almost overwhelming sense of gratitude for the good fortune that has been made possible by these other people.

First and foremost I want to thank the people who live and work on West-Forty-Sixth Street. My research simply could not have happened without them. The people I met and worked with there were not only tolerant but downright gracious about my sustained presence in their lives, which lasted several years, and which was surely awkward and uncomfortable for them on more than a few occasions. In particular, my in-depth research participants (named in this study), the members of the West Forty-Sixth Street Block Association, and all of the interviewees who are featured in the text proved, really without exception, to be accommodating and giving of themselves in ways that far exceeded my expectations. Meanwhile Nicole Cicogna at Hartley House and Bob Kalin at Housing Conservation Coordinators helped me understand the subtleties of the neighborhood, provided valuable information, and shared key resources that were logistically essential. I know that my account of the complex social space in which all of these people live and act is bound to fall short of their expectations in some respects, but I hope that what I have written will prove valuable to them in some of the ways they had imagined—and

maybe also in some that they had not. In any case, they are owed all sorts of appreciation and thanks.

If my ethnographic research itself could not have happened without the people of West Forty-Sixth Street, I am confident that the intellectual aspects of my project would not have come together without the unparalleled community of peers, scholars, and intellectuals that orbited in and around the CUNY Graduate during the time I was there. My co-conspirators in the Geography program and the Spacetime Research Collective provided such a consistently excellent level of social and intellectual support that I am going to be nostalgic about it forever. In particular I want to thank Stephen Boatright, Desiree Fields, Brad Gardener, Jen Gieseking, Katie Gill, Rachel Goffe, Jesse Goldstein, Amanda Huron, Elizabeth Johnson, Scott Larson, Francesca Manning, Enrique Lanz Oca, and David Spataro, and Stephanie Wakefield. All of these people were with me during crucial moments along the way, helping to shape my thinking and spur me onward by freely sharing their whit, humor, enthusiasm, and critique. Meanwhile Chris Grove, Paul Jackson, Michael Polson, and Ted Powers suffered (and I do mean that) through early drafts of my ideas and helped guide me in better directions. It might sound like a cliché to say that the group of people whom I had the privilege of studying alongside and thinking with was rare and amazing, but seriously, it was. Together we scrapped through, supported each other, and worked collectively to find a sane balance between good scholarship and a decent, joyful, and committed life. I am forever grateful to everyone who was a part of this.

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provided a formidable—and, in the end, very constructive—combination of prodding, debate, and acuity every step of the way. Jeff Maskovsky humored my ideas about urban ethnography with a genuine spirit of intellectual vitality, guiding me towards questions that led to a much more innovative, sensitive, and dynamic result than I would have arrived at otherwise. Mariana Pavlovskaya was an invaluable support. She always found a way to be excited about my project and to nurture and sustain my ideas while at the same time demanding an intellectual precision and attention to political detail that resulted in much stronger arguments.

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Finally, I want to thank my wife, Melissa Martinson, who for more than a decade now has been my most ardent and passionate supporter, my most helpful critic, a provider, a role model, and an all-around brilliant companion. Through thick and thin, she has always believed in me and pushed me to live up to my own best ambitions. Of all the people I have been fortunate to have in my life, you are the greatest, and it still feels like we are just getting started. You are the best, and I can't wait for all that is yet to come!

There are others who I am leaving out for the sake of brevity or possibly just forgetting. Many years, conversations, and encounters etched their way into this project and altered its course in some subtle way. I almost feel like a fraud calling it my own. To everyone: Thanks sincerely. Let me know if there is any way that I can pay these countless debts back—or at least pay them forward—in the future.

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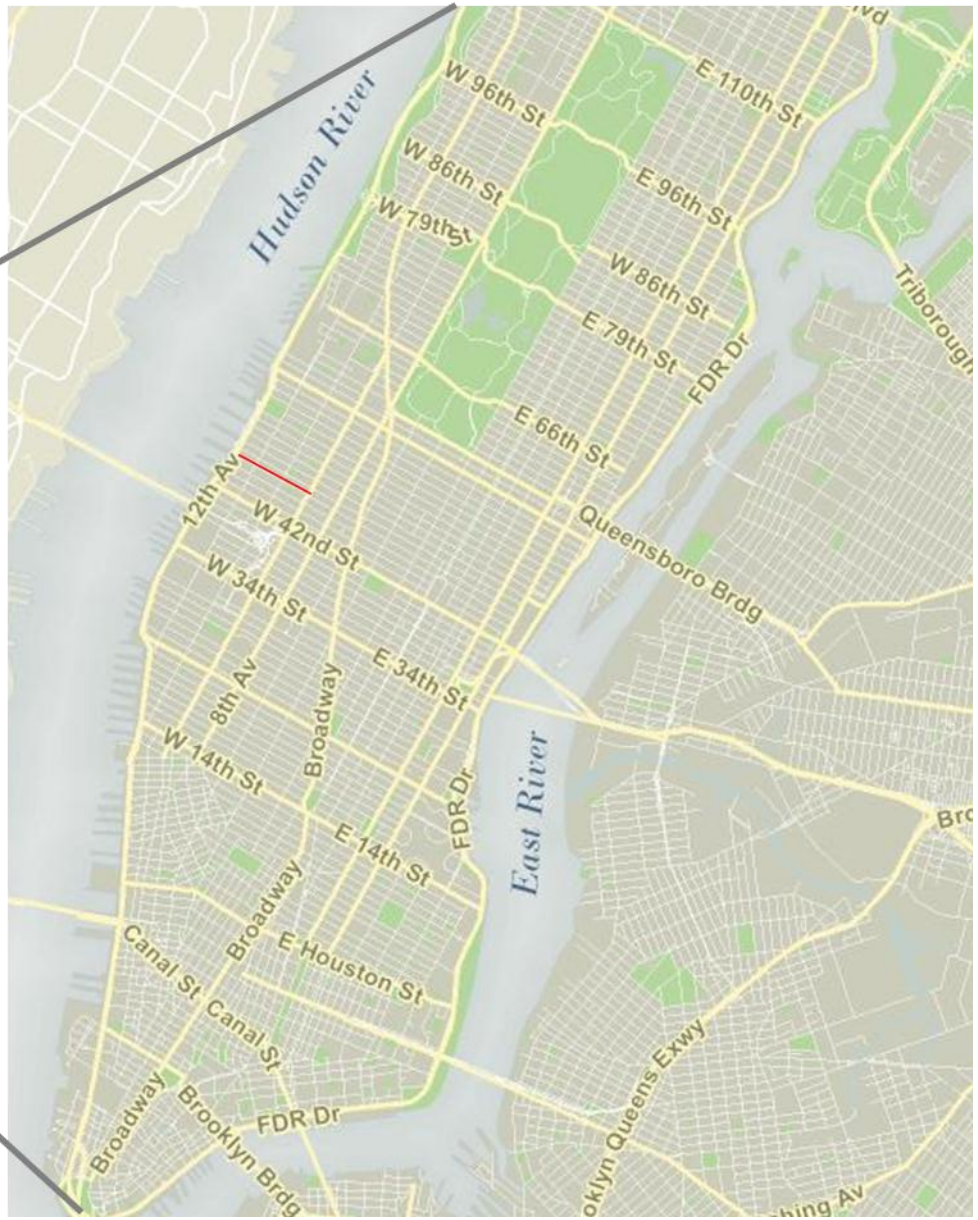

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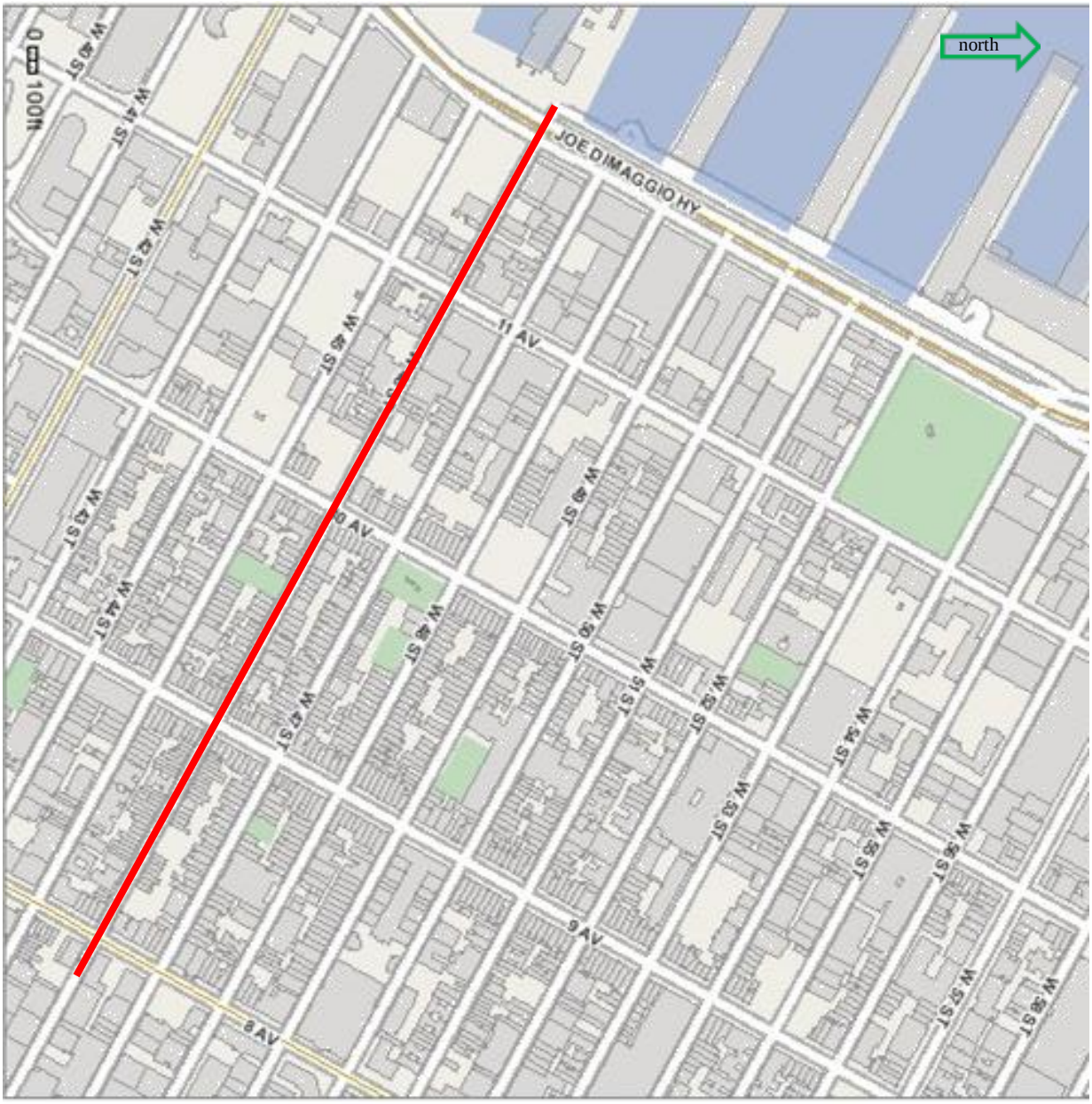
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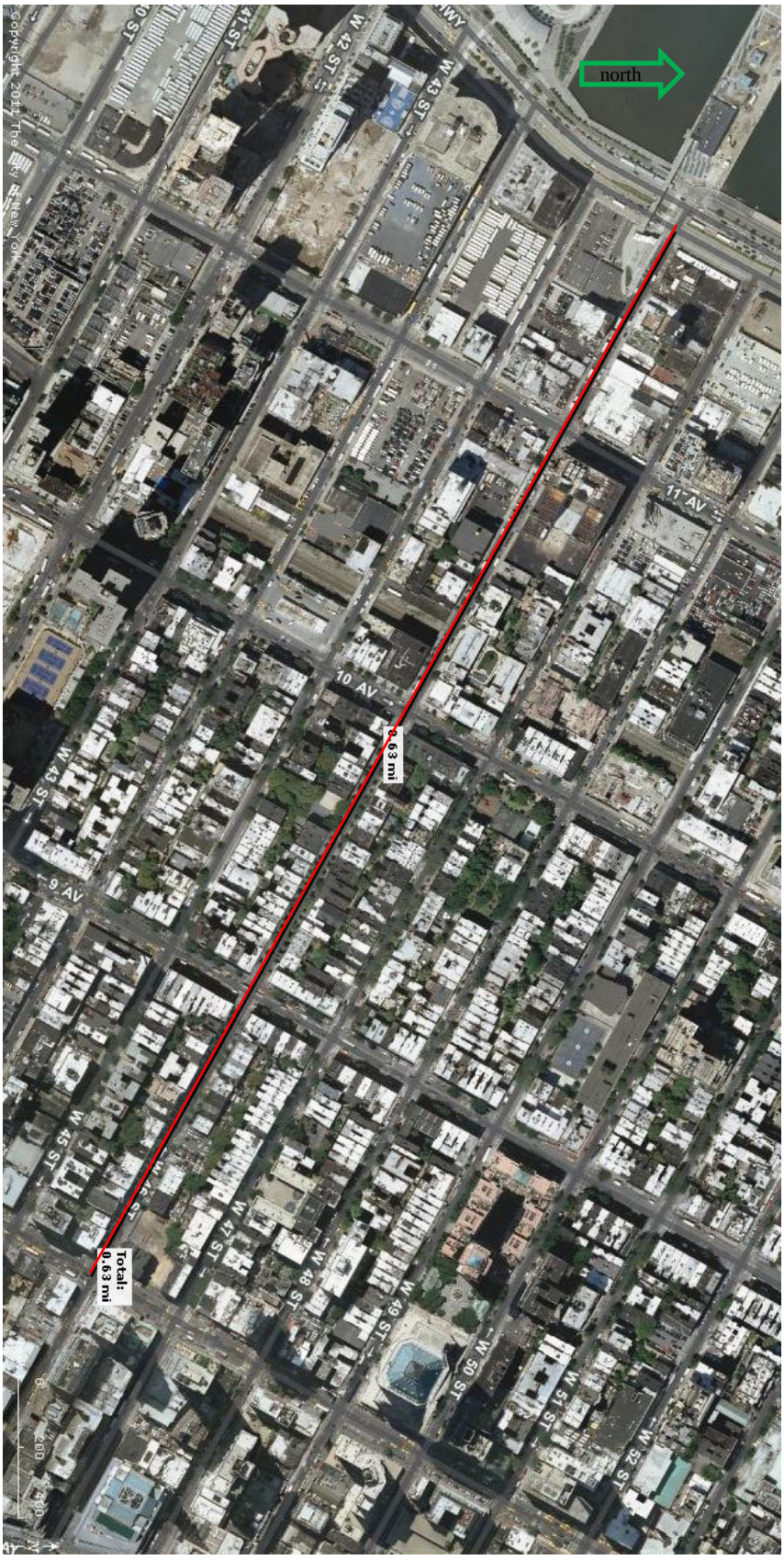
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"What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extra ordinary: the front page splash, the banner headlines. Railway trains only begin to exist when they are derailed, and the more passengers that are killed, the more the trains exist. Aeroplanes achieve existence only when they are hijacked. The one and only destiny of motorcars is to drive into plane trees. Fifty-two weekends a year, fifty-two casualty lists: so many dead and all the better for the news media if the figures keep on going up! Behind the event there has to be a scandal, a fissure, a danger, as if life reveals itself only by way of the spectacular, as if what speaks, what is significant, is always abnormal: natural cataclysms or historical upheavals, social unrest, political scandals.

In our haste to measure the historic, significant, and revelatory, let's not leave aside the essential: the truly intolerable, the truly inadmissible. What's scandalous isn't the pit explosion, it's working in coalmines. 'Social problems' aren't 'a matter of concern' when there's a strike, they are intolerable twenty four hours out of twenty four, three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

Tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, tower blocks that collapse, forest fires, tunnels that cave in, the Drugstore des Champs-Elysees burns down. Awful! Terrible! Monstrous! Scandalous! But where's the scandal? The true scandal? Has the newspaper told us anything except: not to worry, as you can see life exists, with its ups and downs, things happen, as you can see.

The daily papers talk of everything except the daily. The papers annoy me, they teach me nothing. What they recount doesn't concern me, doesn't ask me questions and doesn't answer the questions I would like to ask.

What's really going on, what we're experiencing, the rest, all the rest, where is it? How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?

To question the habitual. But that's just it. We are habituated to it. We don't question it, it doesn't question us, it doesn't seem to pose a problem, we live it without thinking, as if it carried neither questions nor answers, as if it weren't the bearer of any information. This is no longer even conditioning, it's anesthesia. We sleep through our lives in a dreamless sleep. Where is our body? Where is our space?

How are we to speak of these 'common things', how to track them down, rather, flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak what is, of what we are?

What's needed is perhaps to finally found our own anthropology, one that will speak about us, will look in ourselves for what we have so long been pillaging from others. Not the exotic any more, but the endotic.

To question what seems so much a matter of course that we've forgotten its origins. To rediscover something of the astonishment that Jules Vern or his readers may have felt faced with an apparatus capable of reproducing or transporting sounds. For that astonishment existed, along with thousands of others, and it is they which have molded us.

What we need is to question the bricks, concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, the way we spend our time, our rhythms. To question that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us . . ."

Georges Perec – "Approaches to What?" From *Species of Spaces.* Used by permission.

Opening

Introduction

This is an ethnographic study of everyday life[1] on a few relatively unheralded blocks of a single New York City street—specifically West Forty-Sixth Street between Eighth Avenue and the Hudson River in the Hell's Kitchen/Clinton neighborhood on the Middle West Side of Manhattan. Between 2007 and the fall of 2010 I spent a great deal of time slowly documenting the contours of life in this place. In the simplest terms the following text interweaves the stories of some of the lives in that urban space at that time and tries to explicate some of the connections among them.

Of course everyday life in contemporary urban space is hardly simple. The scope of it, even in a tightly delimited site like this, proves much greater than is often assumed. In more complicated terms therefore, this is also the story of that greater scope—a story about how cultural, economic, political, historical, and thoroughly social processes that extend far beyond any single location are one with everyday life in places like West Forty-Sixth, and about how encounters in the sphere of the routine can bear insights about broader dynamics that are taking shape in contemporary space.

Neither the seemingly straightforward and the more complex nor the particular and the broad are necessarily at odds with each other.[2] As they are fused in everyday life, I do not wish to create any reifications or false separations between them here. Indeed, echoing Georges Perec

[1] As I hope to demonstrate and as I outline in more explicit detail beginning on page 99, everyday life is a complex concept that, at once, refers to both concrete lived activities and to more abstract ideas about what these activities mean, how they arise, and what they perform within a broader social, historical, and philosophical context. French social philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who wrote many volumes on the subject, distinguished between "daily life" (*la vie quotidienne*—raw daily activity) "everydayness" (*la quotidienneté*—the production and reproduction of dominant social relations in and through routine daily activities) and "the everyday" (*le quotidien*—the social transformation of the dominant in and through routine daily activities). According to Lefebvre, "everyday life" refers at once to all of these and to the dialectical relationship between them. While philosophically rich, I also view these distinctions as being useful on a descriptive level. Wherever "everyday life" is used in this text, I am referring to the full analytical concept. Where I am simply describing raw daily activity, I use the term "daily life". For more on these distinctions see the later section as well as Roberts (2006) and Kipfer (2008).

[2] Pratt and Rosner (2006, 2012) articulate a coupling of "the global and the intimate" to examine similar tensions in a way I find very compelling.

(1997), this study tries to show that efforts to "question the habitual" by looking at particular daily lives in place can produce novel insights about the character of broader geographies precisely *because* those lives are deeply integral to those broader geographies. Critical observation and analysis of everyday life can therefore reveal something about what broader spatial-social structures are—what they are made of, how they form, how they persist, how they intermesh with ordinary life, and perhaps even how they might be transformed where necessary despite all the stubborn inertia that sustains them.

In what follows, I work through these ideas by tracing some of the intricate social geographies—collective relations in and across space—that are suspended like solute amidst the buoyant stuff of everyday life on a few city blocks of the modern world[3]. My principal aim is relatively straightforward. Using ethnographic research on West Forty-Sixth Street as a foundation, I try to develop a critical, politicized concept of everyday life by showing how daily practice is—as both a cause and an effect—integral to the structuring and reproduction of processes that are usually understood, in a kind of scalar shorthand, as more 'macro' in provenance. I pay particular attention to gentrification and the neoliberalization of urban space. I show that these processes do not take place in a spatial register which is somehow separate from daily life. Instead, I argue that everyday life serves to at once express, produce, perpetuate, and potentially alter these and other 'macro' relations both in the locations where they are directly encountered and beyond. Crucially, I show how everyday practical activity serves as an enacted bridge between particular historical geographies, concrete material and social forms, and potent

[3] Foregrounding arguments about everyday life that will be made in later sections, here I am intentionally evoking the language of Raymond Williams on "Structures in Solution" from *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Allan Pred (1981, 1984) on place as the sedimentation of daily routine, and Henri Lefebvre from his oeuvre of work on everyday life (Lefebvre 1971, 1991, 2002, 2005).

abstractions that can emerge from and come to condition all of these in ways that extend across space and time.

Additional arguments about urban space and social reproduction are mutually imbricated within my primary claim. I conceptualize the urban as an extended set of social relations that must be understood not only in terms of political economy, but also in terms of subjectivity and social reproduction. Any particular daily life in contemporary urban space intermeshes with, indeed depends upon, the lives of countless others. So far as everyday life in a place like West Forty-Sixth is situated within these extensive relations, the geography of daily life and the scope of daily practice necessarily far exceed the absolute space of the city. Contemporary urban life intersects with far flung circulations, other lives, and different spaces in ways that are often obscured by distance and time. These extended social relations have long been recognized as a hallmark of modern urban life, and they complicate both lived experiences and analyses of the displacement, inequality, and structural violence that seem to be part and parcel of contemporary capitalist urbanization. I address these dynamics from the perspective of everyday life in order to show—again, emphasizing the embodied interaction between concrete and abstract—how everyday life provides a crucial mediating link between practices, ideas, and the production of social space. I argue that such a link is essential to the continued survival of ostensibly macro social and political economic processes, and indeed, that hegemonic processes and the social relations that structure them necessarily require forms of enacted consent which, at least in part, are held in place through daily practice. In this sense, I build towards an argument that everyday practices constitute what might be called "social infrastructure" for processes that far exceed them in space and time, including processes that perpetuate inequality as well as those that might

put a stop to it. These dynamics mean that everyday life has a necessarily political character which demands serious consideration and analysis.

There are two additional aspects of this analytical framework that I want to emphasize from the outset and which are evident throughout the text. The first aspect to underscore concerns the *method* of my analysis. While my argument cumulatively opens up some very abstract theoretical and social philosophical conclusions, it ultimately hinges on the nitty-gritty details of daily life on West Forty-Sixth Street and works through these towards an analysis of the broader historical-geographical processes—at once concrete and abstract—that are animated by and revealed in the lives of the people there. I use details of the personal and the particular and build up arguments and understand abstractions that are broader in scope.

The method I am deploying here is an ethnographic interpretation of a distinctly Marxist approach. In *The Critique of German Ideology*, Marx writes:

> In direct contrast to [a form of] philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men [sic] say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. (2000, 9).

Here Marx is arguing that history, social life, and thought can only be fully grasped—and therefore, where necessary, potentially altered or fought against—in the context of lived practices. The goal of analysis is to understand how particular iterations of these social products emerge, gain traction, and congeal into broader formations in relation to such practices. My own

approach mirrors Marx's as I am directly concerned with analyzing historical formations, consciousness, subjectivity, and abstract ideas as they emerge from and persist in practical activity. While my approach differs from those who draw on Marx to focus on more overtly political-economic or revolutionary concerns, I understand this is a difference of emphasis rather than a quarrel. I offer a view of urban social space and social reproduction from the vantage point of everyday life, and while I approach from another direction I hope to show that my uptake of this conceptual framework converges with other articulations of Marxism and radical theory at the point where political considerations arise from description and analysis.

The second analytical aspect I want to stress follows from this methodological approach and concerns the *style of representation*. As my method would suggest, the arguments that I will ultimately present in the following sections arose from a close engagement with the stuff of everyday life on West Forty-Sixth Street.[4] Consequently, I have tried to work up to these arguments in a way that emphasizes that stuff as much as possible. In place of a standard academic text which proceeds by way of a handful of somewhat lengthy, systematic chapters, I chose to present my findings in a manner which interlaces shorter sections of exposition and analysis with substantive sections of story-driven observation in what I hope is a somewhat fluid and iterative way. Since the claims that I make precipitate out from ethnographic analysis, I attempt to demonstrate them as they emerge from everyday life on West Forty-Sixth Street rather than as detached findings or conclusions.

There are also other reasons, closely related to the character of my research and of everyday life itself, that I made these representational choices. For one thing, I wanted the people of West Forty-Sixth Street to be able to recognize something of themselves and their lives in the

[4] In her work on the lived dimensions of global restructuring, Marxist feminist geographer Cindi Katz (2001) says, "Social reproduction is the fleshy, messy, indeterminate stuff of everyday life." She follows Marx in attending to the "flesh", and my own emphasis on the "stuff" was directly inspired by hers.

words that I have written about them. The people who participated in my research gave me huge amounts of time and trusted me with their reputations by agreeing to be identified, and yet may not, in the end, be very pleased with some of the conclusions that I have drawn from their lives. They are owed a certain degree of transparency.

At the same time, part of my argument is that everyday practice plays a crucial but obscured—perhaps even fetishized, in that everyday life can appear to be an a priori thing rather than a malleable and unstable product of social activity—role in perpetuating hegemony and inequality because the repeated daily enactment of certain abstract ideas can underwrite processes which generate social violence and the suppression of difference while contributing to the naturalization of such social violence in common sense. To do justice within the framework of my own arguments here, I feel compelled to write in a way that preserves the spirit of vibrant idiosyncrasy, indetermination, and sometimes disjointed variety that was evident in the lives of the people who made these arguments possible in the first place.

Finally, and related, I wanted to write in a way that reflected the actual experiences—both those of the people I researched and my own as a researcher—of daily life in modern urban space, where certainties and conclusions rarely readily present themselves in an orderly or neatly linear fashion. Numerous precedents have been set by wonderful writers who experiment with form and narrative in ways that try to mimic something of the experience of modern life itself while also leaving leeway for different readings and interpretations to emerge from the same text.[5] This kind of writing is not only consistent with its own intellectual premises in the sense just outlined above, but also seems more representative of and honest about the partial nature of

[5] I have in mind the likes of Walter Benjamin, Alan Pred, Michael Taussig, Kathleen Stewart, Fernando Pessoa, and John Berger all of whom, though not heavily cited here, echoed in my head as I wrote this.

all intellectual arguments and their origins[6]. In my fieldwork as in life, there is so much material to be winnowed that such partiality is unavoidable.

Tim O'Brien once wrote that "story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth" (1991, 203). O'Brien was writing about the chaos and uncertainty of the Vietnam War, but story-truth can, perhaps tellingly, be a useful way to approach writing about contemporary everyday life as well.[7] O'Brien shows that there is a kind of affective feeling in story telling that can be more, or at least differently, true to life than just the facts and an analysis. 'Story-truth' can evoke some of the excesses and absences of modern experience—fleeting flashes of feeling and association, complex connections to some unknown elsewhere, or things that were missed, distorted, or misperceived as events were actually happening. In the pages that follow, I have tried to mobilize a kind of ethnographic "story-truth." I tell a lot of stories from everyday life on West Forty-Sixth Street. The contents from many of these stories will be taken up in analysis. Some of the material that arises, however, will remain underdeveloped or unrequited. There are aspects of everyday life that remain open like live wires, or that fly off like sparks, escaping recognition, commentary, capture, conclusion, or analysis. My writing knowingly reproduces these alongside the overarching arguments that are woven through to the end.

These representational and narrative points are no mere post-modern indulgence, nor must they lead to analytical or political paralysis. As ethnographer Les Back observes, "Partiality

[6] Here I am mindful of feminist thinkers such as Hartsock (1983) and Haraway (1988) who argue that vision is always partial, and that the ability to make sense of the world is always a question of power and perspective. This fact need not demean the pursuit of science and knowledge, but can in fact make these more rigorous by compelling a robust framework of triangulating partial views.

[7] This is not to say I am not telling the truth, or that the stories I tell are fiction, but rather that the truth often simply exceeds traditional social scientific narrative strategies. For example, O'Brien often tells the same stories differently in different parts of his book, and then variously says that all versions are true and that none of them are true. I am not far gone enough to attempt that with my 'data'. Every researcher knows, however, that over the course of a long project, the story about what, why, and how we are doing things changes. Further, and as I show later in the text, people and groups also tend to do this with their own histories and traditions. In both cases, every version is true, and in a way none of them are. It is the way stories get taken up and enacted—and not necessarily the factual content within them—that gives them traction. I have tried to allow this sensibility to poke through in different ways in my writing.

and failure do not suggest that the lines in our portraits have no semblance of likeness" (2007, 155). Likewise, as I have tried to foreshadow here and as I try to show throughout this text, uncertainty, messiness, and subjectivity need not diminish our ability to make sense of and make arguments about the social world. In fact, I assert that these qualities themselves are a large part of what is actually at stake in our understanding of everyday life. My arguments do not hinge on stories about people and daily lives, but on the stories that people tell themselves and *enact* in their everyday practices. Such stories can, if repeated enough times in space and social practice, produce very real material effects. Stories and ideas emerge from particular material social conditions, but they can also escape, exceed, or intervene and play a part in (re)constituting such conditions. This is the dialectical power of abstraction, the indexical, the mimetic, and the performative[8], which I will argue gain particular traction in the space of everyday life.

In the end, this text strives to be more than a collection of stories and to function as a layered ethnographic argument about how, out of the often chaotic mess that is situated everyday life and limited perspective, things are assembled into cohesive structures, processes, and social forces that can concretize in ways that pretend to universality, and can have very real and sometimes disquieting effects in the world. My representative choices are more than merely discursive or textual moves, and the stories from West Forty-Sixth amount to more than just show and tell. They also pose difficult questions about how abstractions live in the world and about the sometimes beautiful, sometimes nasty effects that they can have.

[8] Here I am directly gesturing to different but, in this context, kindred thinkers such as Benjamin (1999) Butler (1993), Lee and Li Puma (2002), Lefebvre (1991b, 2005), Scott (1985), and Taussig (1993, 2006) some of whom I take up more explicitly in later sections. There is also something of this dialectic within the recent ideas about "Magical Marxism" (Merrifield 2011), which seem to want to change the world—to change the truth—partly by embracing utopian social forms and making them cohere and endure in and through new forms of lived political praxis.

One final thing that the stories from West Forty-Sixth show is that there are some troubling things going on there which may not be obvious to people who pass through or even live there. There are people being displaced from their homes, being discriminated against and punitively targeted by state power, and being left to suffer individually through all manner of indignity and affliction, as if the collective forces that colluded to produce such things could never be made to operate in any other way. Amidst this, I have tried to play a role not as neutral observer or story teller but also as an invested interpreter. The truth of things is not always readily apparent from description alone.[9] Some situations demand more than just the exposure of uncomfortable truths that everyone already knew existed beneath the anesthetizing routines of daily life. Cultural critic Eric Lott, commenting on what is at stake in thinking about intersections between race, class, patriarchy and inequality, argues that social critique must amount to much more than just "a bourgeois matter of getting your head on straight" (Quoted in Arthur, 2005). Towards a more just world, writers and scholars must go far beyond "consciousness raising"—beyond simply shedding light on the truth and letting the political dimensions be implied or worked out by someone else. Forms of structural violence and the practical activities that produce those truths in place must be interpreted and explained. Demands for transformation must be addressed. For me, these are the things that necessitate a hard look at the messy stuff of everyday life.

[9] James Scott employs an effective method of story-telling and interpretation to analyze the everyday forms of peasant resistance in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985). There he builds on Geertz's famous description of a blinking eye to illustrate the need for interpretation: "Is it a twitch or a wink? Mere observation of the physical act gives no clue. If it is a wink, what kind of wink is it?" (1985, 45). Only a knowledge of culture and shared understandings, he argues, can explain. Interestingly, my argument suggests that people need not agree on the meaning of something in order for it to have an effect. Material social conditions can emerge and persist without a shared meaning if everyone acts the same way, which they might for very different reasons. In this context, and in relation to arguments that I spell out in later sections via the work of Antonio Gramsci and others, I assert that the role of the interpreter is not to explicate shared understandings, but to explicate the play of abstract and concrete social forces that lead to actions and thus produce the effects.

An origin story?

If it isn't obvious already, this study does not follow the model of much existing urban ethnography. This is not a community study; a study of any particular group, activity, struggle, or social movement; an extension of the Chicago School of urban sociology; or an attempt to document and define a common culture or a shared set of meanings or norms.[10] I used the tools of ethnography[11] to explore the way that broad geographies and social relations are bound up with different daily lives in a particular space, and indeed space is what ultimately allows the argument to hold together. Meanwhile, the outcomes were born from experimentation and trial and error as much as from any straightforward research aim in the traditional sense, and the result is consequently more decentered, unsettled, uncertain, and fraught than many existing urban ethnographic studies. Eventually I came to the conclusion that I was doing amounted to an ethnography of a *process* or set of processes more than some other kind of stable analytical object[12].

When I first began this research I was enthralled with the half-baked idea of arbitrarily picking a small urban area and finding out what kinds of geographical insights might be gleaned from a close study of everyday life in that space.[13] In an ostensibly "global" era, I reasoned, broad political-economic, cultural, and social processes must occur—with difference—

[10] For some urban ethnographies that exemplify these traditions and or/have typified the genre see Warner's '*Yankee City'* Studies (1963), Liebow's *Tally's Corner* (1967), Susser's *Norman Street* (1982), Anderson's *Streetwise* (1990), Gregory's *Black Corona* (1998), Duneier's *Sidewalk* (1999), Bourgois's *In Search of Respect* (2003), or Venkatesh's *Gang Leader for a Day* (2008).

[11] Typified by thoroughgoing immersion into the world of peoples' experiences via close and well documented observation and participation. A brief overview of my methods is provided in the next section

[12] For more on this see Anderson (2012). This sense of process also comes through clearly starting in the section on Everyday Life.

[13] This was provoked when I read Perec's (1978) novel *Life: A User's Manual*—which meticulously details the interlocking lives of the people who live in a single fictional apartment building in Paris—at the same time I was reading William Bunge's *Fitzgerald: A Geography of Revolution* (1971), which demonstrates that a "geographical expedition" within a delimited urban space can produce exceedingly rich results.

everywhere. I could pick any spot in any city, and I would be sure to find them. My aim would be to understand how these "macro" or "global" processes were folded into everyday life in a single space and how the social relations that structure these processes are produced and reproduced through everyday practice.

I settled on West Forty-Sixth Street for several reasons. As New York City is endlessly fascinating and I also happened to live there, that choice was easy. I picked the Middle West Side of Manhattan because I used to go for walks there during lunch breaks at a job I had in Midtown the first year I moved to the city, and I always wondered if there was as much going on behind the facades as my greenhorn imagination supposed. A few years later when the opportunity to do this study came, I walked every block of the West Side between Fourteenth and Fifty-Ninth Streets before settling on West Forty-Sixth, a stretch known for having diverse land use, an active block association, and several progressive non-profit institutions which might offer accessible points of entry for study. I dug in there and started talking to people, and it wasn't long before the space started to suggest a set of questions that diverged somewhat from the ones I started out with.

The area on the Middle West Side of Manhattan[14] where West Forty-Sixth is located has long been a space of relentless urban transformation.[15] In the early nineteenth century, most of the land bordering the Hudson River between present-day 42nd and 59th Streets was part of a farm owned by a family named Hopper. Then a pastoral landscape, the plot was quickly urbanized thereafter. In 1811, the Commissioners Plan was put into place projecting the now iconic street and property grid system onto the then undeveloped spaces of middle and upper

[14] Located roughly between Forty-Second and Fifty-Ninth Streets, Eighth Avenue and the Hudson River—though many often extend the boundaries south to Thirty-Fourth Street.
[15] This early history is drawn from a combination of sources including Cartwright (1911), Delano (1982), Gwertzman (1997), The New York City Planning Commission (1969) and Winslow (1995).

Manhattan. The Erie Canal was completed in 1819 and expanded in the decades that followed. It opened up shipping routes to the interior of North America through the Great Lakes via the Hudson, and New York Harbor—including the shores and piers of western Manhattan—soon became one of the busiest working waterfronts in the world. The opening of a rail station at 30th Street and 11th Avenue in 1851 furthered the industrialization of the Middle West Side. This allowed goods—particularly livestock—from the interior of the Northeast to be processed in factories in the surrounding neighborhood. All told, the area transitioned from pasture to industrial urban space in a matter of decades.

By the later part of the nineteenth century[16], the Middle West Side had a rough and tumble reputation. According to one account, the warm blood of freshly slaughtered livestock flowed in the gutters, where it was lapped up by feral dogs[17]. Locomotives ran at grade down Eleventh Avenue and, though there was usually a cowboy riding on horseback ahead of the engines to warn pedestrians, fatalities were common enough that the street was nicknamed "Death Avenue". The labor of countless workers was the real driving force behind the ongoing industrial and waterfront activity, and thousands of tenements were built to house the Irish, Germans, Scots, Blacks, and other groups—both native born and immigrant—who populated the area and constituted its workforce. Housing conditions in these tenements were generally horrible, and the area was included in Jacob Riis's now famous 1890 book, *How the Other Half Lives*. All of these factors combined to give the Middle West Side a reputation as a gritty, unsavory backwater unsafe for the middle classes. These perceptions proved to be enduring.

By the middle of the twentieth century the Middle West Side was still a working waterfront and an industrial staging area, but its demographic profile and productive identity had

[16] Aspects of this history are re-told, with significant differences and details in the "Traditions and Apparitions" subsection.
[17] This according to one Fitz James O'Brien cited in Cartwright (1911).

started to shift. Immigrants from Puerto Rico began to move into the area in large numbers in the 1950s. The Broadway musical *West Side Story* debuted in 1957, just blocks from where the kind of ethnic conflict between working class European and Puerto Rican youths that the musical famously portrayed was actually taking place. Meanwhile, in subsequent decades, the growing prevalence of containerized shipping along with the advent of de-industrialization across the cities of the Northeastern United States took a toll on the West Side. The work of unloading freight from ships moved across the harbor from Manhattan to New Jersey, where the open expanses provided the requisite space for the storage and interchange of intermodal containers. Much of the industry in the neighborhood moved elsewhere as the raw materials did. This economic shift hit the working-class area hard, and was a major factor in local permutations of the urban crisis of the 1970s and early 1980s. At that point the area had a reputation for abandoned apartment buildings[18], organized crime[19], prostitution, and the easy availability of drugs.

The fortunes of the Middle West Side began to reverse in the late 1980s. By then the economy of New York City had been reorganized around real-estate driven development and high-end services such as insurance and finance. Tertiary workers and young professionals working in the resurgent offices of nearby Midtown started to notice the combination of proximity and value just to the west. Ever since, the demographic composition of the Middle West Side has become steadily whiter and more affluent and property prices have been on the rise (see Hackworth and Smith 2001; Saegert et al. 2003; Hackworth 2007). Hell's Kitchen/Clinton has also become known for its sizable gay population as the Chelsea

[18] Many of these abandoned buildings were owned by the City because of "in rem" property tax foreclosure.
[19] An unusually violent Irish syndicate called "The Westies" operated out of the area and is said to have been responsible for in upwards of 100 murders between the late 1960's and mid-1980's (see English 1991 for a detailed portrayal).

neighborhood to the south has gotten expensive and people seeking more affordable gay-friendly proximity have ventured farther north (Shaftel 2007).

Around the same time that this most recent round of demographic shifts was taking shape, a number of noteworthy civic experiments also sprouted in the area. During the 1990's, the blocks in and around Times Square—which is immediately adjacent to the east of the stretch of West Forty-Sixth that is the site for my project—were a pilot location for several new models of urban governance including public private partnerships and Business Improvement Districts (see Dykstra 1995, Zukin 2010). At the same time, this locale became a testing ground for then Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Police Commissioner William Bratton to try out broken windows and zero tolerance policing strategies (see Bratton 1995, Chronopoulos 2010, Smith 1998) that emphasized the minimization of visible signs of disorder such as graffiti, panhandling, and petty crime[20]. Through a combination of forces, the area immediately adjacent to West Forty-Sixth was transformed from one of famously seedy pluralism to one of increasing homogeneity sometimes bordering on hyper-reality (Berman 2006).

In the first years of the 21st century, the administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the New York City Department of Planning signaled another round of change by deeming the Far West Side—and the large parcel around the Hudson Yards between 30th and 33rd Streets in particular—one of the last great underdeveloped spaces left in Manhattan (Angotti 2008). As I write, massive development projects are slated on the horizon. These will no doubt alter the character of the surrounding neighborhoods once again.

I sketch out this cursory history here for several reasons. For one, it provides a quick background to those who may not be familiar with this part of New York City. It also

[20] The idea being that the appearance of disorder leads to crime, so focusing on these small things could stem the development of larger issues.

foreshadows several issues—especially the relationships among historical-geography, macro-structural transformation, and perceptions of these things from the perspective of everyday life in urban space—that will be explored in more detail in the sections that follow. Beyond that, this history conveys something of the ongoing dynamism of this space. My project is not "salvage ethnography", or a study where something dramatic is about to change a place and the researcher is capturing a way of life that is about to be forever altered, primarily because this is a space where change *is* a way of life. At the same time many of the moments, events, and changes outlined in this brief history are still alive on and animate West Forty-Sixth Street, embedded in its everyday life and space in ways that continue to affect events unfolding in the present and its becoming future.

I went to the West Side in 2007 with the hope of finding people who were engaged in some way with the forces of urban change that were clearly transforming the space there. Many scholars have argued (cf. Hackworth 2007; Moody 2007) that the particular style of urban development which has been cultivated in New York City since the 1970s largely serves the interests of the wealthy and real-estate and financial elites to the detriment of the middle and working classes, poor people, and people of color who have long called places like the Middle West Side home. Meanwhile, the spaces around Times Square and on the Middle West Side more broadly have, in many ways, served as a bellwether for development ideals and governance practices that now are now evident in numerous major cities as well as within processes of development, imperialism, and dispossession on a global scale (Katz 2004; Mitchell 2010; Smith 2002). When I started my research on West Forty-Sixth Street, then, I had good reason to believe I might find geographies and social relations of broad, perhaps even global proportion bound up with everyday life there. More specifically, following the work of geographic ethnographers

Gidwani (2008a), Hart (2006), Katz (2004), and Pratt (2005), I expected to find that the processes which social theory names as globalization, development, neoliberalism, gentrification, social reproduction and the like, were—from the situated perspective of everyday life—incomplete, unstable assemblages that were, at least to some extent, being collectively resisted by people living them. I further hoped to find that, in this context, everyday life contained some immanent radical potential, aleatory volatility, or inherent contradiction that might serve as a wellspring for radical politics. Now that this research is said and done I have come to understand that my first impulses were perhaps too optimistic—that there is nothing inherently radical about everyday life. Indeed, the propensity for everyday practice to serve hegemony is precisely what should motivate the need to understand, politicize, and transform the everyday.

Among the disparate people living and working on West Forty-Sixth, I found little critical objection—let alone outright active resistance—to the current trajectory of urban change there. Instead, I found that things like displacement, surveillance, and the privatization of formerly public services seemed to be more or less accepted and naturalized to the point where they were rarely criticized or even commented upon by anyone outside of a handful of housing activists, non-profit workers, and a few increasingly threatened pockets of long-time residents. Sometimes people would voice concern about very limited incarnations of these things, or, more often, about a perceived loss of "diversity" or "character" that came with corporate chain retailers moving into the neighborhood or fifty-story luxury condominium buildings being constructed all around the perimeter of the Far West Side[21]. But many times, in the next turn, the

[21] There is a special zoning designation called the Special Clinton District (SCD) in effect for much of the area. Though the stipulations have been weakened since initial implementation in 1974, the regulations limit the height and density—buildings must be less than six stories and housing adequate for families is encouraged —of buildings within a preservation core area between 43rd and 56th Streets, 8th and 10th Avenues and a perimeter of more "mixed

same people would undertake or support actions that directly or indirectly lubricated the very forces I honestly hoped I might find them openly fighting against. Generally, it seemed as if it were taken as given that future changes would continue their current, inequitable course; as if this "progress" were a foregone conclusion that had simply become part of the routine and taken for granted. In this sense, people appeared to be agents of the production of inequitable outcomes not because they were malevolent, but because well-intentioned common sense ideas about community, quality of life, and progress conditioned their actions. What's more, these abstractions seemed to have a peculiar kind of agency that was closely tethered to ideas about recent history and lived experience in the space of West Forty-Sixth and the surrounding area. Sensibilities about what the neighborhood was perceived to have been like in the past constantly figured in changes that were implemented in the spaces of the present. Once I got over the idea that I was going to find an overt fight, this passive naturalization, the taken-for-grantedness of inequitable change, and the relations between abstraction, lived experience, and space became the central concerns of my research.

I do not want to imply that these tendencies toward apathy, complacency, and complicity were expressed uniformly or in the same way by people in different times, circumstances, and spaces. As I show in the following sections, they were not, and this is a big part of the intrigue. Viewed from the vantage point of everyday life, hegemonic and socially homogenizing processes are clearly striated by all sorts of discontinuity and difference. I generally found West Forty-Sixth to be a social space where different lives and practices sometimes overlapped to produce a coherent outcome or reproduce a particular set of social relations but just as often did

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use" zoning maintaining some of the same regulations. Except for a couple of public housing complexes, there are no high-rises in the SCD as a result of this zoning, and there is an increasingly dramatic change in the skyline where it ends. The legislation also includes stipulations that pertain to tenant rights and acceptable land uses (see page 199 of this text for stories related to the SCD through the eyes of a local housing activist. Additionally, Gwertzman (1997) provides a good overview of the conditions that led to the creation of the SCD.)

not. Contrary to my expectations, there did not seem to be any singular community, dominant group, or unified classes overtly battling it out. Nor was there much activity that could have passed for the coherent processual force that I had previously imagined things like neoliberalism or gentrification to be. These processes were happening there, no doubt. But the story of *how* seemed to be much more messy, nuanced, particular, fragmented, and deeply subjective than much of the existing academic literature had led me to believe. The recognition of this messiness, indetermination, and contingency at the heart of hegemony yields a different political sensibility than more universalizing reads generally allow for.

I went to West Forty-Sixth Street without any very precise research aims aside from an interest in everyday life and urban space. Over time, more specific questions emerged: Why was there so little critical consciousness of processes that appeared to be producing inequality here? What, if any, consent or conflict—explicit or not—existed in place of the activism, dissent, and resistance that I had hoped to find? How did the seemingly 'macro' processes that had apparently long been transforming the Middle West Side actually work on the ground in this particular place? How were these processes enacted, produced, and reproduced in this space? And finally, what—if any—pinpricks and political openings were there in the seemingly staid fabric of social practice that sustained them? These are the questions that everyday life had to answer.

Fielding a project

The woman across the table eyed my digital audio recorder suspiciously. Or maybe it was me she was suspicious of. It was always hard to tell at the beginning of an interview with someone I had never met.

My Olympus DS-40 recorder was no bigger than a slim candy bar, but it still made normally eloquent people tongue tied. One woman even felt compelled to hide it while we talked because it made her feel unduly nervous. Turned out my current interviewee—a woman with whom I met only once to talk about housing—had a different concern:

> "You sure you don't want to test that thing to make sure it is working?" she said, obviously unimpressed by the wad of green rubber binders and string that were fastened to it.
>
> "Um," I said, "I am pretty positive that it is working."
>
> "Ok . . ." she said, seemingly unconvinced.
>
> "I've got a system," I said. "The reason I have this highly advanced technological apparatus," I said gesturing to the wad, "is because I am doing this broader project where I am actually following people around over the course of their everyday lives—to the grocery store, to work, down the street, whatever—and I strap this around my neck. So it is battle tested."
>
> "You are sort of like a spy." She said, deadpan.
>
> "It is a little like that . . ." I said. "It's not creepy though," I added optimistically.
>
> "Hey, I don't mind," she said.

Supposedly, Studs Terkel used to pretend to be slightly incompetent with his tape recorder in order to show the people he was interviewing that he was just an ordinary guy. This made them feel more comfortable. I apparently had that skill down without even having to pretend.

***

The thing that really sets ethnography apart from any other method is the extent to which the researcher becomes deeply involved in the often overwhelmingly rich and detailed ordinary world of a setting. The challenge is then to sort out what should count as "data" and what should not while still doing representational and analytical justice to the lived experience of that world. In my research on West Forty-Sixth I tried to cast a wide net and gather as much information as possible.[22] My fieldwork there unfolded by way of four overlapping undertakings that I think are useful to describe here as they structured the way the research findings emerged from fieldwork.

At first, partly out of shyness, I spent a lot of time making observations in places where I could get access without having to talk to anyone about what I was doing there. These included the sidewalk and a small park as well as restaurants, and coffee shops. Most times I would simply write down a chronology of what was happening in these locations. Other times I would write little scene settings, snippets of overheard conversations, or vignettes that described these spaces and the people in them. These provided a baseline of sorts—a feel for the schedule and the rhythms of life here as well as a sense for places or things that I might look into in more depth during later stages of my research. If at first I really did act a little like a spy, I slowly transitioned to become something more akin to a benign stalker or a roommate that is somehow always around.

I eventually got up the courage to start talking to people, and based on my initial observations I targeted some organizations and institutions to observe in closer detail. I began to attend the monthly meetings of the West Forty-Sixth Street Better Block Association. One month I just showed up there and introduced myself. I probably made too big of a deal about my project at that first meeting by passing around a bunch of "information sheets" with official university

[22] To be clear, I never lived on West Forty-Sixth. I lived in the Morningside Heights neighborhood of New York City for the duration of the study, and I commuted from there.

stamps and outlines of risks of participation on them, but this was standard research protocol. The members of the Block Association were nice about it, and they soon voted to give me consent to be there. Subsequently, I just kept showing up for the next three years. My presence at the meetings quickly seemed to become more or less banal. These meetings gave me an invaluable sense for the social landscape of West Forty-Sixth and the surrounding neighborhood as well as a deep familiarity with the concerns of some of the people who live there.

As I continued to attend Block Association meetings, I also began going to broader community events and observing various activities at different businesses and institutions located on West Forty-Sixth. I pulled an all-nighter at a large dance club called Pacha, which attracts up to 4,000 people on a good night. I got a chance to see the inner workings of a community health clinic. I also volunteered once a week for five months at an after-school program housed in a non-profit called Hartley House on the block.

A third set of activities was the most difficult to orchestrate. In order to really understand and document everyday life here, I sought out residents of West Forty-Sixth who would be willing to let me shadow them over the course of their public and private daily routines. For reasons I discuss in more detail below, I also wanted these people to allow their identity to be revealed in the final analysis. Finding volunteers for this turned out to be very challenging. I started by enlisting two people whom I had met through the Block Association. After that I tried distributing flyers on the street, going to different social functions to try to recruit people, getting lists of contacts from people or institutions, and straight-up cold calling. Many people expressed some initial interest, but perhaps unsurprisingly, most got cold feet once they heard that I intended to follow them around as they conducted their daily routines—"traveling to and from work, running errands, hanging out at home, whatever you do every day" . . . "for 15 to 20

hours" . . . "we could schedule it as your comfort, time, and availability allow, of course"—with a running audio recorder strapped around my neck. Mostly through sheer stubbornness, I eventually found seven people who were willing to give it a go[23], and who, while definitely not a "representative sample"[24] in any traditional sense, exemplified a good cross section of those who call West Forty-Sixth Street home. Their stories are told in detail in later sections.

Each of these "in depth" participants was offered $60 that I was able to fund from a small grant. This was basically a modest token of appreciation for their time and patience. This compensation was originally going to take the form of a gift certificate, but after one participant subtly suggested it, I switched it to cash. Some of them accepted this money, others did not. In any case, I did feel the need to give them something because I took up a lot of their time. Letting someone tag along to work is one thing, but I also showed up during times—puttering about the house, watching TV, reading on a bench in the park—that might normally be used for a quiet respite, relaxation, or just generally not having to be "on".

Meanwhile, on my end, it was somewhat difficult to figure out how to schedule my observations. Turns out there are a lot of things—walking the dog, going shopping, different recreational activities—that people just sort of do when they feel like it or that they intend to do during some non-specific window of time. There was a period of many months where my own everyday routine was liable to be interrupted at any moment because a participant would call and say they were about to go do something and I would need to drop whatever I was doing and go join them. There were numerous other times where I agreed to a certain window of time with

[23] Or more accurately, six people who were willing to give it a full go and one who—as will become clear—participated with restrictions.

[24] Of the seven, for example, only one has children and five identify themselves as gay or lesbian. This is not a group that represents the general population of West Forty-Sixth. Rather than being a deliberate sample, this is more a reflection of the type of person who was willing and able to participate in a study of this kind, which demanded a degree of open-mindedness, trust, and flexibility from participants. These qualities no doubt prohibited different kinds of people—in particular people with families and people who strongly value their privacy—from participating.

someone and then just sat around on the street waiting, sometimes in vain, for them to get to whatever it was we were about to do.

One final thing that I did, concurrently with the other activities as needed, was conduct supplementary interviews. These were a way of generating context for things that came up in my other activities, getting background for different threads of my analysis, and also checking some perceptions. I ended up doing 17 of these kinds of interviews with housing organizers, tenants, employees of various programs at some of the institutions I observed, and a few others who had relationships to West Forty-Sixth in some capacity.

By the time I got done with fieldwork in 2010, several people on West Forty-Sixth had begun playfully mocking me for hanging around so long. "Career Student!", "I look forward to reading your book . . . in thirty years!", and so on. Some people also started to think that I had been there much longer than I actually had and that I knew things about their lives that they did not. For example, during the last months of my field work there was a high-profile incident where an unexploded car-bomb was found in a vehicle parked a couple of blocks away in Times Square. After this incident I asked members of the Block Association if they had noticed any changes in traffic patterns, tourist activities, or the presence of the police on the street. One of them said, "You tell us. You pay more attention to what goes on around here than we do!" This sentiment spoke to the necessarily obsessive and detail-oriented character of ethnography, but also to the peculiar way that everyday habituation can dull the ability to fully perceive the familiar.

After three years spent doing these things I had gobs of data—over a hundred hours of recordings along with several notebooks full of field notes both of which I spent six months

transcribing, a couple gigabytes of visual material[25], and a large box of random odds and ends that had accumulated in my apartment over the duration. It has taken a lot of time to sift through it all, sit with it, pull out different themes, become impatient with them, and do it all over again. I like to think that there is something about the slowness of a project like this that is worth savoring—a sensibility that resists the fast, too clean or too compressed sound-bite modes that are often used to report the world and produce knowledge about life these days.

All in all, the logistical challenges worked themselves out and gave way to the deeper questions that I still sit with. I can only guess how this study would have turned out if I were not able, young, white, and male—my guess is it would have worked out very differently and possibly not at all. I also wonder sometimes if I am a huckster. There was something a little too easy about the way I could get access to things just by saying I was doing a study of everyday life on this street. Most people think of everyday life as a totally innocuous thing, and even though I knew better and it was my intent to try to prove otherwise, I did not always say so.

These sorts of studies always raise questions about the merits of identifying participants. The idea is based on a journalistic notion that identification compels a certain standard of accuracy and a kind of intellectual honesty. Anyone can go back and find the people I represent here and ask them what they think about what I said. Hypothetically that compels me to tell the truth, but in reality it could just as easily make me shy away from saying things that portray people in a critical way. Still, I think there is something about knowing the names and seeing

[25] I lent each participant a digital camera so that they could photo-document their own daily lives and provide a visual element. At least that was the idea. In practice the results were very mixed, and most of them ended up just sending me a bunch of pictures that they already had. Many of these images are used in this text. Where images were taken by participants as part of the photo project I have indicated this with a (T) for 'taken by'. Where images were provided by participants and taken at a different time I have indicated this with a (P) for 'provided by'. Where no indication is given, it means I took the photograph myself.

faces that can ground the analysis and the stories in a different and more resonant way than words alone.[26] If that is the objective reason, it is also arguable that if I had sought to protect the identity of participants, I would not have been able to name the street, which in turn would have taken some of the teeth out of what I wanted to do. Identification does not come without risks to the personal privacy of my participants. Ultimately however, I decided that the potential benefits outweighed these risks. I hope I am right. Of course, participants who did not wish to be identified have participated with identifying information removed or changed for publication, and I have simply not named them where that occurred.

One final note on who is made known in this study and who is not: In the end, though this study does focus on inequality, I chose not to enlist, or at least identify, anyone who was in a truly precarious position. I thought of myself as "studying up"[27]—around and at a deliberate level of remove from the people on West Forty-Sixth who are most at risk, including undocumented migrants, people in precarious labor or housing situations, and people under police scrutiny. Even though I did not seek out interaction with anyone so vulnerable, I found that their presence could be registered and triangulated in spectral ways that are almost more apropos to my argument and certainly more insulated from adverse effects because of this secondary character. After all, this not a study about poor or oppressed people so much as one about the powerful ways that routine daily practices can ripple out to affect others, whether we directly encounter them or not.

[26] There are several non-fiction works that I admire—particularly Bunge's *Fitzgerald* and numerous books by Dale Maharidge—that name and show people in ways that add another dimension of urgency to the content.
[27] Most of the people I studied had equal or greater social power than I did.

Daily Life

First Impressions

November, 2009. I sat in the living room of a small one-bedroom apartment on the ground floor of a five-story building. The apartment was modest—essentially two rooms and a bathroom—but it had character. The man who lived there had turned basic amenities, some exposed brick, linoleum, and a little woodwork into a cozy place replete with numerous personal flourishes.

It was mid-morning. My host was sitting in his pajamas, sipping coffee and answering questions about his experiences living here and dealing with a negligent landlord. Unprompted by me, he started to talk about the inconspicuousness of West Forty-Sixth:

> "This street I think tends to appear pretty anonymous to people," he said. "I think people tend to just pull out of the [Lincoln] tunnel and get off the West Side Highway. Maybe they don't really have much of a connection to New York, maybe they are going to the theater or the restaurants. Or maybe they want to see Times Square. So they are people who just drive down the street, and it must look like the most anonymous place in the world to them." He stopped, looked to the side, and nodded for a moment before continuing. "One thing that I do, being on the stoop level here, as I call it, I tend to go out—even in the winter—with bare feet. If I have some garbage I will just run it out there barefoot, like this," he said, gesturing to his pajamas and to feet, which were indeed bare at that very moment. "And if there is traffic stuck out there, I always wonder, does that look really odd to people? Someone is actually barefoot on the street." He paused again and thought about it. "I sort of like that image."
>
> "Yeah," I said, picturing it in my head.
>
> "This is so intimate to me that I can be barefoot," he said. "And yet for them it is just this thoroughfare from the tunnel to Midtown. It is little things like that that fascinate me about this place."
>
> "I like that," I said.
>
> He laughed. "Well, I hope that is your opening" he said, nodding his head. "It is all the little things . . ."
>
> But I was still picturing the anonymous man in his pajamas, barefoot, next to the garbage on the New York City sidewalk.
>
> "Oh, I thought you meant . . ." I said, stammering and trailing off.
>
> "The barefoot guy?" he said, finishing my thought.

"Yeah," I said. "Some random barefoot guy on the sidewalk!"

"Well I really like that image too," he said. "This plays on the fact that this is such a huge city, and on the fact that this is just a little anonymous corner of it. But I guess you are doing a doctorate on it, so maybe it is not that anonymous."

"Honestly?" I said, "I picked it because it is pretty anonymous, to show that, look, there is interesting stuff going on in all kinds of places like this. A lot of people pick places to study because they are like, 'Oh, this place is about to disappear,' or 'There is something really exceptional going on here.' This isn't like that."

"But how did you pick this street?" he asked. "Any particular reason it was Forty-Sixth?"

"Well I walked a lot of streets looking for one that could work," I said. "And this street just seemed to have the most interesting mix of things without anything too dramatic."

"I have a sense of pride that you said that," he said. "You said that, and I felt proud, 'Well of course!' as if I have any ownership of it. But I did, when you said that I got this swell of pride, 'Of course you would pick this street!'"

***

As a whole, Forty-Sixth Street is like a two-mile belt across the midsection of Manhattan. It is a one-way street, running west to east, that begins on the banks of the Hudson River, threads the heart of Times Square, cuts across the Midtown business district, and traverses just north of Grand Central Station before ending at the entrance to the United Nations assembly hall on the edge of the East River. Some of these are world famous locations. *West* Forty-Sixth, where the street begins, offers a particular cross-section of that larger world.

The three and a half block stretch of West Forty-Sixth Street that lies between Eighth Avenue and the river—the setting for this study—feels different from the iconic urban canyons just east. The far West Side of middle Manhattan is mostly low-rise. At Eighth Avenue the Midtown skyscrapers drop off. The buildings west of Eighth, on the slight slope down to the

Hudson, are mostly modest four and five story buildings of brick and plaster in shades of red, brown, and tan. The New York City of skylines and postcards visibly ends where one domain of the relatively unsung lives that sustain it begins.

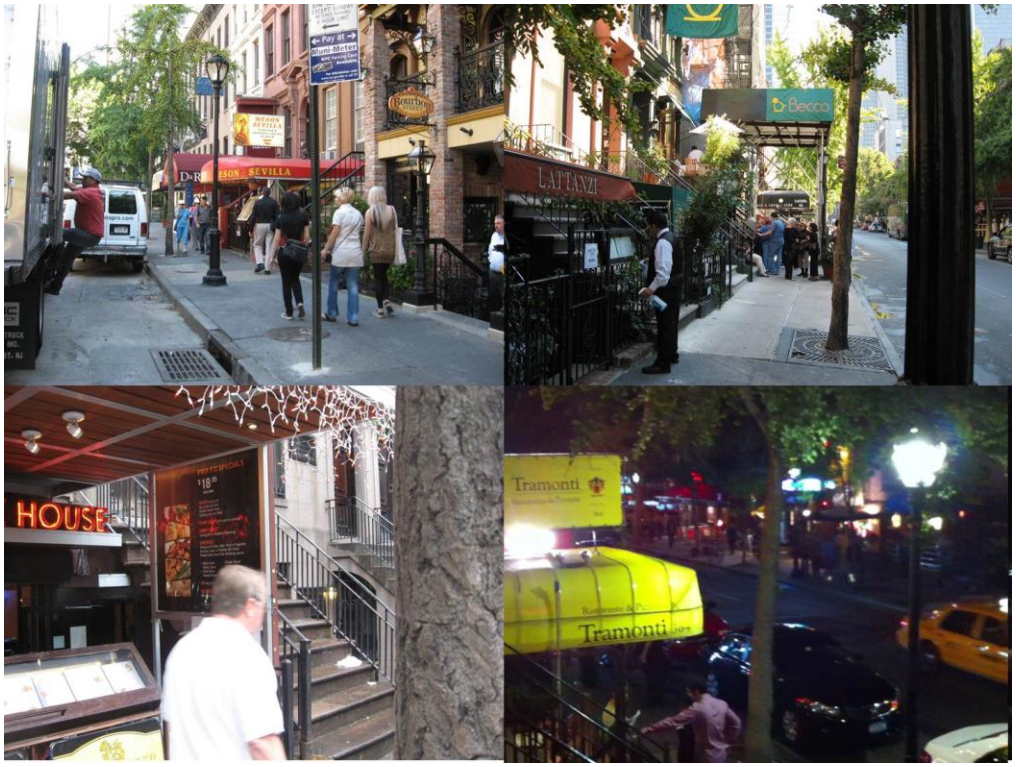
The skyline drop-off at Eighth Avenue, viewed from half a block to the west.

Though it is just blocks from the flash of Times Square, far West Forty-Sixth often seems somehow distant and anachronistic by comparison. On clear summer days, the wind that blows along the river can make the leaves of the trees dance in excited little waves against the relatively unblocked span of sky to the west. At night, anemic light from faux-Victorian lampposts or high sodium-vapor lamps can play tricks against the surfaces of the scruffiness that still persists here creating an effect that evokes earlier times in New York City.

Each of the three and a half blocks on this stretch has a distinct character. There are two blocks of narrow-lot apartment houses followed by a mix of warehouses and light industrial buildings closer to the river. The further from the center of Midtown, the more obvious it becomes that this area used to be a working waterfront.

On the 300 block, between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, a finger of the Times Square Business Improvement District extends to incorporate 'Restaurant Row'—so called because over thirty eateries and bars are concentrated there. The rhythms of this block are closely tied to the schedule of the Midtown Theater District. Lunch specials attract day tourists. Later, well-heeled couples catch dinner on the way to Broadway shows. After that the bars gradually swell with young people and urban professionals who revel on into the nights. All of this activity is supported by a small army of laborers, some of whom live in the neighborhood while many commute in from elsewhere. In the early morning and again during the post-lunch lull, men wearing red Times Square Alliance jumpsuits wheel grey plastic trash barrels behind them as they sweep up the detritus of the crowds. At midmorning, men with handcarts unload weekly deliveries of essential supplies from double-parked trucks. During peak lunch and dinner times, people employed by the restaurants stand on the sidewalk and implore passers-by to stop and see

the menus. Those are just some of the laborers that can be seen on the street, and there are surely many more behind the facades.



Images from ‘Restaurant Row’

The 400 block is the next to the west, between Ninth and Tenth Avenues. Two Restaurants—a venerable vegetarian place called Zen Palette and a diner called the Galaxy—abut Ninth Avenue like sentinels of commerce on the north and south sides of the street. Beyond them the block turns abruptly residential. Rows of mature Ginkgo trees line both sidewalks. Numerous rental apartment buildings share space with some condos and co-ops. Looking at the facades, it is obvious that some owners are more invested in their property than others.

Images from the 400 Block

At street level, a few small businesses are interspersed. There is a bed and breakfast, a Middle Eastern themed restaurant with hookahs, a hair salon, a shop that sells 'Hell's Kitchen' t-shirts and gay themed workout clothes, and a totally improbable little boutique that only sells exorbitantly priced Japanese dance leotards. Aside from these businesses, other institutions include a nonprofit organization called Hartley House; St. Clement's Episcopal Church, which also hosts a theater[28]; and Ivan Shapiro House, a transitional housing facility for the formerly homeless. Mid-block, in a space straddling Forty-Sixth and Forty-Fifth Streets, there is a small park called Mathews-Palmer Playground. Sometimes groups of children leap and yell on a train-shaped playground ("The Hell's Kitchen Express"). Other times young people play basketball or handball as assorted and sometimes unsavory looking onlookers sit on benches nearby.

[28] This is a way to take advantage of the location near the theater district and maintain revenues, allowing the church to remain operational despite a dwindling congregation.

Facing south towards Mathews-Palmer Park, midway through the 400 Block

Closer to the river the land use gets more eclectic. On the 500 Block, between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, century-old tenements and storage buildings share space with newly built condominiums. This is a block that looks like it is in the middle of deciding what it is going to be. The eastern half of the block feels residential, with trees and walkup apartment buildings. The other half, further west, feels positively light industrial as it is dominated by a large Salvation Army warehouse and an even larger building that used to be a printing plant and now houses the offices of a prominent advertising agency.

The 500 block looking towards the Salvation Army warehouse from east (top) and west (bottom)

Finally, the block between Eleventh Avenue and the West Side Highway that skirts the Hudson is really more like a half block. There are no residential buildings here, only two carwashes, a bagel factory, warehouses of various kinds, and two buildings that used to be warehouses but have now been converted into nightclubs—Pacha and Hudson River Terrace, which sit right across the street from one another. An assortment of vehicles and other things

parked at the curbside hint at what goes on in many of these buildings and what their relationship to the surrounding area might be. There are several trucks for a theater prop storage company as well as a caterer. There are also usually numerous food vending carts—the variety that can be seen selling hotdogs and pretzels on corners throughout Manhattan—waiting to be wheeled to some midtown corner or into the garage here on the block that specializes in storing them.

Images from the half block

At the point where West Forty-Sixth meets the Highway and the Hudson, it can seem very far removed from Midtown. There is a pedestrian bridge that allows people access to the recreational pathways and concrete piers of the Hudson River Park without having to cross traffic. There is also an enormous decommissioned aircraft carrier called the USS Intrepid housed at the pier, which is open to visitors who visit its decks and museum. In some places

along the waterfront little stumps stick out of the water where the ships of bygone days used to dock amidst numerous, now rotten and shipworm eaten wooden piers.

Looking down Forty-Sixth towards Midtown from water's edge

All along these blocks, both in the buildings and on the sidewalks, very different types of people share the regular proximity that is a hallmark of urban life. Anonymous and non-descript, most of those who live, work, and pass through here are not the kind of people who usually show up in social science studies or books about New York. They are neither fabulously wealthy nor troublingly poor, not criminals or public figures nor iconic, exceptional, or particularly hip. Like millions of other people, they mostly seem like regular folks going about their daily lives. And this is precisely why it is important to understand their particular practices and social powers. For, though mostly unremarked upon, their daily persistence makes an imprint on this place, slowly transforming it in ways that are sustained here at the same time that the extended filaments of their lives connect them to and help to produce surprisingly complex geographies.

Somewhere between the concrete and the imagined, between what circulates and what stops, the *lived* spaces of West Forty-Sixth accrue their own unique depth and texture. I want to try and tell the story of some of the people here—the story of their lives and their relationship to this social space.

Up Close

One of the most archetypical qualities of the experience of daily life is that the full implications and scope of even the most momentous occurrences are not always immediately apparent right there as things are happening. As the idioms go, 'it is hard to see the forest through the trees' while 'hindsight is 20/20.' At the same time, there are moments of life that are pervaded by a sense that *something* important or consequential is happening, even if it is not clear what, or that just a few more small changes or a little more time will finally allow us to live life to our full potential. These are, perhaps, inherent aspects of the entrenched, familiar, and finite character of daily life. They also have broader social and political implications.

In the section that follows, I present detailed accounts of the daily lives of seven people who live on West Forty-Sixth Street. The qualities noted above are replicated at this level of magnification. It is not necessarily easy to clearly recognize the broader forces that shape contemporary life or which I have foreshadowed as wanting to call attention to in the social space of West Forty-Sixth Street. As I have already indicated, however, these broader forces are there, no doubt, and a close look at the stuff of daily life provides a starting point for analyzing how this is so in and through the kinds of seemingly ordinary events and activities which are often minimized across the distances of space, time, and abstraction. I will therefore conclude this section by focusing in on some of the broader points of intrigue that resonate across these accounts and open up from them into an analysis of how daily life is implicated in my broader concerns with urban social space.

***

CARMEN has lived within a few blocks of her birthplace on the Middle West Side of Manhattan for her entire life, now more than 50 years. She grew up as a middle child with eight brothers and

sisters in a fifth-floor corner apartment in the back of a walk-up building at Forty-Ninth Street and Tenth Avenue. Carmen's family came to the U.S. from Puerto Rico in 1950 before she was born. She tells me that her dad wanted something better for his wife and two kids, so he packed the family up and moved them to Hell's Kitchen, where other relatives had already found apartments. At one time, she tells me, all the apartments on all of the floors of the building where her family lived were filled with relatives.

The family grew once they arrived in New York. Carmen was born, and things were pretty happy for a while, but when she was eleven, her father died. She is a little vague about exactly how—she just says he was ill—but it is clear that, not surprisingly, his death had a pretty serious impact on the family. Her mother didn't speak English, and as the child who was old enough to be responsible but young enough to remain at home, Carmen ended up doing a lot of translating for the food stamps, welfare, and social services that sustained her family during that time. These were lean years, but there is more than a hint of fondness and even pride in Carmen's voice when she describes what life was like for her family at that time:

> "You ever had bread soup?" she asks me, smiling.
>
> "I don't think so," I say. "Tell me about it."
>
> "Well," she says, "you take a slice of bread and put it flat on a plate. Then you take a little broth and scoop it over the top of the bread." She laughs as she makes a motion like she is pouring liquid out of a ladle. "That's bread soup." She describes other meals: "Sardines with a little tomato sauce over some white rice—that can be tasty, and that's some protein. People wouldn't ever think to eat that today, sardines . . . chopped liver . . . tuna fish mixed with mashed potatoes. Might sound weird but it's pretty good."

Carmen remembers standing in line to get boxes of cheese and cans of meat from the government. She says that even though they were poor, she and her siblings didn't know it at the time. For one thing, she explains, that's how everybody else she knew was living too. For another, her mother worked hard to make sure they had a good life:

> "We had Christmas and New Year's, Mother's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving," she explains. "Everybody always had something for Christmas. My mom always made sure."

Carmen remembers going shopping with her family at the Salvation Army warehouse on the 500 block of Forty-Sixth Street. They called it the "Sally Store":

> "We went down to the Sally Store and we got black and white shoes and dresses," she says. "To us, that was like Macy's. One time, me and my sister got matching dresses in different sizes, just like a regular store. We paid $2.50. Down the street the same dress was $6.00. That's what you did."

Carmen says that she and her siblings spent a lot of time at programs run by different charitable organizations in the city. They spent time in the country with the Fresh Air Fund. They also spent a lot of time at St. Albert's Catholic Church, which sat on the 400 block of West Forty-Seventh until it closed in the mid-1970s. Her mother and father were on the maintenance staff there.

Carmen's mother valued hard work, but she never made her kids focus too much on cooking or cleaning or domestic things because she wanted them to focus on studying so that they could grow up and make something of themselves. Carmen studied as hard as she could, finished high school, and eventually went to beauty school. When she couldn't get a job as a beautician, she took a job at the drycleaners that still operates at the corner of Tenth and Fiftieth. She met a man who was a customer there. She was 19, he was 28 and also from Puerto Rico. They got married in 1974, had their first of two children a year later, and moved down to a small place on the 400 block of West Forty-Sixth so they could have some space of their own.

When they first met, Carmen's husband worked in a factory in the Garment District, just to the southeast of Clinton/Hell's Kitchen. Eventually he left that job for a better paid one polishing cars at the Potamkin Cadillac dealership on Eleventh and Fiftieth. Soon after he started this job he began to get really horrible calluses on his hands and the bottoms of his feet. Carmen

says, “It was almost like the polish that he was standing in and touching all day went into his body and made a hard shell in those places.” He died of cancer, a liver tumor, at age 47. He didn’t want her to worry about it until he couldn’t hide it anymore. He lasted six months after that. She thinks that the polish and the calluses definitely had something to do with the cancer. Carmen was 38 with two kids, and she got by just like her mother before her.

I met Carmen at Hartley House, where she worked every summer as the evening receptionist at the front desk. The person who introduced us said that she was a “tough cookie,” and in a lot of ways this turned out to be true. Unlike most of the other (Whiter? More affluent? More masculine? Younger? Less precarious?) people who agreed to participate in my study, Carmen wouldn’t let me follow her around. She would only talk to me in the lobby of Hartley House and didn’t want to be audio recorded or have her picture taken. In fact, she didn’t really even agree to participate at all until the very last of our meetings with each other.

When I initially asked if she might be interested in participating, Carmen said she didn’t think so, but that she would think about it and I should come back another day to ask again. The very next moment, she started to tell me an enticing snippet of her biography, then stopped herself and told me again to come back another day to get her answer. The same thing happened the next time I came back. And the next. And so it went.

She was always both reluctant to talk to me and bursting with great stories. The reluctance seemed to be a result of doubt—doubts about me, definitely, but also doubts that the things she had to say about the world or about her life would ever really be of interest to anyone else. Somewhere along the line she apparently told her daughters about me, and they were highly apprehensive. As Carmen recalled, “They said, ‘Mom, why are you telling stories to some white

guy at Hartley House? What is he doing talking to you and what's in it for you?'" Though she was casual about it, I think Carmen was letting me know that she shared their misgivings. At another point I asked her to let me record some of her stories, saying I could make her a copy of the recording to hold on to. She looked at me as if I were dim and asked, "Why would I want that? I got those stories right here," as she crossed her hands over her heart. "I will always have them right here. I am just not sure that I want to let them go out into the world . . ."

Eventually we came up with a system that she clearly also viewed as a kind of test to see how well I paid attention. After each of our conversations, I would run and jot down the things she had told me. Then I would type them up and bring them to her the next time, when she would verify whether or not my details were correct. Each time we would add a little more to her story, and she would think a little more about whether she really wanted to participate.

Once, when we were reviewing her comments on a write-up, Carmen told me that her daughters had read it and objected to the way she described herself and her past. "They said, 'You make it sound like you were so poor,'" she said. "'Do you want people to think you were poor?'" Carmen seemed unsure about what to say on this point. She said that she had no shame about growing up the way she did because everybody she knew came up like that. People got by because they stuck together.

> "That's how it was," she said. "Everybody here lived like that back then. That's just what you did. Some of them might try to say they didn't now, but I remember. Don't try to tell me you didn't wait in line for that cheese too!"[29]
>
> "It sounds to me like you may not have had a lot of material things," I said, "but that you had . . ."
>
> "Each other," she finished for me. "That's right. My mom used to say, 'from one egg, everybody eats—de un huevo, comen todo[30],' in Spanish. That was her motto, and that's how we did it. Whatever we have, everybody is going to get some."

[29] Here she was referring to government cheese that her and her family used to get.
[30] I do not speak Spanish and do not know if this is correct, but this is exactly how the phrase was dictated to me.

It is a sentiment that Carmen still applies with her own family and friends, but that she said she thought the people in the neighborhood seemed to have lost touch with over the years.

Carmen's daily routine consists of rhythms that are deeply synchronized with the place where she has lived her whole life. Because she kept me at a distance, it is not as easy to be precise about this as it is with others, but her daily schedule is roughly as follows:

> **Morning:** Wake-up time depends on the time of year. During the school year Carmen works as a teacher's aide and office staffer at a public school a couple blocks away. On those days she wakes up at 6:00 AM. During the summer, when she works evenings at Hartley, she wakes up at 9:00 AM.
>
> The first thing Carmen does when she wakes up is take a bath. In her kitchen. Her apartment is an old tenement that would not have originally included a private bathroom. Bathtubs were routinely plumbed into the kitchen in buildings of this sort. In Carmen's apartment, the tub was right next to the sink. Carmen says that her husband built an enclosure around it, and things have been that way for so many years that she hardly thinks about it now.
>
> After she takes her bath and gets ready, she heads out, either to school or, during the summer, to her mother's. Carmen's mother still lives in the same apartment that the family grew up in. Over the years, her mother also acquired the apartment next door. Thanks to rent control, the monthly rent for both was $159.36. These days the roles are reversed, and Carmen is the caretaker. Her mother has Alzheimer's, and Carmen spends most of her free time looking after her; one trying to do justice to the memories that the other is steadily losing. She says she feels her mom deserves to be taken care of now, because she worked so hard to take care of them when they were growing up. "It's only fair. That's how it's supposed to be."
>
> **Afternoon:** During the school year, Carmen will go to her mother's after work to prepare dinner. In general, Carmen tries to take meals at work or at her mom's. I asked her what she eats once, and she said, "Salads mostly. When you have diabetes you can't eat too much good stuff."
>
> If it is summer and she is working at Hartley, her shift does not start until the afternoon—a busy time when children at the summer day camp get picked up by their parents and many people come in and out of the building for English as a second language classes and other social services. On the days she works at Hartley she will go to her mom's in the morning, and to work later in the day.

Evening: During the school year, Carmen's evenings are spent at her mother's. During the summer, her evening shifts at Hartley double as some of her most cherished social time. Eventually I learned that was best to talk with her at around 7:00 PM, after the public and most of the staff at Hartley have gone home. Between six and nine, Carmen sits and talks with other women who have deep connections to the neighborhood in their own right—a Hartley staff cleaning women with two kids in the childcare program here, an elderly woman who has kids that Carmen went to school with, and a woman who is a friend from church. They have a great time together, laughing and telling stories and even singing songs on occasion. They look at magazines or catalogues or the New York Post, and they talk about the pictures or the most sensational stories, all in Spanish. "We sit around like old hens and talk about men and church and our kids," Carmen says. It is hard to characterize the atmosphere in the lobby here when these women are the only ones left in the building. It is cozy, joyful, and boisterous. The ceilings are low, the couches are soft, and the space is small in a way that allows their presence to completely fill the room. These women have known each other for years, and in a couple of cases for generations. Carmen says, "I like it here with them. They stay 'til the end [9:00 PM when she locks up] because they don't have anything else to do."

Weekends: On the weekend Carmen takes care of her mother and occasionally visits with siblings. Mostly they come to her mom's place from where they live in Brooklyn and the Bronx. Every Sunday after church, she goes to Western Beef—a low-cost super market chain store way up on 62nd Street—and buys whatever is on sale for both herself and her mother.

I once asked Carmen if she ever left the West Side. She said:

"I've been to Puerto Rico, uptown, to the Bronx, and down to Brooklyn, but there is no place like home on Forty-Sixth Street. Life on Forty-Sixth has been great for me. I settled down, had my kids, and I'm growing old here, just like my mom who is still growing older up on Forty-Ninth . . . I wouldn't trade this here, my life here, for anything. Maybe that sounds silly, but I mean it. I wouldn't trade it for nothin'."

She once thought about moving to a public housing project up on 51st, but in the end she didn't even want to go that far. She would never even think about leaving the neighborhood now. "Where else am I going to go?"

When I told Carmen that my study was about everyday life, she said she thought she wouldn't make a very good participant: "I come to work, I take care of my mother, and I go home and lock the door," she said. "I am kind of a private person I guess." I told her that her

stories and experiences might be private, but that they are filled with details and implicit questions that the public might benefit from knowing and having to confront. I am not sure I ever convinced her of the value of her stories.

She finally signed the consent form at the very end of summer. After holding out for months, she barely even read it. She just giggled, and then made me swear that I would share the money if I made a million dollars off of a book about the neighborhood. I asked her one more time if she would let me take a picture of her. She said, "Hmmm . . . no, not today." She said she didn't want people from the neighborhood to see her and ask what she thought she was doing talking to a person like me.

That night I stuck around until lock up. As we walked out of the building—Carmen and her friends and me—they were dancing and singing and joking that maybe they should make a West Side Story 2. Carmen gave me a hug and said, "Take it easy sweetie. Glad you are interested in my old stories."

***

DARRICK moved to the 400 block of West Forty-Sixth Street in August of 2001. He typifies one kind of new comer to the Middle West Side. He is a gay professional in his late thirties. He is socially active in ways that thoroughly blur the boundaries between work and life. He also has a distinct structure for the kind of life he wants to live and a corresponding sense of the kind of place he wants to live it.

Darrick grew up and went to college in Connecticut. He describes his personality as "Sometimes intense. Demanding. Attempts to be funny; usually fails." He works as a consultant for a large international insurance company where his job involves talking to the human resources departments of different employers and helping them to figure out what kinds of

coverage best fit their organizational needs. When he started out in the business, he had to work his way through the ranks:

> "In 1993," he says, referring to the year he graduated from college "the jobs were like they are now . . . Well maybe not *this* bad!" We both laugh, maybe a little too heartily, at that. "So I got a crappy job working at a second tier insurance company, and then ultimately I got a good job."

His first "good job" was in central New Jersey, and he worked his way up to New York City by 1998. When it came time to move to New York City, he says the Middle West Side was an obvious choice:

> "It was centrally located to where my office was at the time . . . I was absolutely certain that I wanted to live in Hell's Kitchen. The perception was that the apartment buildings on the East Side, around Murray Hill were costly in a way that I didn't find to be a necessary expense. They were high-rises. The perception that I had in Hell's Kitchen was that because it is quite visible between Fifty-Seventh and Forty-Second Streets that the buildings are all low-rise, it looked like an affordable place to live."

So he moved into a one-bedroom apartment in a rent-stabilized building on West Forty-Sixth, and made himself at home.

Darrick, looking relaxed and sporting a camera case after weekend brunch on the Lower East Side (P)

Before he agreed to put his life under examination in my study, I got to know Darrick at West Forty-Sixth Street Block Association meetings. He served on the Block Association as president for a time, and generally had a reputation as a civically responsible guy. At the time we met, he was also very involved in organizing an LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) professional network within his company. He founded this network from scratch in an effort to change the professional culture there and make it a more welcoming place, which he viewed as being good for business and human rights at the same time. Pragmatic with a tinge of idealism—that is Darrick. When I officially asked him to participate in my study, it's possible

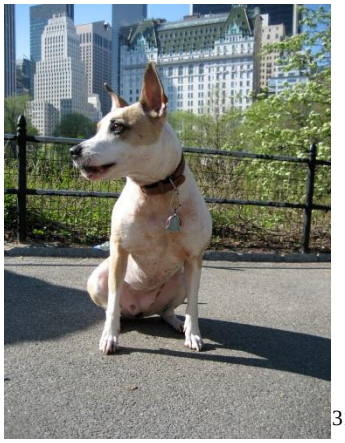
that he said yes more out of a sense of responsibility than out of genuine interest. Not that I minded.

Darrick's daily life is a portrait of young, middle class urban professionalism. When it came time to follow him around over the course of his daily routine, he sent me a sampling from his "Outlook" schedule and said it would show me more-or less all there is to know. I was skeptical about this, but it turns out he was pretty much right.

Darrick's daily schedule is roughly as follows:

7:00 AM: The first thing Darrick does when he wakes-up is check his email. Both work and personal correspondence ultimately go to the same place. After that he will spend a half hour to an hour looking at Facebook to see pictures, get updates, and generally keep apprised of things that are going on in his various social networks. Once he is done doing this he will spend whatever time is necessary—and not more—on personal hygiene and getting presentable for his day.

9:00 AM: Darrick has a dog named Pebbles.

 [31]

Like Darrick, Pebbles seems to have an upstanding reputation in the neighborhood. Before leaving for work, Darrick takes Pebbles for a quick walk. Usually this is just four right turns down the sidewalk around the block, with Pebbles off the lead but keeping close. Being a dog owner in Manhattan apparently brings a different level of sociality to the typically anonymous sidewalk culture. I ask Darrick about this:

> "Do you ever do that thing that happens were you are walking and your dog starts being friendly with another dog and you suddenly find yourself talking with

[31] (P)

someone through the dogs?" I ask. "Are there any people whose dogs you know the name of, but you don't know their name?"

"Oh, that is really what it is," He says. "Yeah. I know the dog's name, so I will always say hello to the dog first and then, maybe, talk to the person."

Darrick is usually gone for long stretches once he leaves for work, so he has an arrangement with a dog walker to come and let Pebbles out in the middle of the day for $10 a day. He says that if he wanted to pay for it he could have a dog walker "on retainer" to come as many times as he needed, but that it would be a lot more expensive.

9:15 AM: Darrick's office building is on the Avenue of the Americas, otherwise known as Sixth, only a few blocks east of home. On nice days he will ride his bike there and on rainy days he walks with a large umbrella. He has worked out a regular route that he follows, and he listens to his iPod while he is on the move. Times Square—a spectacle that millions of people travel to New York to see—sits between his home and his office, and like most people who live nearby Darrick systematically avoids it.

Somewhere en route to work, Darrick will typically pick up breakfast. Here too he has a routine with a small number of set options. One of his favorites is the 'Healthy Wrap' from the Café Europa right across from his office. That's scrambled egg whites with spinach, tomato and onion, and Swiss cheese wrapped in a whole-wheat tortilla. I once accompanied Darrick as he ordered this, and all he had to do was nod to one of the men who worked there, who then made him the usual on sight. Darrick said he knew the guy's name at one point, but that he has since forgotten it.

9:30 AM – 6:00 PM: Darrick's working day can vary, but not a huge amount. Sometimes he makes visits to different clients to discuss their needs. Other times he makes phone calls, talks contracts, goes to trainings, or attends meetings at the office.

6:30 PM-??: The structured nature of Darrick's life continues when the working day is over. Overlaps between work and play also become apparent. For one thing, his social calendar is very full. Describing his night-life, Darrick says:

"I have something going on literally every night of the week. I will have drinks together with friends maybe one night. Some other night maybe it is an open bar somewhere for some reception. . . another night of the week it might be a community meeting, maybe the block association or a community campaign, or maybe something related to community partnerships at work. At least one night a week will be fitness related, so in the summer, maybe a bike ride and in the colder months maybe going to a gym to exercise."

When he talks about his social life, it is clear that he views it as equal parts recreation and purposeful networking.

Darrick also tries to date twice a week. In fact, he schedules dates into his PDA much like meetings—often double-booking two at the same time in case one cancels or doesn't go well. He says he always has someone new "in the pipeline," and that dating works in a cycle where new dates are given dinner priority before eventually being downgraded to the weekend "brunch circuit."

It is unclear when exactly Darrick gets home and sleeps. One morning I join him as he walks Pebbles and goes to work. I ask him how late he stayed at a party he had been to the night before:

> "Oh, until about 1:00 AM," He says. "Then I rode my bike home from there. Then I stopped at the Ritz [a bar on West Forty-Sixth]. Then I stopped at Posh [A bar on West Fifty-First].
>
> "Is the Ritz bumpin' at 1:00 AM on a Tuesday?" I ask.
>
> "It is usually not too bad, but it was a little quiet . . . But Posh was packed," he says.
>
> I get the sense that he likes a crowd more than a quiet nightcap.
>
> "So is it typical for you to bust out like that on a work night?" I ask.
>
> "At least twice a week."
>
> "Really?"
>
> "Oh yeah."
>
> "That is some stamina man," I say. "I couldn't do that. But, you know, I am from the Midwest, where we like to go to bed at sunset and wake up with the chickens."
>
> "Well, I wish I could get on that schedule," he says. "Maybe not sunset though. That is a stretch."

Darrick out on the town with ??? (P)

Weekends: Darrick's weekend schedule can vary somewhat, but it generally fits into one of two patterns.

Most of the time weekend activities extend what happens on weeknights after work. Darrick makes his way around the New York City brunch circuit, takes time for fitness, and then spends the evenings hopping from social situation to social situation just as he would on a weeknight. During this type of weekend, the only real guaranteed "down time" comes when Darrick watches *60 Minutes* every Sunday night. He says he might also watch something from Netflix every now and again, just to unwind.

The alternative weekend happens twelve times a year, when Darrick goes to a time-share on Fire Island[32] in a community called The Pines. He treats this as his vacation time, and the discipline of the planner is set aside during his time there:

> "There is really nothing scheduled to do there," He says. "Go to the beach, walk to the harbor, have a Bloody Mary . . . in the afternoon there is happy hour."
>
> "And those things don't go in the planner?" I ask.
>
> "No, I don't put that in the planner."
>
> "Is that because you feel like it would be doing some kind of violence to the idea of vacation and relaxation?"
>
> "It really would!"

[32] A very narrow barrier island, roughly thirty miles long, off of the south shore of Long Island. It has also long been known as a gay enclave.

Despite the absence of the planner, however, there is still a certain sense of discipline even here. It is as if the transition out of the space of Manhattan and into the space of The Pines is the thing that officially marks vacation time, but the two are always still entangled:

> "Well, there is not actually that much to do out there." Darrick explains. "There are no cars, no bikes. Just the beach. And if the weather is bad . . . and you don't have internet access, it can be a little brutal. Very few of the houses have TV's because we just don't bother. We are just not watching TV there."
>
> "Yeah, I could see that," I said. "So do you feel like it is almost like forced relaxation?
>
> "Yeah."
>
> "That is good, I guess. So do you leave the Blackberry at home?"
>
> "No, because my personal life and my professional life are totally intertwined. So when I put you on the calendar in my office yesterday, it syncs up to Plaxo, and then it dumps it into my Mac. So I need that to keep track of my calendar . . ."
>
> "Ok. Has it always been like that? Work-life. No boundaries?
>
> "Yeah. Right . . ."

Overall, the apparent logic of Darrick's daily life felt a little too clean, as if there were dimensions that I must be missing. But as far as I could deduce, his daily life really has been stripped down to be as efficient and compact as possible. One day when I met him over lunch in his office I put this to him:

> "It seems like you try to schedule your time very closely." I said, "So I am curious to sort of know how that works in your experience of the context of the city and of your experience of life in general."
>
> "Well," he said, "I always try to minimize transitions—transportation, trips, times in between things—as much as possible. For example, if there is a meeting in a particular place or I am going to a certain restaurant, I will try to schedule everything else I am doing at that time close to the same area. That way I can minimize cab fare, subway fare, and spend less time in transit. I can just get to what I am doing quicker. So that is an example of how location works in my schedule."
>
> "You try to compress everything?"

> "Right. And that has been more difficult to do over the last two years with these new professional networks I have been helping to build. In the past, I would just stick to my own neighborhood, to Midtown West. I wasn't really using the rest of the city. But I now go to the Village and the East Village and other neighborhoods in lower Manhattan. I rarely go any place outside of Manhattan, unless it is to The Pines."
>
> "What's out there anyway, right!?"
>
> "Suburbia!" he says.

We both have to laugh at that. It reminds me of that famous *New Yorker* cover that shows a New Yorker's map of the world. In the map, Manhattan is huge and every place else in the world is just a blip. Maybe it is true that New Yorkers don't always see their elsewheres very clearly. With Darrick I can kind of understand why. He has made a deliberate effort to minimize any activities that would typically be recognized as part of social reproduction. He almost never eats at home, which means he almost never buys groceries. He pays to have has his laundry done and delivered.

When we sat down to review my perceptions of Darrick's life, we joked that a lot of the things that people think of as being part of "everyday life", he just pays somebody else to do for him. That is a distinctive kind of privilege. We struggled to find some part of his daily life—besides walking Pebbles, going to work, and going to Block Association meetings and the like—that it might be appropriate for me to follow him around for. My presence when he was networking or dating would be riddled with privacy issues, not to mention totally awkward. I couldn't get in to his gym. So what else was there?

> "The thing is," I say, "what I have been doing is following people around on their daily routines. And a lot of people also have slow, habitual things that they do to reload and refresh that I can observe. But you have somehow managed to cut out most of those things."
>
> He laughs.

"Almost scientifically," I continue. "To the point that the things that are necessary to maintain and sustain Darrick . . ." I trail off.

"Yeah?" he says.

". . . are accomplished as quickly and automatically as possible," I continue. "Right?"

"Yeah," he says in a contemplative tone. "You are right."

Interestingly enough, shortly after I wrapped up my time with Darrick, he thoroughly junked his finely tuned routine. First, he quit drinking. He said he felt like his late nights were starting to interfere with his potential as a professional and as a human being, so he stopped. Then, as if to *really* shake things up, he transferred to Hong Kong in the summer of 2010. The last time I was in touch with him was a year later, to confirm the accuracy of our transcripts. He said he was afraid to look at them. I couldn't tell if this was because he thought they might make him nostalgic for the life he left behind, or because he was afraid he might not like the person that he saw in it. He said that making a new life in Hong Kong was a challenge, but that he was growing with it.

I might have thought Darrick was a rigid "organization man"—someone who could very comfortably keep the same set routine for the next couple decades, stick to safe professional and civic territory, and then retire to a different but somewhat similar schedule that was also well worked out in advance. I once asked Darrick how, with everything so tightly scripted and scheduled, newness ever came into his life. That question puzzled him, and he thought about it for a moment with a furrowed brow. Then he said that he thought that the routine *was* the thing that allowed newness to happen. I interpret this to mean that he felt the structure of daily routine allowed him to incrementally accomplish the life he wanted for himself and selectively decide which new things he wanted to allow into it. In the end, he proved more than willing to allow

some fairly dramatic change in exchange for a shot at what he viewed as better future. I admit, I hadn't thought he had it in him. He surprised me and reminded me not to underestimate the transformative power of aspiration.

***

FRANC, short for Francisco, lived on West Forty-Sixth Street for exactly one month in the summer of 2010. Before that he had lived in an apartment one block away on Forty-Fifth. When his roommate there needed to move, he found the place on Forty-Sixth on Craigslist—a bedroom of a shared apartment in a building right by the playground on the 400 block. He rented it for $1100 a month. It became clear pretty quickly that this arrangement wasn't going to work out. The new roommate, the guy with the actual lease, was there all the time, as was his roommate's boyfriend, and they mostly just sat around smoking pot in the living room. When I first met Franc at a neighborhood event, he was there because it gave him an excuse to get out. He was also actively looking for a different apartment. It turned out that he had been through this kind of thing many times before.

Franc describes himself as follows:

> "A gay Hispanic man, mid 40's. Extraverted. I love to watch sports. I like to work out. I like to cook, sometimes. I am outgoing and I meet people very easily. I like to talk to people."

He was born in El Paso Texas, but grew up on the west coast and went to high school in a small town in southern Oregon. He got a degree in business from the University of Oregon, and is still a huge Oregon Ducks football fan to this day. After college he worked in Seattle for a couple of years, and then moved to New York City in the mid-1990s. Once there he found work as an accounts executive in the advertising business, eventually becoming a senior director at a reputable firm with some big clients.

If Franc's story starts off with the familiar plot of young person coming to the city, going professional, living free, and making good, it gets more complicated from there. Due to a tricky combination of circumstances, Franc has been navigating a fine line between constantly moving and being stuck in place for several years now. In July of 2005 he was run over while crossing a street in Chelsea. Franc didn't mention this crucial part of his biography to me until halfway through our second meeting. It took me by surprise when he told me the details:

"You got hit by a car?" I said, "What happened?"

"Actually it was a tow truck." He said. "A ten ton tow truck. I had over a hundred broken bones in my body and twelve staples in the back of my head."

"Wow . . ." I said, stunned.

"I had a million operations. Everything was in a cast except my left arm. So it was pretty bad. Very brutal. And I was inches from being quadriplegic or dead because if they just would have hit me at a different angle, they explained to me, it would have just been forget about it."

"Wow . . ."

"Yeah. It's been a long, long ride. And the physical part was one thing, but then the mental stuff starts coming in. They explained to me that post-traumatic stress disorder is common, like people who go to Iraq, but the difference is that they know that there is a possibility that they might be injured instead of out of nowhere like that. I was blindsided. I was just going to go visit a friend and then the next thing I know I was waking up from a coma at the hospital . . ."

"Yeah . . . ?"

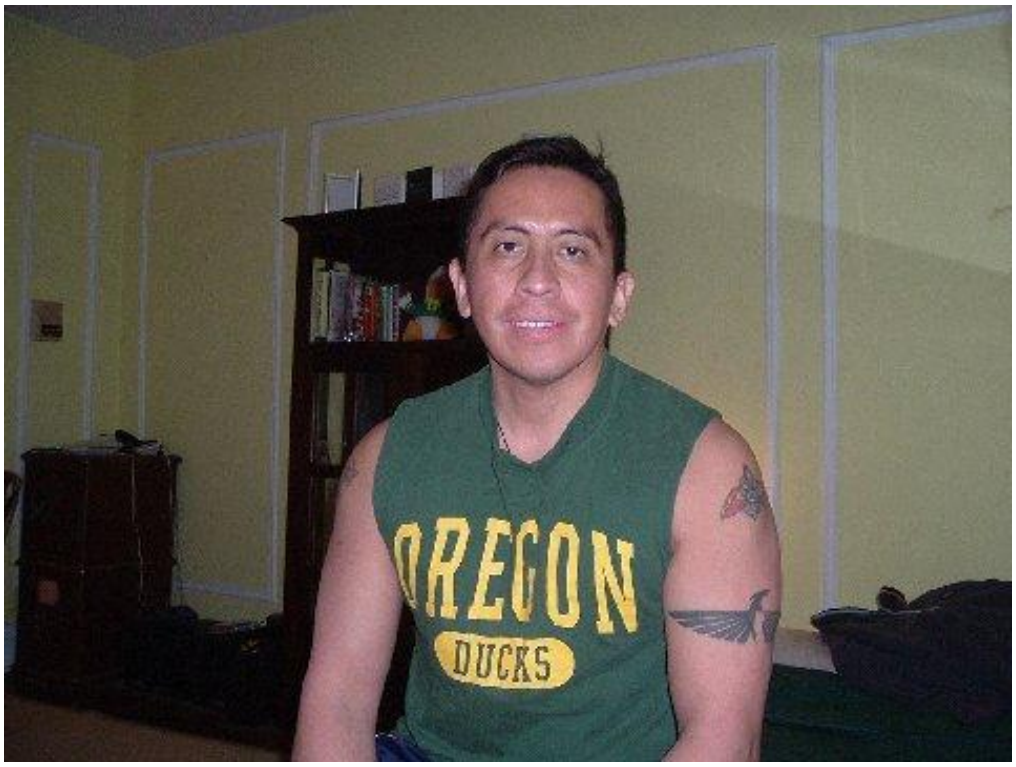
"So that really takes a long time. And I have a great therapist, so that's a good thing. Good therapist and good doctor. But yeah, I was just crossing the street. And I am not one of those people that jump to cross the street. I always told myself, why would anybody be in so big of a hurry that they put their lives in danger? You know? In jeopardy just to cross the street?"

"Right, I am with you on that one. . ."

"You know, I look three times, and I still got hit."

After he said this, Franc let out a little laugh that I soon noticed he often does when he is making light of something painful.

It has taken five years and hundreds of surgeries to rebuild different parts of Franc's body piece by piece. Physically, he only has one part left to rebuild—the heel of his left foot. Mentally and emotionally, he feels like he still has a long road ahead.



Franc with his signature Ducks T-shirt (P)

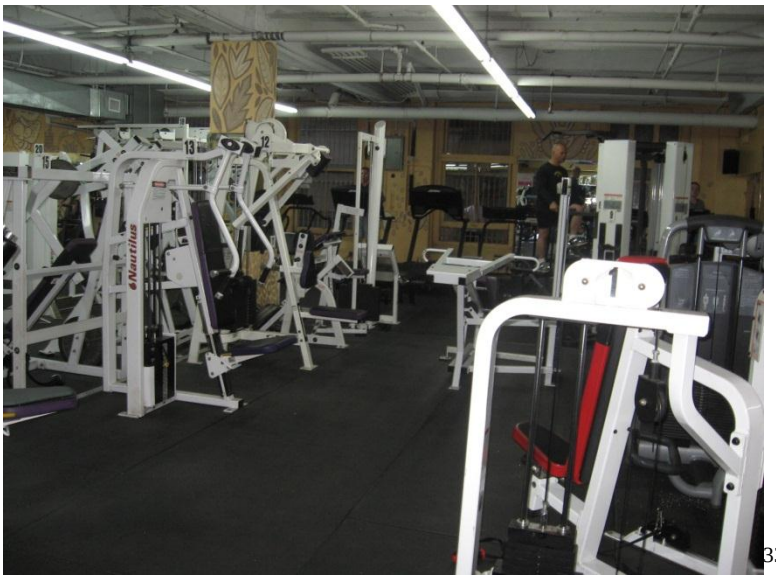
Franc has not been employed since the accident and has been living off of savings and disability. While his daily life is not organized around a job, it is definitely organized and he definitely does work—just in a different way towards different ends than most people. Franc's schedule varies somewhat from day to day as he has no particular clock to punch, but it is roughly as follows:

> **Early Morning:** Franc wakes up relatively early—before 8AM. Most mornings he makes himself a cup of instant coffee, checks email, catches up on Facebook, and reads newspapers online. He also keeps up on advertising trade publications so that he is not

totally out of touch if and when he is ready to get a job again. Franc sometimes turns on New York 1—a cable channel that shows New York City news and related programing, twenty-four hours a day—while he is reading these other things, just to see if anything is going on. "I try to keep my mind as busy as possible," he says.

Franc says he has never been a particularly big eater, but that lately he has really been trying to watch what he eats. He tells me that his blood pressure has been high and that he has had to work harder to stay trim. He says this is because the move to the new place was stressful and that, since his roommate and the boyfriend are constantly around, he has been eating more fast food rather than cooking and eating at home. For breakfast, he is trying to stick to yogurt and fruit. When he needs something more substantial, he goes to the Galaxy Diner for some eggs.

Mid-morning: Franc likes to get to the gym by 10AM.



[33]

He says he was in good physical shape before the accident and that the doctors said this definitely helped him with his recovery. These days he can't work out too hard, since he can't put much pressure on his heel. He lifts weights, rides a stationary bike, and does the Stairmaster.

After he leaves the gym, Franc usually goes and spends about an hour at the Columbus Branch of the New York City public library on Tenth Avenue near Fiftieth Street. There he can print ten pages a day for free and check out books at no charge, both of which he says are important resources for him. He also likes it because it is quiet and it helps him get into a contemplative mood.

Afternoon: By mid-day, Franc is usually ready to do some form of meditation—not sitting in the lotus position and chanting a mantra or anything like that, but just finding a

[33] (T)

quiet place and reflecting on his life, his goals, and his future. For this purpose, he prefers church sanctuaries. Franc says he is not religious, but that he is very spiritual. Though there are two churches on West Forty-Sixth, Franc has not been able to get inside either of them because both double as theaters during the week and are not open to the public. Some of my time with Franc is spent scouting out different churches, little oases of calm amidst the constant din of Midtown.

Besides sitting inside churches, when the weather is nice Franc also spends a lot of time in public parks—in Mathews-Palmer Playground right by his apartment, or in a playground called Hell's Kitchen Park a couple of blocks up 10th Avenue. He likes to sit in the parks and read, listen to music, or occasionally write. On the way he might pick up something light to eat at his favorite deli on Ninth Avenue.

Franc is currently working on several writing projects. He does a lot of journaling. He is also trying to write a loosely autobiographical book about his own life called "The Delivery Boy," which is a title he thought of at a point where he was sick of being stereotyped. Indeed, one of the funny things about Franc is that while he is a well-educated, sensitive, and very articulate person, he is often mistaken for either a tough or a low-skill laborer because of his appearance. On more than one occasion, he told me, back when he was working in office buildings downtown, he tried to run into the office wearing gym clothes and was assumed to be a delivery person and treated harshly by the very same security people that never questioned him when he was wearing a suit and tie.

Who is this suspicious man, and what is his sinister reason for sitting in the playground in the middle of the day?

As we sit in the playground, I do have to laugh a little, because he does look like the kind of guy that people would be wary of if their children were playing nearby. He says he knows that people view him this way and that for a while it bugged him, but then he

realized he could mess with them and get them to leave him alone by giving them what he calls his "look."

Evening: As he would be the first to admit, Franc is not a solitary person by nature. In fact, throughout his routine I notice that many of the places where he chooses to buy things—his favorite deli, his barber shop, his favorite bars—are places where the people are especially friendly and where he feels some sense of belonging. By late afternoon, he is very ready for some extended social contact. When happy hour starts, he heads to one of several local bars. This is main place where he meets new people and catches up with friends whom he is disciplined about not contacting during their working days. During the weekend, when his friends are not at work, he will spend more time at the bar and less time by himself. Franc views the bar as a place to be social, and the fact that alcohol is served there seems purely ancillary to him. Even when he is at the bar for several hours, he will only have one or two drinks.

Franc usually eats diner around 8PM. He likes to cook when possible, or if not he might get take-out from someplace where the food is not too greasy. He is not a night owl, and after dinner he will often spend more time at home writing or looking things up on the computer. He also likes to do water colors, a skill he learned when he was trying to rehab his shattered right wrist after the accident.

Twice a month Franc has outpatient surgery on his ankle. He took detailed photographs of the whole experience. As I look at a picture he took of himself while waiting for the doctor to come in he explains:

"I am always a little nervous, I do it every two weeks, but you never know. I could get an infection or a setback or something like that."

"What are they doing to the foot?" I ask.

"You will see it in a minute," he says. "Here. This is sort of gross, but this is my foot"

He shows me a picture of his naked left foot, held out above a sterile looking linoleum floor. On the top of his foot, at the point where the leg bones meet the ankle there is a deep, jagged white scar, maybe five inches long. Below this his heel looks irregular, diminished, and covered with a patchwork of pink, white, and bluish skin.

"This is the heel that they are still working on," he explains. Basically it is tending a skin graft and a stem cell that is growing. Right now, I think I have three-quarters of my heel back, which is better than no heel, but it has taken five years.

"So the stem cell is for what? Bone?"

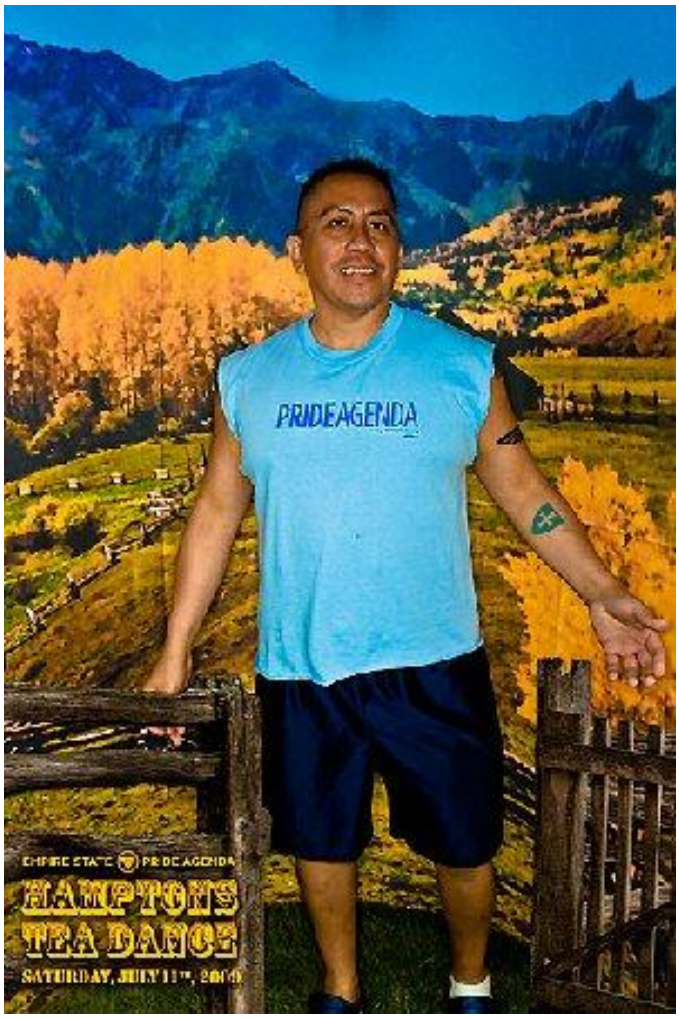
"Skin. When I go in there they cut in and look at it to make sure it is growing all right, and they sort of shave it a little bit. It can be kind of painful."

Reflecting before foot surgery (T)

In hindsight, I imagine that Franc hesitated to tell me about the accident right away because he didn't want this to be the only thing that defined him. He seems to view the accident as one in a series of life events that he often refers to as his "journey". The story of the journey is about a lot more than the accident.

Franc says he wasn't really gay—by which he means that he never acted on being gay—until well after he moved to New York City. Though he had a girlfriend at the time, he says he was jogging in Central Park one day, met a man, was scared to death but went out to drinks with him, and that it just felt right after that. At the same time, he kept this from his family because he was close to them and he was worried that they would not approve.

Several years later, a series of things happened in succession. His father dropped dead one day while out for a walk. His mother became a Jehovah's Witness, and subsequently so did most of his nine siblings. When they found out he was gay most of his family cut off all contact with him. When the accident happened shortly thereafter, nobody in his family even came to visit him and see if he was alright. By the time I met him, he was still in touch with one sibling whom he called his "text" sister because that was the only way they communicated, but even that was becoming less frequent.



Franc in front of a backdrop at a gay pride fundraiser that he volunteered for in the Hamptons. He framed a copy of this picture and sent it to his mother. (P)

The story of Franc's "journey" is roughly paralleled in his tattoos. The chili pepper on his left shoulder was the first. He got that to commemorate his father, whom he always felt a special connection with. Among other things, they both loved spicy food. Next he got the coat of arms of his father's family. Then, to be fair, he got a Fleur de Li for his mother, who is part French. After his family shunned him, he got a Mexican Phoenix. "I guess this was sort of prescient," he says. "I got that before the accident, because I felt like I had been through a lot in my life already before that!" After the accident he got a Mexican double cross to signify a second life. Most recently he got several symbolizing his relationship to the University of Oregon.

As his journey has been inscribed on his body in multiple ways, Franc has also been striving to record it in other forms. He is a big fan of a National Public Radio segment called "This I Believe," which features people reading short statements about the core values and beliefs that they hold most dear. Franc has been working on a writing statement of his own beliefs for many years, amending, rewriting, and re-working it with each turn of events. What is interesting about this is that, as in his life, the end product no longer seems as important to him as the process of trying to get there. We talked about this one day as we walked around looking for new churches to haunt:

> "So," I asked him, "Would you say that your goal has been more to work on self-improvement and less to get yourself . . . I mean there are a couple ways you could think about it. You could be getting yourself in shape order to get ready to go back to work, but it sounds like you don't think about it like that. It sounds like you are working to work on you."
>
> "Yeah," he said. "I mean, I think when I first got here . . . and I didn't know how bad it was at that time . . . but at first it was, 'How quickly can I get back to work?' Now it is like, I do want to get in shape, but mentally, physically, emotionally, psychologically--that is the kind of shape I want to get into."
>
> "Yeah," I said, letting this soak in.

> "And then, maybe," he said, "once I do that I can start thinking about what I want to do next."

For Franc, daily routine is what holds things together, staves off chaos, and allows the possibility of a future.

***

RACHEL and HARMONY live in a studio apartment on the second floor of a building on Restaurant Row. They are a recently married couple, both in their late twenties. They moved to New York City from North Carolina not too long ago, and in some ways they exemplify another growing segment of the population on West Forty-Sixth: young people who are still determining career paths and want to be close to the arts of the theater district and the culture of Manhattan.

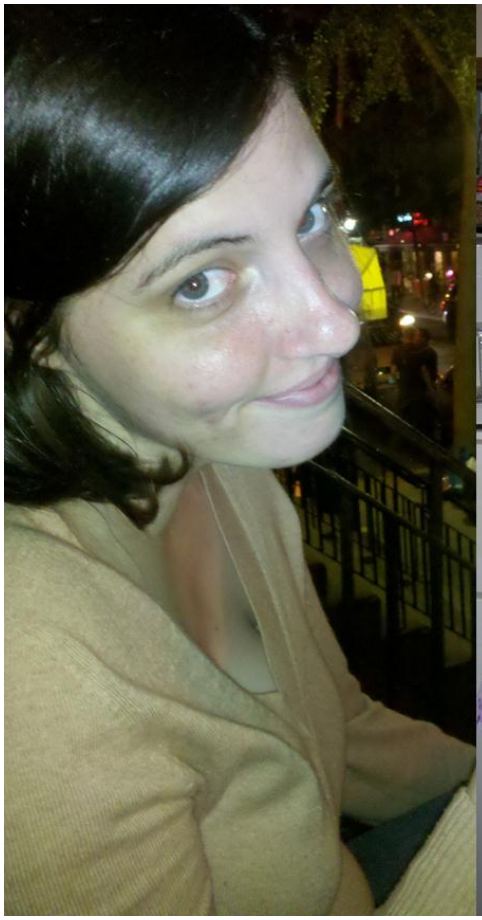
Harmony is an aspiring jazz singer who has performed in a few off-Broadway shows and holds occasional day jobs as a personal assistant to various executives in Midtown. She moved to New York in 2006, without Rachel. Though they were committed to each other at the time, Rachel was finishing up a Master's Degree in Divinity at Duke University. Harmony moved ahead to jump-start her career, with the understanding that Rachel would visit when she could and move up permanently when done with school. Harmony originally chose the West Side as a place to live because it was just a short walk or cab ride from the reputable jazz clubs where she often went to perform. She just happened to find an apartment she could afford on West Forty-Sixth. Rachel moved up in June of 2008, and they were married shortly thereafter.

They had thought they might find a bigger apartment once Rachel moved up and found work. They owned a house back in Raleigh, and they wanted sell it and move on up. Rachel soon got a job as a chemistry teacher at a well-known public high school. It is a job that she says she performs well but grudgingly because, though she has a bachelor's degree in chemistry, she has no teaching degree and would much rather be a priest. Meanwhile the place back in North

Carolina languished in the post-crisis housing market, so they ended up renting it out and staying put.

I first met Harmony and Rachel in the basement of St. Clement's Episcopal Church before a Sunday service that I was observing. They came over and struck up a conversation with me, curious and excited to see another youngish person who they presumed was thinking of joining a decidedly aged congregation. Though they were definitely a little disappointed when I told them I why I was really there, they very graciously hosted me at the service that day and answered my questions. Shortly after that, I contacted them about participating in the study. After a delay of several weeks, Rachel wrote back and said:

> "Harmony and I talked about it. We think we are totally interesting and should be included in your study."




Rachel on the front stoop : Harmony in the Kitchen (P)

Harmony and Rachel's daily lives seemed be constantly shifting, gradually but surely, between different patterns throughout the time that I met them. Some of this was by design, some of it was not. They both lead somewhat different lives, and this may have had something to do with it. An approximation of their routine(s) for most of the time I observed them would be as follows:

> **5:50 AM:** Rachel's alarms—she has three—begin to go off. She hits snooze and repeats until . . .
>
> **6:35 AM:** Rachel gets out of bed. Each day at this moment she thinks to herself, "Tomorrow I am going to get up on time!" She proceeds to brush her teeth, put on some clothes, and comb her hair. While she is doing this, Harmony may get up to assist her if there is anything in particular that she needs. Mostly however, Harmony just stays out of the way, allowing Rachel to move fast enough to be out the door at . . .
>
> **6:45 AM:** Rachel leaves the apartment. Harmony goes back to sleep.

Rachel walks half a block over to Ninth Avenue to pick up breakfast—maybe an egg sandwhich or just a boiled egg—at either a deli called "Smilers" or at a little market they simply call "the corner store" which may or may not have an official name.

From there Rachel heads to the subway and proceeds to commute uptown via some combination of three different trains and transfers, depending on the timing and which train shows up at the station first. Since she is chronically just at the edge of late, she has this down to a science.

Once on the train, Rachel may go over her lessons for the day (primarily in her head), eat breakfast, or take a nap depending on how she is feeling. Though she rarely interacts with them in any substantial way, she is also acutely aware of the other people on the train. She explains this to me one morning as I join her for her commute:

> "I can tell how early or late I am based on who is on the train with me and the people that I see every day," she says.
>
> "Oh yeah?" I say.
>
> "There are teachers and students, and then there are a lot of guys in work boots"
>
> "So who is the early crowd and who is the late crowd?"
>
> "There are certain teachers that are the late crowd. And there are some students who I had last year that were always late, and if I am on the same train as them I am like 'Uh-oh . . .'"
>
> We laugh, and I ask, "Do you look at each other in recognition?"
>
> "No," she answers in a tone that suggests doing so would mean breaking some kind of unspoken taboo.

7:40 AM is Rachel's goal time for getting to work. Once she gets off the the train, she walks several blocks to her school. As she gets closer she joins a steady stream of students. Once inside the building, they are all guided by the schedule of the bell.

Rachel's desk at school (T)

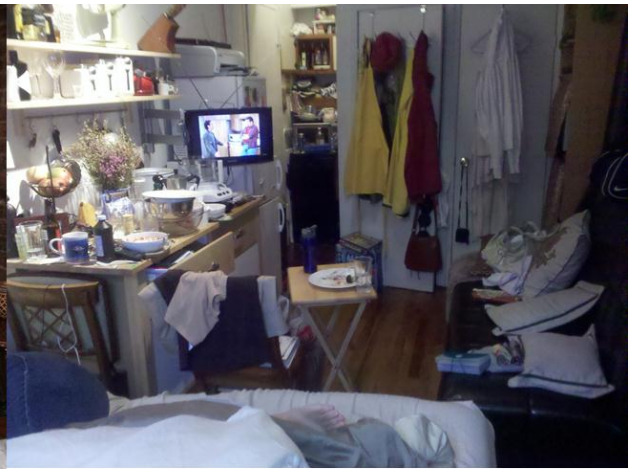
Sometime between 7:00 and 8:00 AM Harmony will get out of bed. At least, that is, if she doesn't have a day job to get to or a performance she has given the night before. Shortly before we met, Harmony had lost her job as a personal assistant to the CEO of a major media venture when the business went under. Since then she has found temporary office work, off and on. Mostly, however, she has taken the opportunity to try and get her singing career on track.

The inventory of things that any would-be performer has to do to make an impression in New York City is somewhat overwhelming. Aside from auditioning and good old fashioned networking, there are head-shots to be taken and demos to be recorded for promotional kits; color schemes, fonts, and and stock wieghts to be chosen for the materials in those kits; and websites to be constructed. Most mornings, Harmony spends working on these things—a process which has understandably taken her a long time, especially on a limited budget. She will also keep an eye out for employment, though she is reluctant to give up her time unless the opportunity is right.

By the afternoon, Harmony usually transitions to another activity. The cycle of working off and on has been loosely conneceted to physical therapy for hip and back alignment issues. When she is working, she can afford it. When she is staying at home she has some tools to help her do some rehabilitation for herself.

During the day Harmony will sometimes also clean the apartment, all four-hundred square feet of it. The apartment consists of a tiny little kitchen, a tiny little bathroom with a half bathtub, and a living room-cum-dining room-cum-bedroom.

Clean apartment (P) . . .



. . . messy apartment. Views from behind the bed (T)

In some ways having a tiny apartment makes cleaning up easy, but in other ways it makes it easier to make a mess and spread it everywhere.

Around 5:00 PM Rachel will get home from work. Dinner immediately ensues in one form or another. One of the variations in Harmony and Rachel's lives is that they go through phases of cooking and not cooking more intense than most people who may simply cook some nights and not others. Rachel and Harmony will sometimes stop cooking for weeks altogether, and then suddenly resolve to go the grocery store and spend a month trying out complicated recipies like roasted lamb stew or shellfish—things that seem very brave given the space that they have to work with (which explains the occasional intensity of the mess). Rachel is the cook, and Harmony does her best to stay out of her way and clean up around her as she goes. "She makes it look easy, this woman." Harmony says. "She is amazing"

Rachel baking an apple pie . . . in the living room. Or is it the bedroom? (T)

I accompany Rachel and Harmony in early summer as they shop at a Whole Foods Market up on Columbus Circle at Fifty-Ninth Street and Broadway. They go there whenever the mood strikes them—usually during the weekend—and they do not use a list. Instead, Rachel just walks around and examines what is available, waiting for inspiration. They try very hard to read labels for things they want to avoid and to buy local food that is in season. Eventually they buy the ingredients to make meals of fish tacos, chili, pasta with pesto, tofu teriyaki casserole with egg noodles, and lots of salad. They say they are trying to eat less meat for the same reason they are trying to go local: guilt about industrial agriculture.

While they are shopping I ask if they ever considered joining a Community Supported Agriculture program:

> "Oh yes," Harmony says, "but we are not ready for a CSA. We are working towards that. We had one for a while, but it turned out we were just not prepared for it! You get this box with a serving of whatever it is that they have for you, and you need to be ready to make that into a meal. We might be more ready for a baby than a CSA!"

She is only half kidding. The sentiment seems to be that making dinner out of the vicissitudes of the seasons and farmer preference requires a balance between spontaneity and preparedness that they have yet to master.

When Harmony and Rachel are not in a cooking cycle, they like to start someplace with a happy hour and then eat wherever the night takes them.

> **9:00 PM**, if not sooner, is time for bed. More specifically, 9:00 PM is time for Rachel to go to bed and for Harmony to do something quiet. Rachel has systemic Lupus, and the level of fatigue she experiences as a result of it can vary. She goes through periods—sometimes weeks or longer—of having really low energy, and periods where it is less prominent. Invariably though, she needs to rest by this point in the evening. Typically, she will watch TV to veg out and wind down. It used to be that there was no television in the apartment, and Harmony and Rachel would both watch videos—lots of Andy Griffith according to Rachel—on their small notebook computers. More recently they bought a television, and that has made it easier to share the evening viewing experience.
>
> After Rachel falls asleep, Harmony's options are limited to things that are quiet and dark. They have toyed with the idea of building a wall in the middle of the room so Rachel can have peace and quiet while Harmony does something else, but this seems like a bad idea given the tiny size of the apartment.
>
> **Overall,** the evening part of this schedule can be extended to entire days on the weekend—with the exception of church on Sunday mornings—and during the summer. If Harmony goes out to perform or see a show at a club things can also change, especially in terms of the evening routine, as going to a club requires what both of them consider an exceptional amount of gussying up and tends to take place fairly late in the evening.

One of the interesting things about Harmony and Rachel is that while they are very socially conscientious, good-natured, and well-intentioned people, their actions often seem to lag a little bit behind their ideals. They would not dispute this. For example, one winter afternoon I spent a few hours with Harmony as she tidied up the apartment. As she cleaned in the kitchen—so small that only she could stand there—we got to talking about food. She told me that she and Rachel had just watched the movie *Food Inc.,* which graphically tries to reveal the social, ecological, and health related costs of industrial agriculture by tracing the political-economic and petro-chemical origins of the modern American diet—especially mass-produced meat. Harmony was talking about how she and Rachel found this film compelling and disturbing, how it changed the way they thought about food. And then she said something that caught me totally off guard:

> "I was really surprised by this behavior," she said, "but the night we watched *Food Inc.*—that night—Rachel was like 'I reaaally want McDonalds for dinner.'"
>
> "After watching it?" I replied, shocked.

> "I know!" Harmony said. "I was like, 'I thought we would never have McDonald's again.' But we ate McDonald's that night and it made us feel sooo sick."

We silently pondered this contradiction for a moment.

> "Amazing." I said. "It really puts a dash on the whole idea that if you just educate people, they'll go and do the right thing."
>
> "You would think that," she replied, nodding thoughtfully and grinning wryly. "But here we are . . ."

Then, as if to underscore her point about being educated enough to know better, she started talking about how US agricultural policy changed under the Nixon administration—about the fact that ever since then the cost of food for consumers has gone down per calorie, but that the policies which were designed to drive down production costs and create cheap calories ended up having negative consequences for health and ecology. It seemed like a good idea to have cheap food when people couldn't afford to feed their families, she argued: "So they changed agricultural policy. But they couldn't foresee the consequences. Which is so typical."

Harmony said that this example was interesting to her because it showed that big social issues were not just about evil people who do bad things to us. She liked to think that the explanations were more complicated than that:

> "So is that generally your view of how things get messed up?" I asked. "It's not that there are evil people out there doing evil things but just that people do stuff and they might have good intentions but then things go haywire?"
>
> "I don't know that that is generally my view . . ." She answered, thinking about it. "I don't know that I would say I have a real good handle on why bad things happen." We laughed and she went on, "But I do think that is a common way—a *really* common way—that bad things happen. I think that people look at a problem and try to fix it, but they don't think of the problems that the fix might bring."

After saying a bit more, she summed up her ambiguity about all this.

> "Look," she said, "I am not going to label evil. That's silly. I've got enough of it in me."

Another time I was visiting the apartment and I noticed a picture of a brown skinned child on their mini-refrigerator.

"Are you sponsoring this kid?" I asked.

"Yeah, Pedro," Rachel said nonchalantly.

"Where is he?" I asked.

"I don't remember," Rachel said. All three of us had to laugh at that.

"Really!?" I said. "I thought you were going to give me some moving story here!"

"I know we are supposed to care, but . . ." Rachel said, trailing off.

"We do love him!" Harmony interjected, and we laughed again.

"It's like . . . it doesn't help for me to know where he is or about his life." Rachel explained. "Look, those are pictures that he made for us," she said, changing the focus and pointing to some drawings on the fridge.

"He drew those," Harmony said, joining in.

"These?" I said looking at them.

"Yeah, those are from him." Harmony said. "'A drawing for my sponsor,'" she said, reading from the typed inscription on the paper. "And he . . . look," she said, holding two pictures of the boy side by side. "The first picture we got is on the left and the second one is on the right. He is looking good, right?"

"Yup," I said.

"He is growin'," Harmony continued optimistically, with more than a hint of humor.

"He put on some weight there," Rachel pressed.

"More nourished," I agreed.

"He can't read yet." Harmony said. "We keep getting letters from grandma and mom telling us about that."

"I think he is working on it," Rachel said, chuckling.

"He likes soccer and dancing . . ." Harmony added.

"So how did this happen?" I asked

"Rachel," Harmony said.

"You know," Rachel explained, "one of those guys on the street was like, 'Sponsor this kid' and I was like, 'Ok.'"

"Some guy on the street?" I said, momentarily confused. "Oh, you mean with the . . ."

"You know those guys on the street . . ." Rachel said.

"Right," I said, remembering. "The guys who are like, 'Do you have a minute to save a dying child?' and most people are like, 'Hmmm. Nope.'"

"It is through Children International." Harmony said. "They are reputable enough. They just withdraw like $17 a month from her account."

"It's $22," Rachel said.

"Well, right on," I said. "He is looking good."

"You know," Harmony said. "I figure the whole family would be mortified to know that his sponsors are two lesbians. But whatevs. If he ever wants to come to New York we will put him up."

"From wherever he is!" Rachel added, and we all laughed.

"You do what you can," I said.

In the end, Harmony and Rachel proved to be the hardest participants with whom to schedule observation times. I would contact them to try and arrange a meeting, and it would often take them many weeks to respond and sometimes months to set something up. My time with them dragged on much longer than I originally expected. This honestly didn't bother me much, but it did make me wonder if there was something in particular about their daily lives that made it difficult to incorporate interruptions into the routine. When I asked them about this, they told me not to take it personally—that this is a common complaint that their friends and family have about them too. They said there are really two reasons why it is so hard for them to break

with whatever repetitious cycle they are currently in and facilitate something even as seemingly minor as responding to messages and setting a definitive date for things. The first has to do with Rachel's health. They both feel that a stable routine is not only essential to maintain Rachel's well-being, but also that when she is not feeling good they will just focus on that and block out all potential distractions. Second, they said their relationship is such that when they are apart, they are doing things for themselves, and when they are together they are totally co-dependent and focused only on each other to the extent that outside communication is nil. They said it was just very rare for an outsider to be able to break into that and find space in their relationship. Rachel and Harmony are the ones who really got me thinking about the inertia of everyday practices—the way in which the momentum of what is already in motion and the force of what is sedimented in place can collude, resisting changes to daily routine, even very small ones.

As I was walking out of their apartment after our final visit together Rachel said:

"You know, I feel really bad about how poorly we have done communicating with you."

"Well," I said, "you shouldn't feel bad. At all. It has all worked out."

"Well you were very generous," she said.

"Are you kidding me!?" I said. "Here is the thing. I have totally been interrupting your life, so your schedule is fine with me. I haven't been in any super hurry here. So don't feel bad for a second, ok? Feel good that you were generous enough to sponsor me!"

"Awe . . ." Rachel said. "We will put your picture up next to Pedro."

"Yeah," Harmony said. "Send us one every year so we can see how you are growing."

***

SARA lives with her partner in a recently built condo on the 500 block. She has lived in the Hell's Kitchen/Clinton Neighborhood since 2000, and moved to West Forty-Sixth Street in 2008.

Sara is one of a growing number of affluent young professionals who have purchased property here over the last two decades and are changing the character of the Middle West Side.

Sara comes from a well-connected family. She grew up, went to high school, and attended a small college in Connecticut before moving to Manhattan while in her early twenties to earn a Master's degree in media, culture, and communication at New York University. When she finished graduate school, Sara got a job in product licensing and brand management with a well-known company, and has been moving around to different jobs within that industry and climbing the corporate ladder ever since.

Sara's career really took off when she got a position developing a product line for a company run by a very wealthy and famous individual who personally engrained in her a distinct work ethic. She explains this as follows:

> "[Famous Wealthy Person] got to work really early—like 7—and stayed really late, and [s/he] instills that in the people who work for [her/him]. I started working there, and just started *doing that*, and then I realized, hey, I am not sleeping much."
>
> Then Sara laughed and joked, "You can't make money while you are sleeping, so I just cut that out."

Sara came away from that job with an insider's sense for how to produce profit. She has since moved on and become a Senior Vice President within the branding and licensing division of a major multimedia corporation. This is quite an accomplishment for someone in her mid-thirties.

Sara and her partner—he is an ivy-league educated entertainment lawyer—were initially drawn to live in Hell's Kitchen/Clinton because of the proximity to their offices in Midtown. When they were ready to buy, they looked at more than a hundred places all over Manhattan, eventually deciding that the first place they had looked at in the neighborhood where they already lived was the best investment. They felt that the 500 block of West Forty-Sixth in 2008 was just nice enough to be safe, but still gritty enough to get in at a good price. Sara wouldn't tell

me exactly how much they paid for their condo. She just said it was more than a million dollars, and less than two. They expect the property value to increase as the surrounding area continues to gentrify.

Sara became very active in the West Forty-Sixth Street Block Association shortly after moving into her new condo. I first met her at a meeting, and shortly after that asked her if she would be willing to participate in my research. She was hesitant. She repeatedly told me that she was simply too busy. She finally agreed after nearly a year and after I convinced her that having me around while she did what she already did would not take any additional time. I soon learned that concerns about time are an ongoing theme in Sara's life.

At home with one of the dogs . . . (P)

During the first real conversation I had with Sara I asked her to describe herself and her personality. She launched into a thorough description with typical zeal:

> "Well," she said. "I love living in Manhattan. I am very focused on what I do everyday, which is my job, which I *love*."

She put great emphasis on that love.

> "I am very interested in branding, and love all aspects of that, and I spend a lot of time doing it. A lot of my day is dedicated to work. A lot of my night is dedicated to work. But, I value my friendships and we spend a lot of time with friends and enjoy doing that. And traveling—we always travel quite a bit."

She paused and thought for a moment before continuing:

> "But, you know, I think I am an outgoing person. I'm definitely a firecracker in terms of . . . well, I am not shy. You don't have to worry about me not telling you something that I feel strongly about. And I get very passionate whether it's good, bad, or indifferent. I get very passionate about things I believe in. Sometimes that's bad, sometimes it's good. But I would say if someone was going to describe me, that is what they would say."
>
> Then she added, "I think I am a pretty smart chica . . ."

We both laughed at that.

. . . and as high powered corporate executive (P)

Sara's daily routine is roughly as follows:

> **6:00 AM:** One of the first things Sara does when she wakes up is check her Blackberry for email. She will also sometimes scan various entertainment-related online media to see if anything significant has happened while she slept. Next, she gets ready for work.

Sometime between 8:15 and 8:45 AM Sara will leave the apartment and drop off her two dogs, Warrick and Kugel, at *Pets at Play*, a dog resort and spa on West Forty-Fifth Street immediately south of her building. Sara and her partner have a membership there which costs more than a thousand dollars a month. This allows them to drop off their dogs anytime day or night, weekday or weekend, at a state-of-the-art facility featuring a ratio of at least one employee to every eight dogs, a HEPA filtered temperature controlled environment, a variety of play areas and lounges "complete with dog friendly furniture where dogs can relax and get to know each other better"[34], unlimited triple filtered water, and dog grooming and massage services.

After she drops off the dogs, Sara will go purchase breakfast. When I was observing her, she tended to go a Dunkin' Donuts on Tenth Avenue and purchase a large vanilla iced coffee with soymilk and 1 Splenda, and an egg breakfast sandwich. Since then, however, she told me that Dunkin' Donuts did something to make her unforgivably angry, so she started going to Starbucks instead.

After she gets breakfast she will usually hail a cab. Rarely, if the weather is exceptionally nice and she is not in too big of a hurry, she will walk the 10 blocks to the office. Most of the time, she gets in a cab and becomes absorbed in her Blackberry while riding across town.

Sometime between 9:00 and 9:30 AM Sara arrives at her office in a large Midtown building. Her office is on a middle floor that is only accessible by a curving stairway and buffered by several layers of security and assistants. The office itself has a curious appearance, something like a cross between an eclectic boutique and a law firm. There are contracts and proposals splayed out on Sara's desk. Some of them are for restaurants, films, live musicals, and other media related things. Meanwhile, all over the room there are mock-ups or prototypes of all kinds of hard merchandise—food, clothing, liquor, books, posters, music collections, and more. A variety of rare media artifacts are framed up on the walls. There is even an impeccably dressed mannequin.

When Sara gets to the office she immediately logs in on the computer and opens her daily organizer to review day's events. Sometimes as many as a hundred 'reminders' will then pop up on the screen. These are things that Sara has previously sent from her own Blackberry to remind herself to do on this day, synched directly into the planner.

Next, Sara scans through the numerous trade, media, and culture related publications that she has delivered to her desk. These include some familiar titles—*GQ*, *Vanity Fair*, *Variety*, *Hollywood Reporter*—and a bunch more that I never would have imagined existing—*Women's Wear Daily, Furniture Today,* and *Home Textiles Today*. Sara describes this part of her job as "staying ahead". She says this means "staying ahead of trends, but also watching culture and changes in culture."

Sara typically reads these publications every morning until she is ready to swing into action. It could be minutes or it could take an hour, but eventually she will get a phone

[34] This according to the spa website, http://petsatplayresortandspa.com/about.php, as of 4/2012

call or start a meeting and will switch gears from watching culture and changes in culture to making culture and changes in culture. There are conference calls, product acquisitions, copious meetings, endless contacts to be made; contracts to be reviewed; and deals to be closed. Through these acts Sara attaches the names of famous people to new and/or already existing products, an alchemy that enhances the value of both and secures royalties and revenues for years to come.

At Noon, Sara takes a break to check the website GILT.COM, which releases a few new limited edition luxury items from top designers every week day at precisely noon eastern standard time. These are scarce, hot items and they move fast, so this activity is actually scheduled into Sara's electronic organizer as an event, every single day, lest she should forget.

GILT is not the only moment where retail media punctuate Sara's routine. She has also arranged to receive messages from upscale New York City establishments whenever they get new products that they think might be of interest to her:

> From: "L_Zodikoff@bergdorfgoodmanstore.com"
> <L_Zodikoff@bergdorfgoodmanstore.com>
> Sent: Fri, January 29, 2010 1:07:01 PM
> Subject: louboutin
>
> 
>
> The flat sandal is also offered on a low square heel in black as shown and luggage brown (to follow). Priced at $695. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance.
>
> Lori
> Lori Zodikoff
> Bergdorf Goodman
> Salon Shoes
> 754 5th Avenue
> New York, NY 10019

Between 3-4:00 PM: Sara's personal assistant told me that many days Sara will work straight through the day and neglect to eat. By the time mid-afternoon rolls around, she is starving. Her personal assistant then arranges "lunch"—usually some kind of quick option from one of the chain establishments that litter Midtown—which Sara typically wolfs down too fast while sitting at her desk. When Sara talks about this, she is clear that it is not an ideal habit. Still, she keeps doing it, and there is a little hint of pride when she jokes about being so obsessed with work that she forgets to eat.

Sometime between 7 and 9 PM: Sara likes to walk home whenever she can. She admits that she is one of those people who walk while looking at their phone, often somewhat oblivious to the people passing by.

Whoever makes it home first will pick up the dogs from the spa.

Sara's partner likes to cook, and on the way home he will often pick up some ingredients for dinner. Sara does not like to cook. She views it as a waste of time, and she has a somewhat tortured relationship to this practice of his. One day she tells me the following story:

> "Last night," she says, "he came home at like 10 o'clock at night from the office, and brought home shrimp and feta and canned tomatoes and basil and herbs and whipped up some kind of Greek shrimp dish within like 30 minutes. And watching him—this is funny actually—I am so hungry, because I haven't eaten, you know, since my four o'clock lunch. So I am hungry. So I order food so that it can get there before he even finishes, because I am so hungry." She stops, gives a little grin, and shakes her head. "I couldn't even wait for him to finish making the shrimp!! He has arrived with the shrimp, and . . ."
>
> "And all you have to do is sit tight for 20 minutes?!" I interject.
>
> "Yeah, but I can't," she says. "It's like I don't have the patience to wait. I feel like, 'Ok, I have to eat now so then I can do x, y, and z.'"
>
> "Umm-hmm," I say, thinking about this. "So it is actually similar to the [Famous Wealthy Person] mentality about sleep. 'I don't have time to wait for the shrimp'"

We both laugh.

> "There is no time to wait for the shrimp!" she says. "And the shrimp were a lot better than what I ordered too, because I tasted them. I should have waited for the shrimp."

So it is that on most nights Sara uses an internet service called Seamless to order dinner and have it delivered to her door. Using Seamless, she can browse menus from all over the neighborhood, order, and pay, all with a couple of clicks. At this point all of her

preferences are saved in a profile, and she can order dinner in seconds without ever having to wait or interact with another person.

Once Sara is done with dinner, she settles in to do more work. Every night, she watches TiVoed interviews from every major network talk show in order to track trends and be on the lookout for potential branding related insights. She watches how celebrities plug different products, and tries to learn from it. After that she often reviews contracts and other work documents, sometimes in bed.

Somewhere between Midnight and 2 AM Sara does a final email check and goes to sleep.

Several nights a week, an early dinner might be followed by drinks out with friends.

Several nights a month Sara will attend community meetings. Aside from the West Forty-Sixth Street Block Association, Sara is also very active in the condo board for her building, and she likes to attend Community Board meetings—part of a New York City system of district specific citizens councils—whenever she can.

At least once a month Sara will travel. Many times this is for work. She frequently flies to Vegas or Las Angeles to meet with west coast counterparts about whatever project might be in the works. Other times, she travels with her partner—over the course of the short time I observed her they went to London, Bermuda, South Africa for the World Cup, and several other places.

A first-class view from Sara's life on the go (T)

Sara's grueling schedule clearly reaps rewards. But it also seems to take a certain toll. Even though her building has a private gym that is ten feet across the hall from her unit, Sara told me that she has a lot of trouble finding time to work-out and that she struggles to keep her weight under control. For much of the time I observed her, she had a chronic respiratory infection which did not respond to a course of the hardcore antibiotic Cipro or to steroid inhalers. One night we sat in her condo after dinner and I asked Sara if she ever thought of her relationship to work as a kind of trade-off. She said that she did. She said that part of the trade-off was about giving up a lot of time in exchange for nice things for herself—a nice condo and nice objects, but also travel and money. In that sense, she didn't feel like she had "made it" just yet. At the same time, Sara admitted that her lifestyle might be bad for her health. In fact, she said, she and her partner had

just bought a country house upstate for this very reason—for the explicit purpose of forced relaxation:

> "Hopefully that will bring sanity to my life," She said. "It is definitely bringing a normalcy to my life.
>
> "Are you saying that there was a little lack of sanity?" I asked.
>
> "Well . . . I mean listen," she said. "It is definitely not completely normal to live in a huge city, and to—every day—be in this rat-race doing these things. I order in food, I don't cook, I work a bizarre hour schedule. You know."
>
> "Yeah." I said.
>
> "So definitely, going to the farmhouse is normalcy. It takes fifteen minutes to get to the grocery store. I have to cook breakfast and lunch, or whatever else . . ."
>
> "You can't get delivery there?"
>
> "You can't get delivery there! That is a difference! My prescriptions aren't delivered. My dog prescriptions are delivered here for god's sake."
>
> "So actually what you are saying is that going to this farmhouse changes the rhythms of your everyday life."
>
> "It completely changes. It is actually completely the opposite."
>
> "Yeah, and you did that on purpose. Is that what you are saying?"
>
> "We definitely do it on purpose. Yeah, totally on purpose. Except, we are not like mowing the lawn or anything. We are going to have people do that for us. But we are weeding and, you know, touching agriculture."

That got a laugh. As we finished this conversation Sara said:

> "I think that is it definitely not normal to live in a city like this. This is not a norm."

Then she added:

> "I mean, I guess it is for however many millions of people . . ."
>
> "Yup," I said.
>
> " . . . but it is definitely unusual."

Sara's comment left me thinking not about the difference between normal and unusual so much as about the luxury of being able to choose which is which and move back a forth between the two.

***

WATTY—that's short for Watkins, which is actually his middle name—has lived on West Forty-Sixth Street for five decades and counting. Over the course of this long duration and through the peculiar insistency of his personality, he has become a kind of fixture in the neighborhood. He is something like an unofficial historian, community caretaker, and public character[35] all rolled into one. As my research unfolded, Watty was the one person who multiple people on West Forty-Sixth told me I should be sure to meet.

Watty was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He went to college, first at a small two-year college in Pittsburgh and eventually earning a BA in psychology from Case Western University. Shortly thereafter, in 1966, he decided to move to New York City. His brother lived in an apartment on the 500 block of West Forty-Sixth at that time, and Watty says he just called him up one day and announced that he would be moving in. Ostensibly, Watty made the move so he could work towards an MBA in industrial psychology at Baruch College—part of the greater City University of New York system. When he talks about it however, Watty gives the impression that Pittsburgh just couldn't satisfy his energies any longer.

Though he arrived on West Forty-Sixth through serendipity, Watty has put down some substantial roots here over time. In the mid-1970's, when his brother decided to move downtown to Greenwich Village, Watty paid $250 to buy into a limited equity cooperative apartment building—a five story walk-up on the south side of the 400 block, just a skip down Forty-Sixth

[35] According to Jane Jacobs, "A public character is anyone who is in frequent enough contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to make himself a public character. A public character need have no special talents or wisdom to fulfill his function—although he often does." (1961, 89)

from the place where he had lived with his brother. He helped fix the building up and get it back on the tax rolls, and he has been there in his one bedroom apartment ever since.

Watty "holding court" at the Ritz

These days Watty is not a hard man to find—he is active in the Block Association, is on the vestry at St. Clement's Church, is on the board of directors at a Middle West Side-based non-profit advocacy group called Housing Conservation Coordinators, and is the president of his building. When I introduced myself at a Block Association meeting and told him about my research, he seemed to more or less assume that I would want to follow him around and get his take on things. He was right. Unlike the other participants, Watty's appetite for my project turned

out to be endless, even if somewhat erroneously understood. At various times when I accompanied him through his daily life, he introduced me to others as his biographer or his oral historian. Watty also talked me into making a video—a sort of roving interview of him walking around the neighborhood and talking about his memories of different spaces[36]—that he subsequently and unsuccessfully tried to have aired on a public television station. In any case, I spent more time with Watty than with any other participant.

When I asked Watty how he would describe himself if he were the author of this project, He said:

> "Well, people have referred to me as Citizen Strauss."

He named all of the things he does in the neighborhood to deserve this title. In addition to the service he gives to numerous institutions, he regularly asks people if they have registered to vote, picks up litter on the sidewalk, removes unauthorized posters and flyers that have been taped to telephone poles and mailboxes, keeps an eye on the playground, and distributes community information whenever possible. As I accompanied him, I saw him routinely doing these things.

> "Anyway," he says "I think partly, one of the people I would most like to emulate is Ben Franklin."
>
> "Hmm?" I say, not quite sure what he means by this or how it relates to these activities.
>
> "Because he would enable things to happen through other people," Watty explains. "I do the same thing. Exactly. Consciously or not, I do."

He points out that helping me with my research is yet another example of this and then says:

> "There are things that have happened, that I was involved with, and I won't get any credit. But that's fine. That's not the point of it. It's to get something done."

He characterizes this as being "benevolent."

[36] Thanks to Stephen McFarland who was a very patient and cooperative camera person despite the heat and the demanding subjects.

Part of the reason Watty has so much time to be involved around the neighborhood is that he is only partially employed. He is somewhat vague about his employment history, but after graduate school Watty worked a spell for the City doing environmental work and then spent 18 years at a Middle Eastern distributing company. For the last decade Watty has worked as a pollster for CBS. The job essentially entails cold-calling people and administering public opinion surveys. This work is sporadic, only taking place when there is a national issue sufficient to warrant a large poll, which is often then released in association with a feature in *The New York Times*. During my time with Watty, he sent me the results of numerous polls that he helped conduct:

> "The State of Health Care Reform Just Before the Congressional Recess"
> "The Economy, the Deficit, and the President"
> "The Stimulus, the Economy, and the President"
> "The Health Care Debate Continues"
> "Afghanistan, the Threat of Terrorism, and Iraq"
> "Where America Stands: the Job Market and the Economy"
> "The President, Congress, and Dissatisfaction with Government"
> "The Tea Party Movement"
> "Gays in the Military"
> "Americans and their Credit Cards"

Here again Watty is a party to history, working in the background as it unfolds.

Watty's daily routine is roughly as follows:

Sometime after 9:00 AM: Watty is not a particularly early riser. Unless he has somewhere to be, he tends to start up gradually. Like a lot of people, he typically wakes up, makes himself a cup of coffee, and then checks email and browses the web on his desktop computer. While standing. Naked. On several occasions Watty told me of his fondness for being nude. He says Ben Franklin was also very comfortable with nudity. In his younger days he used to sun bathe au natural on the then derelict Hudson River piers. He has a picture on his bookshelf to prove it. Anyhow, he prefers not to put on clothes until as late in the day as possible. Meanwhile, most of the chairs in Watty's apartment are perpetually covered with accumulated residual materials from his life—flyers and handouts from civic initiatives, political campaign literature, newspapers, letters, playbills, "beefcake" magazines, and other publications. He is clearly a collector. So most mornings Watty stands there at his desk just beside the kitchen, as naked as the day he was born, sipping his coffee, checking up on his neighbors via Facebook, and keeping in

touch with old friends through his yahoo account. Incidentally, he was gracious enough to make an exception to this practice whenever I was around—a gesture that I very much appreciated.

Sometime after 10:00 AM: After coffee and some computer time, Watty watches TV. He rotates between DVD's that he has purchased and soap operas on broadcast. During the time I spent with him, Watty was working through a box set of a Norman Lear-produced show called "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" that originally aired evenings in the 1970s. Watty likes it for its "off the wall writing" and for its "cult feel". In one episode, he explains, a man drowns in a bowl of chicken soup. We watched a few episodes in which the title character was trying to recover from a period of being held hostage by a serial killer. In one scene, she is sitting inside a police station, recounting the harrowing experience and she says:

> "I read a book once called *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. There is this girl in it, Emily, and she lives in a town, and it is like ours, only she dies. And then they bring her back to life for one day and she comes back and she sees her life. She sees her ordinary life. And she sees how special her ordinary life is. And she says, quote, does anybody ever realize life while they are living it? Unquote. It was during this experience that I understood that phrase."

Meanwhile, Watty's ordinary life goes on. By this point in the morning he is usually ready for breakfast. He typically pops in his dentures and eats a banana and some cereal while watching a show.

Midday: On some days, the "soap" watching goes on for hours. After DVDs, Watty will switch to programming on network television—*All My Children* and others. Watty flips around, and though he doesn't always know the names of the shows, he knows what is going on with the characters.

On other days, Watty will go out to make some rounds starting in the early afternoon. Oftentimes this involves checking in and signing some paperwork or some checks at one of the institutions he is involved with. There are also errands—a trip to the drycleaners to pick up his favorite sport coat, the one with an Episcopalian insignia on it, or maybe a stop at the grocery store on Eighth Avenue and 49th Street to buy some *Ensure*, a nutritional supplement shake that he says helps him keep weight on. Watty also goes to the gift card store a lot, as he likes to recognize people's birthdays whenever possible.

In the midst of these errands, Watty often ventures into some retail territory that is somewhat unusual for his demographic. One time he took me to an Apple Store on the Upper West Side, where he was taking training and learning about all the tricks and capabilities of his new Macintosh computer. On another occasion I went with him to an Urban Outfitters store so he could return some distressed jeans he had purchased there. According to the company website, Urban Outfitters offers a "lifestyle-specific shopping experience for the educated, urban-minded individual in the 18 to 30 year-old range."[37] I

[37] http://www.urbanoutfittersinc.com/profile/urban.html last accessed 3/2012

myself felt too old and crotchety for the place, but Watty didn't seem to have any similar feelings. We walked through racks and shelves full of hipster clothing as Watty felt fabrics and looked for bargains. At one point I found a pair of acid-washed skinny jeans. I thought they were the kind of funny thing that only select consumers could ever pull-off. I held them up and suggested, as a lark, that Watty might like to try them on. He said, "I already have a pair like that."

Somewhere in the course of running errands, Watty will get a papaya shake at Papaya Dog, a New York City fast food franchise that sells cheap hotdogs and fruit drinks. He says these shakes are the best drinks in all of New York, and he has one every day.

At 4:00 PM, without fail, Watty goes the Ritz to have a beer or two, but not more. Located on the north side of Restaurant Row near Ninth Avenue, The Ritz is a gay bar with a vaguely nautical theme. When the weather is nice, Watty sits out on the little patio in the front. He reads *The New York Times* and chats with other people there. He calls this "holding court" and seems to view it as part of his community involvement.

Evenings vary, but Watty tends to keep busy. He often attends meetings for his various engagements. Other times he will attend events that are going on in the neighborhood—fundraisers, parties, plays and shows being put on by various community organizations, and so on. In addition to those things, Watty also likes to go to the theater or to choral performances whenever possible.

If it seems like Watty doesn't eat much throughout his day, it's because he doesn't. Most nights he will eat some steamed chicken and vegetables. He tells me that he rarely gets takeout because a lot of times the portions are too big and he doesn't like that.

When Watty is working his schedule is entirely different. CBS will call him on fairly short notice when there is a poll to be done, at which point he will spring into action. The CBS Broadcast Center is located to the north, on Fifty-Seventh Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues. On days he is working, Watty will wake up early, walk to work, take his meals at the CBS Cafeteria or at a nearby diner called the Morningstar, work for ten or twelve hours at a stretch, and then walk home. Each poll takes several days of such long hours to complete, and then it is over. Technically Watty is not an employee of CBS, just a temporary worker who is re-employed anew with every poll. Watty likes this arrangement, because it means he can work in spurts and have plenty of time to do all the other things he enjoys.

A couple times each year, Watty will go on a vacation. Almost without exception, he travels for one of two reasons. First, he is a member of a group called the *Friends of Franklin*, which describes itself as "an organization devoted to fellowship, learning, and the spirit of Benjamin Franklin." Watty often travels with the Friends as they go on Franklin themed trips—sometimes as nearby as Albany or Philadelphia, other times as far away as London or Paris. They visit historical sights and walk in Franklin's footsteps.

Watty pictured with fellow tour participants (whom I anonymized) on *The Friends of Franklin* website

The other reason Watty travels is to attend events related to his involvement in the Episcopal Church. He is involved in the choir at St. Clement's church, and they sometimes travel to sing at events. Watty will also travel for big events related to the larger Episcopalian community. For example, during the course of my observations with him, Watty traveled to Jamaica to see the ordination of a new Bishop.

"The more man smoke herb, the more babylon fall"—a T-shirt from Jamaica, worn during errands.

Overall, Watty really got me thinking about what all of the little things someone does on a daily basis might add up to. Initially, I sort of wrote off his obsession with Ben Franklin as a mere eccentricity or a personal quirk. Over time, however I came to realize that both Watty and Ben were all about working to make sure that numerous small things—actions, pennies, virtues, and what have you—accumulated into something greater. Watty was the one who came up with the idea for a pedestrian bridge over the West Side highway, maybe while he was trying to get to the piers for some nude sunbathing. Watty played a part in forming the original block association, in getting trees and fancy light-posts for the sidewalk, and in who knows how many other things, because he saw a need for these things in his daily life and then did a little bit of work to make them happen. It all made me wonder how different West Forty-Sixth Street would be without four decades of Watty.

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These are seven very different people, yet there are definite refrains and symmetries among their different lives. There are clear overlaps of routine, like fractal elements of broader patterns—the rhythms of the working day, the consumption of mediated information, the negotiation of social contact, the cycles of human biology and diurnal terrestrial life, and more. Beyond these, there are further points of condensation that I want to attend to and subject to more thorough analysis.

One of the most immediately striking aspects of these stories is the way that each life is crosscut by all sorts of things, people, and processes that circulate through the social space of West Forty-Sixth and connect it to elsewhere. Each life offers small insights into historical currents, cultural trends, political economic forces, and other ostensibly "macro" formations as they have been manifested here. These myriad thick connections to other people, places, and

times offer some evocative hints about at the intensively collective character of contemporary urban space, which I will later ague magnifies the social power and political significance of the enacted daily practices that take place in contemporary cities like New York.

More subtly, there are tensions—contradictions, in fact—that are shared across the individual differences in the stories told above. In the particular expressions of desire and purpose and in the imperatives that each life addresses and acts to fulfill, a vexing question is suggested: Of what consequence are people's investments in their everyday lives as usual?[38] In other words, what should be made of the tension between living to get by or make do versus living in a way that actively transforms the present or resolves pressing social problems which exist beyond the ambit of any individual daily life? This is a contradiction within social reproduction. Many of the actions that fill daily life are dedicated to the achievement of continuity and self-constitution—attending to basic biological and social needs, and also laboring to assure that these needs can be met in the future. This is understandable and absolutely necessary. At the same time, people seem to have a proclivity to get by, make do, and generally want to ensure that daily life and the necessary self-constitution that it entails continue uninterrupted, and where possible, as pleasantly and smoothly as can be. These tendencies can become problematic as they ossify, stymie transformation, or, worse, help to produce or become attached to social formations that entail the subsumption or suppression of difference in and through their own continued reproduction.

Consider the lives that have just been presented:

- Carmen's life is almost entirely taken up by acts of social reproduction. While she is a master of making do for herself and her mother in the only place she has ever known, she also seems dependent on a routine that is fused with the neighborhood in a way that means she likely cannot and will not ever willingly alter it or leave.

[38] I owe a huge debt to Cindi Katz for framing this question and insisting that I consider it.

- Darrick does change things in order to make them more hospitable or potentially fruitful for him, whether by starting an LGBTQ network or moving across the globe. At the same time he seems very reluctant to be flexible in any way that will complicate his efforts make his everyday life as efficient as possible in pursuit of his aspirations.

- Franc's life seems to be a continuous a maintenance loop. His wounded heel is like a talisman of his life—he tends to it delicately and makes slow and painful but steady progress with the hope that someday not too far off it will be renewed. Only at that point will he be able to focus on what his life could be in relation the world beyond himself.

- Despite the fact that they vacillate between different phases, Rachel and Harmony's habits get in the way of their best intentions. Beyond what their friends might say about this, even the things they aspire to and want to change about themselves have trouble finding space to emerge in the constricted routine that has formed around their tiny apartment.

- Sara is a self-professed dynamo and smart chica, and yet her time is so fully saturated by self-inflicted obligations that her own most basic needs are neglected and her health is suffering. Meanwhile, all of her activities seem to be instrumentally oriented towards improving her career, upgrading the trappings of her personal and social life, and tending to the environment in and around her condo, all of which may or may not be good for anyone else beyond that.

- Watty narrates himself as someone who strives to facilitate, through his own daily activities, outcomes that will benefit others. At the same time, it seems that some of these actions may stem from hubris or eccentricity more than altruism, and it is not clear whether his ambitions and self-perceptions are consistent with the actual effects of his actions.

Such blunt summaries are not meant to diminish or make light of these people's lives. Honestly, I find many of their accomplishments and efforts laudable, I think they would all qualify as quite decent and upstanding people, and I got along well with and respected each of them in different ways. Further, I am supremely confident that there would be an abundance of similarly blunt things to say about me if someone put my life under the microscope the way I did theirs. All of this speaks to my point. As these lives show, there is a contradiction within social reproduction, a juncture where performing the corpus of activities that are necessary to thrive and go on as

individuals can come into conflict with our own best intentions and potential—both for ourselves an in relation to others[39].

Another way to frame this is in terms of what I call the inertia of everyday life. Inertia is commonly understood as a resistance to any change in the current state of things. A body at rest wants to stay at rest and a moving body wants to stay in motion. The metaphor is not meant to suggest that the laws of motion apply to daily life. There is, however, a sense in which the tension within social reproduction that I have described above points to something like inertia in effect. So long as their needs are being met, people seem inclined to keep doing things as they are. This applies to activity and inactivity alike. It is not an externally determined law of some sort but a socially produced contradiction. Moreover, if and when some needs are at risk of not being met, people do what seems necessary to mitigate the risk.

The kind of resistance to change which is evident in daily life and which I am describing can have significant social and political implications. The inertia of everyday life is an essential part of a collective edifice of practical activities which hold some social formations in place and contribute to the dissolution of others, allowing some to continue thriving while others are stifled. Meanwhile, countless broader circuits and circulations—concrete things like material goods as well as abstract ones like value, cultural currents, and ideas themselves—are reproduced and propelled by this social infrastructure of inertia and daily routine.

Because of the propensity to resist change, the inertia of everyday life can be a fount for struggle against creeping structural violence and oppression[40]. Just as often, however, this inertia

[39] Lauren Berlant makes a similar argument about what she calls "cruel optimism", a relation that exits "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (2011, 1).

[40] Cindi Katz's distinctions between resistance, reworking and resilience—based on observations of disparate everyday lives in the face of massive economic restructuring—demonstrate this point. Marianna Pavlovskaya's (2004) work on the value of informal community economies in post-socialist Moscow also reflects this resilient aspect of social reproduction. In a different way Michel de Certeau's (1984) account of everyday life—and the

plays into the production of pernicious social forms that, while perhaps well intentioned at first, can ultimately become bound up with some disquieting processes which get in the way of the collective good. Activities or social forms that may begin as acts of defiance in the face of unacceptable circumstances or as attempts to ease the tasks of making do, carrying on, and achieving comfort in daily life can eventually mutate into activities and forms that perpetuate social violence and impinge on the lives of others in disquieting ways.

The lives I have shown here and the tensions I have pulled from them provide a baseline for deeper considerations of everyday life—the opening of an argument that will become more complicated and messy as layers of time, space, and abstraction are added to it. The next section tries to square these ideas with existing theories of everyday life en route to demonstrating them as they have taken place on West Forty-Sixth Street.

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numerous opportunities to 'get over' on and pilfer from power that he views as immanent within daily life—draws heavily on the resistant aspects of what I am calling the inertia of everyday life.

Everyday Life

Despite (or perhaps because of) its obviousness and ubiquity, people do not seem to think much of everyday life. In popular culture as in much scholarly literature, everyday life and "the everyday" can be throwaway terms used in uncritical ways to signify the daily activities or ordinary aspects of some greater phenomenon. Rather than being viewed as substantive, let alone generative, in its own right everyday life is typically taken for granted and regarded as merely expressive of operations at a larger scale. Fittingly enough, most of the people involved with my research seemed to share such attitudes, assuming that an ethnographic study of everyday life on one part of one street would be relatively straightforward, apolitical, and artless. Participants never questioned what I meant by everyday life and simply took it as self-evident. At the same time, some very smart academic advisors expressed dour concerns that a research project organized around the central theme of everyday life would inevitably be myopic, punchless, too mundane, and useless[41]. These attitudes are telling.

Henri Lefebvre once described the everyday as the 'soil' from which all social structures grow. Structures, he said, are like trees or plants which sprout up from the ground of the everyday and are nourished by it to blossom, over time eventually falling back into it and decomposing to nourish future structures anew. Lefebvre further observed that once these structures have grown and, as it were, flowered, they tend to divert attention away from the soil of the everyday that necessarily sustains them. "[F]lowers and trees" he cautioned, "should not make us forget the earth beneath, which has a secret history and richness of its own" (1991a: 87). The fact that everyday life so often taken for granted and deemed unworthy of serious attention is no coincidence, but rather an indicator of the social conditions that make everyday life a

[41] The following anecdote nicely encapsulates the sentiment: Shortly after I defended the proposal for this project, I walked into an elevator at my school just as two faculty members were talking about me and saying, "West Forty-Sixth Street? What the hell is happening *there*?!" As if it couldn't possibly be enough to warrant a whole research project.

compelling and fraught concept in the first place. Further, one of the intriguing things about everyday life as a concept is that while many radical thinkers have taken it up and produced an extensive literature about it, it still remains taken for granted and is treated uncritically in common sense as well and in many influential intellectual traditions.[42]

There is a seam of radical social philosophical thought—extending from Marx, through the early sociology typified by Georg Simmel and Max Weber, to subsequent thinkers including Antonio Gramsci, Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, the Situationists, and British Cultural Studies, among others, as well as some branches of Subaltern Studies and Marxist Feminism[43]—in which many of the overlapping ideas that are tributary to a critical concept of the everyday have been extensively developed. While certainly not homogenous in method, interpretation, or conclusion, there are key theoretical currents that course through these bodies of thought and emerge in what might be called, following Lefebvre, in the *critique* of everyday life[44]. The first common current here is a clear concern with inequality, exploitation, and oppression alongside a desire to understand, if not entirely arrest, the processes by which these are produced. A second, more philosophical current concerns the central importance of social practice as an embodied conduit between subjects that think, act, and experience on the one hand, and the collective

[42] In this sense, perhaps everyday life shares an affinity with the Marxist feminist concept of social reproduction itself, which, despite the large amount of literature that has been generated to validate its political and social salience, is arguably not given due consideration in many if not most intellectual and political traditions.

[43] Clearly, the intellectual tradition of everyday life follows a very European, very white, and very male lineage until relatively recently. As Goonewardena et al. (2008) argue, reconciling this version of everyday life with kindred ideas from non-western and feminist contexts is one of the biggest intellectual challenges associated with the concept. I would also add that everyday life cries out to be better evaluated through and integrated with more qualitative and less grandly theoretical positions as well. I see my arguments as contributing, modestly but visibly, to both of these tasks.

[44] What follows is my best attempt at a concise summary of the literature on everyday life. It encapsulates ideas from a huge swath of social philosophy and scholarship, some of which I revisit in what follows and much of which I do not. My attempt to condense so much into such a short passage is intended to foreshadow ideas that are opened up and given more room to breathe in subsequent sections.

production of thought, action, and experience on the other.[45] Together these concerns merge in a critical desire to understand how already-existing practices and ideas[46] are necessary to the production, reproduction, and maintenance of dominant social relations and structures. As a result, those dominant relations and structures are not treated as external and immutable, but always as contingent and constituted through particular social practices that differ over time and space. The goal of analysis is therefore always one of describing the processes by which dominant relations are constituted in and through particular modes of social practice under different conditions.

The concept of "hegemony" synthesizes these concerns and tries to understand how they relate to particular constellations of social power. Raymond Williams, following Antonio Gramsci, describes hegemony as a concept that allows us to analyze "the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living—not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, social, and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense[47]" (1977, 110). Through this "saturation" and precisely because they arise from and are re-enforced by the routine activities and experiences of social practice in everyday life, the collective

[45] Here I am directly paraphrasing Christian Schmid's (2008, 41-42) description of what Henri Lefebvre's dialectic tries to articulate as happening in and through space. It helps convey, more generally speaking, a key aspect of what analysis of everyday life allows us to understand.

[46] Antonio Gramsci argued for forms of analysis and political action that focused on "renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity" rather than trying to imagine and impose new ones (2000, 332). This was a reaction against vanguardist authoritarianism and a way of always channeling thought in the direction of practical activity.

[47] Common sense, like hegemony, is a fascinating concept that Williams borrows from Gramsci, who describes it as "the diffuse, uncoordinated features of a generic form of thought common to a particular period and a particular popular environment" (2000, 331). Common sense is a culturally particular and historically contingent social sensibility that *feels* as if it is fact.

processes which produce inequality can come to seem autonomous and intractable. Consistent with ideas from the traditions named above, Williams calls attention to the way that hegemonic processes achieve consent and subsume and suppress difference more through the enactment of common sense than through overt or direct force. Hegemony is always in conflict with myriad forms of difference that may destabilize it. The continuity of hegemonic domination depends less on the use of blatant force than on the perpetuation of popular ideas that render inequality and social violence as seemingly natural and reasonable. Where force is used to re-enforce hegemony—and it certainly is when consent fails—it is often justified and underwritten by forms of common sense that tolerate and sometimes venerate such uses of force. At the same time, to the extent that they must always be achieved and maintained at this point where difference meets common sense and consent, hegemonic processes can be understood always to be unstable, permeated with contradictions, and therefore perpetually vulnerable to disruption in and through the everyday practices that are necessary to sustaining them. In other words, the relationship between hegemony and everyday life is deeply fraught at the same time that dominant relations are invested in it seeming otherwise.

The baseline ideas of everyday inertia and social infrastructure take on a much more complex potency alongside the framework of inequality, abstraction, hegemony, and practice that the critique of everyday life presents. Here everyday life can be understood not only in terms of the daily activities that produce, reproduce, and hold broader social formations in place, but also as a means of attending to the social experiences and practices that bridge abstract and concrete social production, and, ultimately, as a means of identifying the contradictions and effacements within unstable hegemonic configurations with the hope of prying them open and transforming them from within. Any analysis of everyday life that hopes to do justice to these

concepts therefore requires much more than the mere description of ordinary activities and daily life. It also demands politically invested interpretation.

I readily acknowledge that the combination of all of these different ideas results in an analytical approach that is unwieldy and fraught[48]. Fully understood, everyday life is, all at once, a living historical artifact, a body of human activities that translate between the concrete and the abstract, a spatialized enactment of past and future social relations in the present, a praxis that is integral to the dominant beliefs, experiences, and socially fetishizing tendencies of capitalist modernity itself and a potential means to undo those dominant processes and the inequities that are left in their wake. That is a mouth—or a head—full. Nonetheless, analysis of everyday life offers a sophisticated and finely calibrated means to try and grasp the structural significance of historically and geographically specific collective social activities that, through the voracious and ceaseless force of their own repetition, routinely obfuscate this specific and collective social character even as it is lived and reconstituted therein. Meanwhile, by both nourishing and effacing them, everyday life plays a crucial role in producing and reproducing hegemonic processes and social inequalities. In light of all this, I would argue that blasé attitudes towards everyday life are part and parcel of deeper structures of common sense that reflect the effective achievement of prior social erasures while contributing to future apathies. For all of these reasons, I find the concept of everyday life to be very politically compelling.

[48] Perhaps this is why Lefebvre produced a lifetime of frustrating prose trying to articulate it!


WESTSIDE HIGHWAY
CAR WASH
OPEN 24 HOURS
ONE WAY

As I hope is now clear, the examination of everyday life can open up underexplored analytical points of contact between seemingly disconnected intellectual traditions and spheres of modern social life. In this section, I am going to tell several more stories from West Forty-Sixth Street in a way that tries to draw out some of these points of contact and channel them into the baseline arguments about everyday inertia and social infrastructure that emerged from my observations of daily life. In so doing my aim is not to offer an exhaustive overview of any particular literature or dense theoretical explication of everyday life.[49] Instead, I want to *demonstrate*[50] what some of the tributary currents of everyday life can do analytically by pushing them "through the pores"[51] of the raw stuff of daily life on West Forty Sixth towards a further critical understanding of why what is going on there demands attention. I begin by exploring the historical-geographical aspects of everyday life in urban space, supplementing baseline arguments about social infrastructure with a sense for how the past is alive in the enactments of the present. Those stories give way to a focus on the tension between concrete and abstract as these both emerge from social practice. I conclude by intensifying arguments about the significance of contradiction and conflict in the social reproduction of social space that I am suggesting occurs in and through everyday life. The result is intended to unsettle common attitudes towards everyday life at the same time that it presents an equally unsettled narrative of

[49] I initially attempted to do just that in earlier drafts of this section. The results were excruciating, stupefying, and utterly antithetical to the tone set by the previous chapters. After banging my head against that wall for a while I realized that my project is best as ethnography rather than a re-theorization. There are several wonderful and detailed volumes including Goonewardena et al. (2008) and Roberts (2006) that do a far better job at plumbing the depths/scaling the heights of the *concept* of everyday life than I could ever do here. I draw on (and recommend) these works.

[50] In the "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress" convolute of the massive, unfinished *Arcades Project* (1999), Walter Benjamin gave a hint at what he was trying to achieve in that project. He wrote "Method of this project: Literary montage. I needn't say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: By making use of them." Benjamin inspires me to strive for a representational form that does not disappoint the content of my analysis.

[51] This is a phrase that Cindi Katz attributes to Gayatri Spivak in an article called *Towards minor theory* (1996). Katz valorizes forms of theoretical analysis that strive to be what she calls "minor"—unsettling rather than totalizing, particular rather than universal. This is another aspiration that I strive not to disappoint.

how seemingly minor events unfolding on these few blocks of New York City can be understood in broader context.

Traditions and Apparitions

These are two stories told to me by participants:

> One night I was sitting around in the lobby of Hartley House with Carmen and her friends as they were talking about the way the neighborhood used to be. One of them told a story that they all swore was true. There was a pimp who came to their church sometimes. He liked to wear fancy clothes, especially hats. As is proper, he always took his hat off during the mass, setting it down on the pew next to him. One day while the pimp was kneeling and praying, some kids in the row behind him took his hat and hid it. When he sat back and saw that the hat wasn't where he had left it, the pimp began to look around intensely.
>
> The priest saw him doing this and said, "Are you looking for the holy spirit, my son?"
>
> "No father," the pimp replied. "I am looking for the goddamn *puta* who stole my hat!"
>
> Maybe I didn't laugh hard enough or react in the way they expected, because they gaged my reaction and agreed amongst themselves that I would find this story to be much richer if I understood the nuances of the Spanish word *puta*.
>
> Another evening I was sitting with Harmony and Rachel and we were in the middle of a conversation about their social lives.
>
> "Wait," Harmony said, "I have a story. . . I mean, it happened on Forty-Sixth Street, and it was big."
>
> "Hmmm," Rachel said, seeming curious to know what story this might be. "I'm ready."
>
> "So this old man at our church," Harmony said, "You may have seen him when you were there."
>
> "Is this the former dancer?" I asked, "The guy who was in the original cast of *Oklahoma*?"
>
> "Um-hmm," Harmony said gently. "So he just died a few weeks ago."
>
> "Oh, really?" I said sheepishly, not sure how to respond.
>
> "Yeah," Harmony said. "He grew up in New York City . . . and growing up, his parents were in vaudeville and his mom had a show. And his mom used to take him to another church, St. Mary the Virgin. That is on Forty-Sixth Street but . . . on the other side of Times Square. Anyway, he was used to being around here as a kid and he used to hang around that church while he was waiting for his mom to get done with her show or

whatever, so he would go there almost every day. When he got older he felt really comfortable around here, and he started to go to our church, St. Clement's.

Well, we were always really worried about him falling, so someone came up with the great idea to make an information card that he could wear around his neck, and it just said, 'My name is Dwayne [last name], my priest is so and so, and this is her phone number'—because he had fallen a couple years before, and he couldn't remember enough to get anybody who knew him to come help. So we did that for him.

Well the day he died it was a Sunday. He was at church, and after service he was down on the corner with some friends who live around here. They were going to go eat lunch and he just said, 'I don't feel so good, you go ahead without me.' And then as they were walking away he fell. He fell backwards onto the sidewalk and hit his head. So he was lying there and they called for the ambulance and then somebody saw this tag around his neck and ran over and got [the priest at the church] and she ran over to where he was. And she was there with him when the ambulance came and with him when he died."

Harmony paused before continuing, "I think it is amazing that he fell right here, in this place where he spent so much of his life, where these two churches were and where he spent so much time, and where there were people who knew him. *Right on this street*."

Though I wasn't sure exactly where or how these two stories might figure into an analysis, they stuck with me. The first story clearly meant something more to Carmen and her friends than it did to me—something that went far beyond the mere meaning of a word and instead likely involved the long history of shared experiences between them. The second story is hauntingly provocative. How many times had that man walked past the spot on the sidewalk where he finally fell? Did his lifetime of daily presence, like Watty's, or anybody else's for that matter, leave any kind of an imprint on the place? How many other spots imprinted by other kinds of events, past and future, are embedded there amidst the pavements and buildings, infusing with the living and the routine? How do seemingly disconnected moments from disparate lives such as these get taken up and incorporated into more enduring forms over time and space?

Sometimes in ways that are obvious, other times less so, shared social histories and spectral traces emerge from and are interwoven with everyday life everywhere. The past meets the present and the becoming future in everyday life. Space plays a key role here, as it comes to bear the imprint of social relations. In my interactions on West Forty Sixth Street, people brought up the past and told stories about it much more than I might have thought they would. Often times, these stories implicated certain places on or around the street and suggested that there may be some kind of continuity between what had happened there in the past and what might happen there again in the future. I viewed myself as an ethnographer, not a historian, and at first I was impatient about all this talk of the past because I did not know what to do with it in the context of the ideas about everyday life that were my central concerns. Soon enough, however, I came to understand that when people talked about the past—or in some cases, made a deliberate effort to forget it—they were often signaling something about the present and the way that they perceived social space from the vantage point of everyday life. This was a key insight.

In the section that follows I present several stories which show how history and geography are animated through social and practical activities that retain and keep vital some aspects of the past in the present while selectively discarding others. This is a complex spatial-temporal process that takes place over the course of countless repetitions and interfaces with daily life in particular places, and one that I found persistent on West Forty-Sixth Street. By showing this process, the stories that follow add to a critical understanding of events unfolding there and deepen my arguments about everyday life. I build these ideas by gently pulling from Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams, and others and weaving them through the narrative to arrive at a better sense of the processes through which the past actively intersects the future in and through the spaces of everyday life in the present. In turn, these stories gradually build up

the ideas of urban social space and social infrastructure that I outlined in the previous section, adding additional layers of nuance and contradiction to those arguments.

What's in a name?

Over the course of my fieldwork I heard many stories about how the area between Thirty-Fourth and Fifty-Ninth Streets, Eighth Avenue and the Hudson River got its names. Some people swear that when it originally industrialized in the mid 1800's, the area was named Clinton as a kind of tribute to New York State Governor Dewitt Clinton, who was instrumental in the creation of the Erie Canal which had so transformed the fortunes of the West Side waterfront. Others say that the name Clinton was made up by the New York City growth coalition[52] at some point in the 1950's or 1960's in order to symbolically sanitize the area. Similarly, the more recent name "Midtown West" frequently appears in property listings and official city language even though I almost never heard it used by people who actually live there.

Hell's Kitchen is probably the most enduring and certainly the most captivating name for the place. There are many stories about the origin of this moniker too. These are three of the most popular:

- There was once a large tenement building so bad that they named it . . .
- There was once a local beer hall called Heil's Kitchen. People used to say, "Let's go to Heil's Kitchen", and eventually they started to say . . .
- Two cops were watching a riot in the neighborhood and one of them said, "This place is Hell." The other one said, "No, Hell is too nice. This is . . ."

And after that the name just *stuck*.

[52] An alliance of real estate interests, cultural institutions, and politicians who are bound to particular cities and are therefore the biggest boosters for growth and economic development. See Logan and Molotch (1987)

The "Hell's Kitchen Express" in the Mathews-Palmer Park playground

In his essay *One Way Street*, Walter Benjamin takes an imaginary journey down a metaphorical street. The text is made up of fragments that explore the cultural tendencies, social formations, and experiences of modern life, arranged as if they were encounters on a walk down this street. Benjamin stops to read these signs, explore interiors, and examine objects encountered along the way. Using this format he engages themes of time, history, knowledge, and the relationships among concrete material things, memories, and subjective experiences as they persist in urban space.

At one point, in the fragment titled TO THE PUBLIC: PLEASE PROTECT AND PRESERVE THESE NEW PLANTINGS, Benjamin muses:

> "If the theory is correct that feeling is not located in the head, that we sentiently experience a window, a cloud, a tree, not in our brains but, rather, in the place where we see it, then we are, in looking at our beloved, too, outside ourselves. But in a torment of tension and ravishment. Our feeling, dazzled, flutters like a flock of birds in the woman's radiance. And as birds seek refuge in the leafy recesses of a tree, feelings escape into the shaded wrinkles, the awkward moments and inconspicuous blemishes of the body we love, where they can lie low in safety. And no passerby would guess that it is just here, in what is defective and censurable, that the fleeting darts of adoration nestle. (1978, 68)

This kind of dream-like melding of idea and object, feeling and substance, abstract and concrete is very characteristic of Benjamin's writing. It is not merely stylistic. In this passage, for example, Benjamin appears to be quite deliberately playing with materialist theories such as those of Henri Bergson,[53] who proposed with rigorous philosophical seriousness that human memory is in fact external to the brain, embedded in objects and matter as they interact with the body. Upon entering a dark room, the hand knows precisely where a light switch is located despite the fact that the mind could not say with certainty. A traveler has no recollection of a place until returning later and realizing that they know the way. A visit to a childhood home brings a flood of long forgotten memories. For Bergson, and for Benjamin too, these are indications that the material world with which we are always in contact preserves our imprints and perhaps even acts as auxiliary to consciousness and sociality in ways we may not immediately realize. It is literally that memories are *there*. Benjamin's dream-like representational world is not just a literary device, but the result of a consistent attempt to work through this kind of relationship between the material and the cognitive across space and time.

Benjamin's views on the relationships among the material, the social, and the temporal, are directly related to his unorthodox understanding of history. As is most clearly articulated in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1968), Benjamin views history as something quite different from the common notion of sequential linear events which simply accumulate and lead to the present. Benjamin describes historical temporality as operating through what he calls *jetzt-zeit*, or 'now-time", because history, he argues, always *begins* in the present, where different kinds of practical activities and social formations retrieve, revive, and enact past ideas which are otherwise left behind and forgotten. In essence Benjamin argues that the past is tangible only to

[53] See *Matter and Memory*, which was published in 1912 and was clearly known to Benjamin at the time *One Way Street* was written in 1928.

the extent that the social and cultural activities of the present animate and reproduce particular aspects of it. Sometimes this is conscious and deliberate, as when history is curated, manipulated, and changed by powerful groups and societies under different social conditions. However—and this is a key insight—history also can and frequently does become lodged in routine, in habit, in space, and in commodity relations. In this way particular iterations of history which are the product of very specific constellations of power and social activity can come to be enacted more or less automatically and uncritically in and through everyday routine. In this sense, Benjamin can be read as questioning how the traces of the past might be embedded not only there in the shaded places where lovers meet and repackaged in "official" histories, but also as being available and malleable in the concrete spaces and ordinary activities of daily life in the present.

The reality of Benjamin's ideas is visible in subtle ways on the one-way street that is contemporary West Forty-Sixth and in the way that history is enacted in the everyday lives of the people there. The discussion of the name Hell's Kitchen is just one small example that opens up the broader point. In a sense, it doesn't matter where the name actually originated or what this space is officially called. It is more interesting to consider what a name means for the people who live here, and how what they think about the name might influence the things they do in this space.

My research turned up a lot of different opinions about what the neighborhood should be called. These opinions were remarkable for what they had in common, which was a shared understanding that the neighborhood was really *bad* until not too long ago. Most people who had been there for decades, and even some who were there for less, had stories about just how bad it used to be. Darrick was happy that the prostitution which "plagued" the area until recently had been subdued since he arrived. Franc had a friend who lived in Hell's Kitchen in the early 1990's

whom he never wanted to visit because "there were drug addicts everywhere". When Sara first moved to the neighborhood she says there were crazy people screaming on the streets and that her parents begged her to move somewhere else. More than once, Watty told me the story of his outwardly sweet and gentle neighbor who, it later came to light, worked for the Irish mob disposing of bodies by chopping them up into little pieces. Whether they want to call it Hell's Kitchen or Clinton, people use these stories as a means of legitimizing what they think the neighborhood should be called, either rejecting—Clinton—or defiantly appropriating and overcoming—Hell's Kitchen—the past that still clearly haunted this space.

While there is no doubt truth in these stories that people tell about the bad old days, the question that interests me, again, is one of how that 'truth' emerges and changes in a way that is intertwined with the spaces and practical activities of everyday life in the present. How is history being revived and enacted, just *there,* in the 'now-time' of West Forty-Sixth?

In *Marxism and Literature*, cultural critic Raymond Williams describes a kind of collectively produced and shared understanding of history that I slowly came to recognize in the activities of people on West Forty Sixth. In a section called *Tradition* Williams writes:

> "[T]radition has been commonly misunderstood as a relatively inert, historicized segment of a social structure: tradition as the surviving past. But this version of tradition is weak at the very point where the incorporating sense of tradition is strong: where it is seen in fact as an actively shaping force. For tradition is in practice the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits. It is always more than an inert historicized segment; indeed it is the most powerful practical means of incorporation. What we have to see is not just 'a tradition' but a *selective tradition*: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification." (1977, 115. Emphasis in the original)

Tradition, Williams argues, needs to be understood much less as something handed down from the past than as a key element of social and cultural organization in the present. Individuals,

groups, and entire societies selectively produce and refine traditions according to changing social conditions at any given moment. Benjamin surely would have appreciated this argument.

Traditions are not feel-good celebrations of the past, but are instead a "historical and cultural ratification of the contemporary order". Williams argues that institutions—families, civic associations, cities, and even bigger aggregations—play a key role in mediating and consolidating these selective traditions by absorbing, preserving, and perpetuating them as further folds of enacted memory. Because they can play this subtle role in the ratification of the status quo and, I submit, in the justification of whatever it takes to get by or perform daily life with minimal disruption, traditions can be understood as a crucial part of how hegemony *takes place*.

So how and in what sense is it possible to identify something like the process of selective tradition-making on West Forty-Sixth Street? As in all urban locations and as the stories from daily life here show is still happening in the present, countless lives, actions, and events have circulated through this space over time. Which ones are granted presence by the contemporary social order there? While some lives and labors are etched in popular knowledge or enacted memory, others are unknown or selectively forgotten. Some things get suppressed, erased, and banished. Others are valorized in ways that are not always innocent. Thinking about tradition in this way opens up another way to explain exactly how what goes on in everyday life in a particular location is intimately related to broader historical currents, social formations, and political challenges. In other words, tradition—the selective activation of the past in particular moments of the present—is part of the social infrastructure which can be found in places like West Forty-Sixth.

The Block Association

Over the course of my three years there I spent a lot of time at West Forty-Sixth Street Better Block Association meetings and functions. The Block Association meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:00PM in the large auditorium-cum-community meeting space on the ground floor of Hartley House. Sometimes there are as many as twenty-five people at these meetings, but ten or so was more typical[54]. Depending on what is on the agenda, meetings lasted anywhere from forty-five minutes to two hours.

The demographic profile of the Block Association is not surprising. With a few notable exceptions, members tended to be single, to have lived on West-Forty Sixth for several years if not decades, and to be aged 40 or older. There seemed to be a pretty even mix in terms of gender, sexual preference, and class, but a distinct majority were white. Many times I noted a young person or a person of color who showed up at one meeting never to be seen again. I was never sure quite what to make of this. There is a commitment to a particular style of civic participation that seems to be shared by most active members, and it could be that newcomers of different political or social persuasions were not particularly compelled by this. The lack of interest might also be attributed to the fact that the things that were discussed most frequently at these meetings take a certain kind of pedantic zeal to get into and want to revisit[55]. Further, it seemed likely that

[54] Attendance was somewhat seasonal—higher in the winter and far lower in the summer.

[55] For example, over the course of the three years of meetings I attended, there was an ongoing issue with some metal tree grates from the sidewalk of the 400 block. The holes in several of these grates needed to be enlarged so that the trunks of the trees could grow. It took a year to figure out which city agency to contact about this. Then the grates disappeared and nobody knew where they went. Then the Block Association decided they wanted the grates back so that they could hire a private blacksmith to do the work. There was an update about this at virtually every meeting, and as of the time of writing the grates are still not back in place. Not exactly the stuff to inspire passion, but an example of the kind of minor alterations that can add up and slowly change a space while most people are not paying attention.

there might be something about this civic commitment and zeal that worked to the exclusion of others who did not share or came up against it.

According to the bylaws, which were ratified in 1981, the Block Association's purpose is to "promote a better neighborhood through the monitoring of city services and to initiate innovative programs which will improve and benefit the community." That mission could be pretty broadly interpreted, but the Block Association as it was constituted during my study stuck mostly to very local "quality of life" related things. Over the course of the meetings I attended, the vast majority of conversations focused on things like garbage, traffic, rats, noise, and things of that nature. The solution most commonly proposed to solve these and other problems[56] was to call 311[57]—"Have other people call too . . . and not just once. Keep calling!"

As part of their ongoing mission to improve and benefit the community, the Block Association also throws parties and events. A couple times a year they will have a gathering in the courtyard at Hartley House or in a bar called the Landmark Tavern on Tenth Avenue. In addition, they throw fundraisers now and then and they have been able to raise thousands of dollars for Hartley House, the Ryan Chelsea Community Health clinic on Ninth Avenue, and the social programs at the churches on the street. Members also participated in the annual city-wide "It's Your Park" day—when residents all over New York City are encouraged to pitch in and volunteer to clean up the parks in their neighborhoods. In fact, I first got to know Darrick on one of these days while we planted daffodil bulbs in the patch of soil next to the playground in

[56] Noisy neighbor, icy sidewalk, suspicious vehicle parked outside apartment, spotted someone doing work on the exterior of a building without a permit, idling vehicles releasing fumes into building, dead animal on the sidewalk, saw a utility worker sitting in a truck urinating into a bottle and then emptying into the storm drain—all actual situations reported at meetings.

[57] 311 is New York City's "one stop" call in service for every imaginable non-emergency need. 311 provides all sorts of information to New Yorker's who need it. It is also the number to call with all manner of complaints, which are then registered in a data-base and given a "case number" until the issue is deemed to be resolved.

Mathews-Palmer Park. The Block Association recently started hosting events there too, but that is another story . . .

The only time Block Association meetings got a really good turn-out was when something dramatic had just happened or when a perceived moral calamity was underway. When there was a high-profile crime on the street[58] or when there is a proposal involving something like a strip-club, a bar, or a "DVD[59]" store in the surrounding area, people will show up to find out what is going on and voice opinions. Occasionally there were dramatic conflicts in these contexts. In the spring of 2009, for example, Sara spearheaded an attempt to get one of the nightclubs at the end of the block shut down on the grounds that there were drugs on the premises—an allegation that was based on information from internet reviews of the place. In this case the real and hardly hidden source of popular anger was the widespread belief that club-goers were making noise, littering, puking, pissing, fighting, fornicating, and even defecating on stoops and in stairwells all the way along the route from the club to the subway at Eighth Avenue[60]. There were several heated meetings in which allegations were literally thrown[61] at representatives from the clubs, who agreed to try and do a better job monitoring these things. After a few months, the issue simply subsided and seemed to be more or less forgotten.

[58] Two murders, one stabbing, and two gun-related incidents did occur on or very near West Forty-Sixth during the period of my study. Of these, both the murders involved personal disputes under very particular circumstances in private spaces, and the gun-related incidents both stemmed from disputes that began at one of the two night clubs that occupy the half-block closest to the Hudson River.

[59] Also known as porn

[60] Interestingly, I was asked to give an opinion while this dispute was happening. The club owners and the residents knew that I had done night observations both in and outside the club and could confirm these allegations one way or the other. Instead of commenting, I directed them to other social researchers who could be contracted do this kind of study if they wanted evidence. As it turns out, my data would have told them that these problems—to the fairly limited extent they even existed—were at least equally originating from several bars on Restaurant Row, which was never mentioned over the course of these heated discussions.

[61] In the form of print outs and photographs.

When Sara was elected president of the Block Association for 2010, she wanted to infuse a little pizazz and inspire people to think about what they wanted out of the institution. One of the first things she did was pass out little slips of paper on which she asked people to anonymously write down their greatest dream for the neighborhood—the one thing that they most wished the Block Association would help make happen. The result? People wanted less dog shit on the sidewalk.

Watty was around when the Block Association first got started in the 1970s. True to character, he was a founding member. He told me that the issues back then were drug dealers and prostitutes, and that the Block Association was started as a way to try and unify residents to pressure the city to do something about those things. He said they also used to offer help with housing issues and tenant harassment, but that the focus of the Association had gradually shifted over the years. If he had to trace a line from the old focus on drugs and prostitution to the present concerns, he said, he would do it through the evolving concept of 'quality of life'. He said he was just happy that people are involved in their community. Still, he said, he sometimes thinks that the newer people on the block seem like they don't quite appreciate where this street came from and what it *is*[62].

Among current members, there seemed to be an underlying feeling that participating in the Block Association allowed them to be a part of a longer continuity and a greater sense of purpose. Exactly what that continuity and purpose might be, however, is a matter of some contention. While most members seemed to understand what they did in the context of a larger framework of civic engagement and community service that looked to the past for its inspiration, their actions suggested that their primary commitment was to making sure that people in the

[62] I interpreted this as meaning he felt new comers did not appreciate how unique of an urban setting it was and how much work and tenacity it took to make and keep it that way.

neighborhood could go on with their daily lives on the street with as little unpleasantness, inconvenience, and disruption as possible. As I argued earlier in the context of individual social reproduction, this is not, in itself, a problematic goal. The real problems arise where more enduring and oppressive constellations of power emerge from and latch on to ambitions such as these while other, perhaps more collectively radical, just, or benevolent constellations are forgotten or suppressed.

Tales from the Old West Side

I wanted to learn more about some of historical moments that have played out on West Forty-Sixth Street and to understand how they intersected with people's activities there in the present. The West Side literally seemed to have gotten a bad name long before any of the people that I knew were there. It further seemed that the West Side developed a reputation for dysfunction and disorder almost immediately after it was industrialized. By many residents' accounts, it was almost as if the place itself went wrong at some point and started to produce dysfunctional people and criminals, and as if this was something that still needed to be guarded against in this space. True? Just how bad did the West Side used to be? In order to understand what sort of continuity—what sort of social inertia—was really there in the actions of people like those on the Block Association and whether and how local history was taken up, enacted, and inscribed in space in the present, I needed to know a little more about some of the things that had happened here in the past.

One of the most interesting historical records I came across in my research was a set of surveys called *The West Side Studies*. In the summer of 1912, a team of social workers,

coordinated by the Bureau of Social Research of the New York School of Philanthropy[63] in collaboration with the Russell Sage Foundation, conducted a substantial study of the West Side. The selection of the West Side as the focus of this study was explained as follows:

> These 80 blocks which border upon the Hudson River, between Thirty-fourth and Fifty-fourth Streets, contrast sharply with almost all other tenement neighborhoods of the city. They have as nearly homogeneous[64] and stable a population as can be found in any part of New York. The original stock was Irish and German. In each generation the bolder spirits moved away to more prosperous parts of the city. This left behind the less ambitious and in many cases the wrecks of the population. Hence in this "backset" from the main current of the city's life may be seen some of the most acute social problems of modern urban life—not the readjustment and amalgamation of sturdy immigrant groups, but the discouragement and deterioration of an indigenous American community. (Goldmark 1914)

Based on this understanding, the survey team made a kind of inventory, block by block, of the people and social problems of the West Side. During the duration of the study, many members of the survey team actually lived in the community. Hartley House[65] on West Forty-Sixth Street is mentioned by name as having contributed in particularly helpful ways to the research.

The results of these surveys, published in 1914, include a wealth of description accompanied by numerous charts and diagrams tallying everything from the number of tenants per building and block to countries of origin of and number of generations removed, employment status and profession, criminal activity, and birth rates. There are also many pictures of unidentified people and various West Side settings.

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[63] Later merged with the Columbia University School of Social Work, the New York School of Philanthropy evolved from a charitable society founded in 1898 into one of the first organizations in the United States to train social workers through a program of higher education.

[64] Based on the demographic tables included in the study, this seems to be a reference to both color—white/ European—and class.

[65] Hartley House was founded in 1897 as part of the settlement house movement. One of its claims to fame is that it may have had the first after school children's program in the country, "The Children's Hour". In the lobby, there are pictures featuring some of the activities that would have been available when it first opened its doors: cooking, sewing, hygiene, language—all skills meant to contribute to the cultural acclimation, industriousness, and socialization of the people who then lived on the surrounding blocks.

The survey was subdivided into several themes that each explored a different element of the total challenging social situation on the West Side. These were published as separate sections of the greater *West Side Studies* whole. The section entitled *Boyhood and Lawlessness* focused on the youth gangs and criminal activities of young boys, calling attention to their negative social impact on the community and the troubling implications for the futures of the children involved. The lawless boy was framed as an expression of deeper social problems:

> "And, indeed, every suggestion which will tend to lessen the troubles of the Middle West Side is peculiarly needed. The whole community—from molested property owners to the most disinterested social workers—are agreed that the worst elements rule the streets and that neither police nor court authority succeed in enforcing decency and order. And the center of the problem is the boy, for in him West Side lawlessness finds its most perennial and permanent expression." (Goldmark 1914)

The authors of this section of the survey aimed to evaluate the prospects for "regenerating" such boys. A second section was titled *The Neglected Girl.* Its stated aim was to "gain some knowledge of the type of girl who is seen so frequently at the street corners and who refuses to be attracted to agencies which frankly declare a desire to improve her" (True 1914).[66] It offered numerous stories about the lives and home situations of a small sample of 65 girls whom the researchers got to know by starting a social club where the girls could come to do activities[67]. A third section, *Mothers Who Must Earn,* looked at the lives of several families in which the father was either dead, disabled, or absent, necessitating that the mother be the primary wage earner for the household. It underscored the difficulties that arise around properly looking after children in these circumstances.

[66] Though the context is different, the *West Side Studies* reflect the kind of injunctions towards improvement and the mitigation of wastage that Gidwani (2008a) argues were central to liberal ideals of capitalist 'development' in the colonial and post-colonial context, and which Katz (2011) suggests are still enacted in bourgeois sensibilities about children and childrearing today.

[67] Again, sewing, cooking, basket weaving, and "brasswork" which I take to mean polishing metal as would be an appropriate skill for a housemaid at that time.

The West Side Studies are fascinating in a number of ways. They provide a detailed empirical account of what the neighborhood was like right at the point when it was starting to reach industrial maturity. The studies also offer a sympathetic look at the daily lives of people trying to make do under some of the difficult circumstances that arose for laboring people amidst these conditions. This was a period before the advent of any social "safety net," and detailed knowledge of situations such as those described in these studies subsequently factored into the later development of state sponsored social welfare programs. Along those lines, the tone and content of the studies impart a distinct sense of the social ideas and intentions of the people who carried out the research. The writing practically crackles with the progressive liberal sensibilities that were taking root in urban areas across the United States and England at the time[68]. The introduction to the collection concludes:

> "Indeed, if there is any one truth which emerges from these studies, it is the futility of dealing with social maladjustments as single isolated problems. They are all closely interrelated, and the first step in getting order out of our complexities must be knowledge of *what exists*." (Goldmark 1914, my emphasis)

There seems to be an understanding here that the problems documented in the studies were collectively produced and that they therefore needed to be collectively mitigated through new means and explicitly *not* through the systems of law, policing, and individualized incentive which were clearly all failing to address the problems on the West Side at the time. The researchers do not purport to know exactly what these new means might be, but they do suggest that they must involve forms of social investment that benefit people who are marginalized, vulnerable, and precarious. Rather than a straightforward ethic of responsibility, this position is presented as a matter of collective necessity. The studies conclude with a strong and distinctively

[68] See McGerr (2003) for a broad overview of this period and Recchiuti (2006) for a more New York City specific account. Also see Marston (2004) for an interesting overview of such movements from a feminist geographical perspective.

progressive sense that getting by and making do need to be more than individual pursuits for individual ends. The argument is that everyone should have the dignity and security of a decent life and that rampant suffering and crises of social reproduction diminish and affect everyone. When basic dignities are not collectively achieved, a collective failure has occurred and the possibility that suffering and crisis will happen again is something that everyone is party to, even if unevenly. Addressing these demands, even in one part of one city, took a massive investment of social, political, and practical energy during the progressive era, which could explain why such efforts eventually became exhausted. Meanwhile, I suspect that the daunting prospect of such massive investment plays a role in making such ambitions and sensibilities seem almost utopian from the perspective of a much differently entrenched present.

I read the *West Side Studies* at the same time that I was starting to think about what kind of continuity the Block Association was enacting. Their bylaws state that the Block Association is meant to facilitate innovative programs to improve the community. This much seemed to echo the ideas that those social workers had embodied so many decades before. Likewise, the sensibilities of the people on the Block Association and others who lived and worked on the block seemed contingent—as they clearly also were for the progressive social workers—on the experience of encountering "what exists" in everyday life and then trying to imagine solutions for it. At the same time, the contemporary pedantic attention to so-called quality of life issues, and indeed their sensibility about what should be considered socially problematic to begin with, felt like something altogether different and devoid of that distinctive collective sensibility.

A second historical encounter shed light on what the differences might be and raised the question of why and how some of the progressive social sensibilities may have been forgotten.

On a summer night in August of 1959[69] two brutal murders took place in Mathews-Palmer Playground, just down the street from Hartley House on the 400 block. As the story goes, a Puerto Rican gang called the Vampires was supposed to rumble there with an Irish gang, but for reasons that remain unclear the fight was called off before it started. Fifteen year-old Salvador Agron and a fellow "Vampire" showed up looking for a fight, and Agron stabbed and killed two boys—Anthony Krzesinski and Robert Young—who just happened to be there in the park among a small group of white teenagers that he mistook for rivals.

For a number of reasons, Agron's crimes caused a sensational citywide outcry. There had been several other gang related killings already that summer. Agron was wearing a satin cape (remember, he was a "Vampire") at the time of the stabbings, and he was dubbed "The Capeman" by the press. When arrested, he gave a remorseless and glib confession and was ultimately sentenced to death although that sentence was later commuted to life in prison. The crimes were understandably sensational. They triggered a moral panic, and—in some ways mirroring the concerns that had been outlined in the *West Side Studies* decades before—were widely interpreted as evidence that the youth of New York City, and in particular the non-European Spanish speaking youth increasingly populating Hell's Kitchen and other working class neighborhoods, had gotten out of control and lost their sense of right and wrong amidst the throng of modern city life.

The Capeman murders boar an uncanny resemblance to the Broadway musical *West Side Story* which had been playing at the Winter Garden Theater, just a few blocks from West Forty-Sixth, not too long before these crimes took place. The musical also portrays conflict between rival white and Puerto Rican gangs on the Middle West Side where two young men are stabbed

[69] An in depth description of these events and their aftermath for the people involved can be found in McAlary (1997).

and killed. A life imitates Broadway imitates life circle was turned again in the late 1990s when Paul Simon and Derek Walcott created a musical about the actual murders called 'The Capeman"[70], which notably flopped after 68 performances.

On the day that Watty and I were walking around the neighborhood on the video tour that he requested, we went into Mathews-Palmer Park to talk about some of the history there. We talked about the huge mural on the wall of the building immediately adjacent to the basketball court. We talked about the women for whom the park is named—May Mathews and Alexandra Palmer. Both had been caretakers and stewards of the community in ways that Watty clearly identified with. When I brought up the fact that the Capeman murders had taken place on the very spot where we were standing, Watty downright shushed me. He turned his head to the side as if to avoid the camera and said quietly "We don't like to talk about that . . . would rather portray a more positive image." I felt bad about this and later edited my comment and Watty's reaction out of the final video.

The more I thought about it, the more I found it curious that a fifty year-old crime evoked this reaction. When I first heard about the Capeman murders, I assumed they would be ancient history to many of the people who live on West Forty-Sixth. I figured most of them wouldn't even know about it, and that even if they did they would simply view it as an unfortunate tragedy from a bygone era. To my surprise Watty not only knew about it, but appeared to be actively warding off the memory and the story as if they had some power to infect the present. It was as if the mere thought of disorder—of such a violent disruption to the social space of daily life as usual—was enough to shut down any possibility that this moment of the past might be available for critical appraisal.

[70] As of June 2012, some of the songs and information about Simon's musical can be accessed here: http://www.wbr.com/paulsimon/capeman/cmp/songs.html

Meanwhile, as a third and final historical encounter demonstrates, there were other moments of disorder that loomed large in the spaces of the present and in the formations that were enacted there. In the 1970s New York City was in the throes of a severe fiscal crisis. After a public bailout in 1975, New York City was one of the first instances in which the kind of forced austerity that would subsequently become a hallmark of structural adjustment programs globally was applied to a city[71]. Public spending was curtailed to the point that the City was forced to cut back on basic services like police and sanitation. Living standards deteriorated. Many affluent people and businesses left the city. Crime rates increased and the general perception was of a city in chaos and decline.

Fed up with these social conditions Curtis Sliwa—at the time, a night manager at a McDonalds in the Bronx—decided to take matters into his own hands. Sliwa formed a small band of volunteers to start patrolling the subways late at night in an effort to deter criminal activity. Though they were not armed, members of the group were prepared for physical confrontation. They wore distinctive red berets and military style clothing, and they called themselves the Guardian Angels.

Though the police and the general public were apprehensive about this kind of vigilante action, Sliwa and his Angels persisted. Membership in the organization grew, as did its media profile. They expanded their repertoire beyond the subway and began doing street patrols. They started doing "pro bono" work for different communities and businesses. So it was that in the early summer of 1988 the Guardian Angels moved to West Forty-Sixth Street.

I wrote to Curtis Sliwa to see if he would be willing to answer a few questions. I didn't expect much, but to my surprise his publicist got back to me promptly to set up an interview. Sliwa agreed to meet with me on the eighteenth floor of the Empire State Building, where he

[71] See Tabb (1982) for an excellent overview of the fiscal situation during this period.

hosts a talk show on AM Radio. When I got there, I sat in the lobby for a half hour, noting the signed picture of George W. Bush on the wall while Sliwa sat in another room on a conference call, entertaining a pitch from a business that wanted to feature him in an advertisement. He ended the call by telling them to think harder about what his image had to do with their product. When he finally brought me into his office and sat me down, he launched into what could reasonably be described as a monologue.

Sliwa is a radio personality for a reason. The forty-five minute story[72] he told me was as audaciously entertaining and spirited as I imagine a research "interview" can possibly get. The man is verbose with a distinct gift for imagery and metaphor. I would like to just cut and paste the whole transcript right here, but I will try instead to simply present a few excerpts that give a sense for the overall narrative and the flavor of our conversation.

According to Sliwa, the Angels ended up on West-Forty Sixth largely because of their own effectiveness in the midst of the crack epidemic. It all started when the theater owners of Forty-Second Street called the Angels in to try and help deal with the situation that was unfolding there. Here's Sliwa:

> "Because now all of a sudden there is this mayhem. It's chaos. People are getting robbed. There's crackheads breaking into the theaters and sawing the pipes off in off hours, you know, selling the copper and the brass, anything. And there's, like, floods. And this is like . . . you know, it's bad, Times Square. You needed to give it a colonic because of the pimps, the prostitutes, the sleaze factor. But these crackheads brought it to a new dimension. And people were dealing crack openly, the way they would be dealing nickel and dime bags of reefer. And nobody quite understood the connection with crack. So the president of the theater owners of Forty-Second Street invites us in, because nothing is working with the police. And we moved into a theater that had to be abandoned because the crackheads in '86 were so bad that they couldn't get anyone coming in. So they give us the theater, we operate out of it, and we used very aggressive tactics to push it out of 'The Deuce.' Just Forty-Second Street. So naturally, what happens? Well, business is doing well again, the crackheads have dispersed into other parts of Midtown mostly north of Forty Second—Forty-Third, Forty-Fourth, Forty-Fifth, Forty-Sixth . . . in fact, it's

[72] That's really what it was. He talked, I listened. Only at the end did I become un-stunned enough to manage a few questions.

> right in front of the *New York Times* building, which used to be on Forty-Third, so they are having kittens."

The Angels cleaned up "the Deuce" and the police and other nearby business reacted by blaming them for pushing the problem out into surrounding areas. "Shoulda' left it on the Deuce," they all said. Sliwa says the diffusion was not the Angels' fault, just a "natural progression" and an offshoot of the fact that everyone was underestimating the scope and the intensity of the crack epidemic at that point.

The business owners of West Forty-Sixth were among those up in arms. They felt that the unsavory element that had been pushed off of Forty-Second had moved up and was scaring away their customer base. Restaurant owners reacted by trying to shut down the soup kitchen at St. Luke's Lutheran Church on Restaurant Row because they said the people who frequented the soup lines there were intimidating their clientele. Sliwa again:

> "Easy, because they say, 'Look at all these homeless guys. Smelly, disheveled, loud, abrasive. Every afternoon they are chasing our customers away.' So the Lutheran minister brings me in. He says, 'I remember what you guys did on Forty-Second Street. I saw it with my own eyes. It was incredible. You did what the NYPD couldn't do.'"

Eager to save his soup kitchen by showing that the people he served were not the problem—they had been there for years after all—the pastor got the idea that the Angels should come to West Forty-Sixth and do the same thing they did on Forty-Second. He set up a meeting between Sliwa and the restaurateurs.

On the night of that first meeting it was hot. The tempers of the restaurant owners flared and they accused Sliwa and the Angels of causing the whole problem in the first place. Of course Sliwa was a cool customer:

> "I said, 'Rather than condemn us, since we didn't create the problem, why not take advantage of the techniques we have utilized to target and remove the problem?"

The restaurant owners turned the Angels away at that first meeting. Sliwa said this was understandable but that they just didn't understand what they were dealing with. He illustrated the situation by describing what Hell's Kitchen Park, just down the street at Tenth Avenue and Forty-Seventh, was like at night in those days:

> "You could go there at four in the morning—hundreds of crackheads. Swarming like bees around a beehive. Again, whatever crack they could get. Crack dealers knew, show up there and man . . . you know, you always have to have enforcers and security, because crackheads try to rip you off. So you had to have the enforcers there, but they would do anything. 'How much, how much? Jumbos, Jumbos.' Jumbos means two in a vial. 'Twenty bucks.' Then they would go out and steal something. And they would bring back the thing. And the guy would say, 'What do you think, I am going to be able to sell a battery? I need cash!' And they would . . . any way they could get money. They were desperate. And you could see them always percolating there. So I outlined the problem and a lot of the restaurateurs were like, 'huh?' Because they never ventured over to Tenth Avenue . . . In fact, Eighth Avenue became sort of like the green line in Beirut."

It wasn't long before things got so bad that the restaurant owners had no choice but to call Sliwa and the Angels back in. By then the owners were so desperate that they just straight-away asked him what he needed to operate:

> "'We need space and we need radios . . .'" No money—we are not private security—but we needed a space to operate out of because we were literally going to have to take this block back inch by inch. They are hanging out. They are literally coming onto the block and going into the restaurants in the middle of the day now, and snatching people's pocketbooks. It's like *Dawn of the Dead*. These are like zombies. They are out of control. Nobody knows how to deal with them. The criminal justice system is turning them loose because, again, they are dealing with this as if it is a simple violation instead of a felony."

It looked like Restaurant Row might be saved by the Guardian Angels. They moved into a space in a basement on the 300 block in June of 1988. No sooner did they get there than the story took another dramatic twist. The mayor at that time, Ed Koch, got wind of the situation and he was not happy. The subways in the middle of the night were one thing. A touristy street in the Times Square area was quite another. Koch decided to try and nip this vigilantism in the bud before it

got out of hand. He gave the restaurant owners an ultimatum that he thought would leave them no choice: say goodbye to the Angels or say goodbye to the services of the NYPD. Sliwa again:

> "He [Koch] meets with the restaurant owners. It's advertised. He threatens them, while the cameras are there—'If you choose to go with the rag-tag bunch of vigilantes from the Bronx led by that wisenheimer Curtis Sliwa, then you will be on your own means. We are not sending any more cops.'
>
> So the caucus goes and takes a vote. Joe Allen[73] says very politely, 'Mr. Mayor, we appreciate everything that the city has done for us. This is a gateway of the world. It's economically an engine for the city, as you know. But we are inviting them in. Half of our restaurants have closed because your police cannot get control of the situation, and the Guardian Angels, they cleaned up Forty-Second Street. They know how to do this.' The mayor was personally insulted. So Benjamin Ward[74] literally pulls the cops that would normally walk through the area and puts them all on Shubert Alley—across the street off Eighth Avenue. And the producers of Shubert Alley, production agents, theater owners, they vote not to have the Guardian Angels come on. And in fact, they tell the police, 'We don't want them. Arrest them.' So now it is almost like East Berlin and West Berlin. Again, Eighth Avenue becomes like a Maginot Line, like the green line in Beirut. If we cross over, Eighth to Seventh Avenue, we better not be on a block where there is a major theater, because now it is like the theater owners want us hunted down."

The Angels stuck to their turf and started the hard work of driving the crackheads off of West Forty-Sixth starting from Eighth Avenue and working towards the river.

Sliwa said there was a "heavy condensation" of crackheads in the buildings of West-Forty Sixth because there were many Single Room Occupancy hotels there. He described the mêlée that ensued:

> "So it is like beehives. It was like anthills, you know, worker ants everywhere, because they were working 24 hours. So we literally began taking it back inch by inch, foot by foot, storefront by storefront, foyer by foyer, because they would take over building lobbies. In fact, uh, the guy who owns the restaurant on the corner, now, is one of our main supporters . . . He was living right near Hell's Kitchen Park at the time, and he would be on his ten speed mountain bike. He lived on the top floor. He would come down the steps on the bike, because there were crackheads in the hallway, and just go right down the brownstone steps, to the store, and just, like, come back and rush into the apartment. He goes, 'It was unbearable. You guys were the only . . . you would come, and like the Red Sea, the crackheads would part. Like the Red Sea did for Moses. And you would flush them all out. It was the only time there was any peace and tranquility.'

[73] The owner of two very well-known restaurants at the time
[74] The New York City Police Commissioner at the time

> We couldn't be there all the time, because we would go from block to block, but we kept Restaurant Row, Forty-Sixth Street, clean from Eighth Avenue to Ninth Avenue."

It was hard work. Many of the Angels quit because they couldn't hack it or got kicked out because they were not up to the strict internal standards of the group.

At this point in the story I was itching to ask a few questions. I got in one about the nature of the tactics he kept referring to. He replied unhesitatingly:

> "Oh, slam and jam. Uh, we broke every rule in the book. We violated your civil rights. We tossed you upside down. We went in your pockets. We knew who the crackheads were. We knew where the crack dealers were. It wasn't some guy, you know, coming in from New Jersey to see the theater, but it might have been the guy coming in from New Jersey who parked the car in a parking lot on Eleventh to score crack in the SRO hotel. So we had it figured out. We scoped the SRO hotels, we kept data, we knew who the dealers where, we knew who the crackheads were, and we just started shaking people down, getting very physical, and just driving them out."

He said the whole strategy was a bit like the "clear and hold" tactics that changed the philosophy in Iraq. The Angels would take one block at a time and hold it while moving on to take another. At that point, they started to achieve some results, and people started to notice. Sliwa again:

> "Slowly but surely we began to have a difference. And then the Times Square Improvement District came about . . ."

His story switched from detailed description of the activities of the Angels to a much larger urban policy context just like that. This got my attention. Sliwa went on:

> "This woman, her name escapes me, recently she was part of the Bloomberg administration. They brought her into *The New York Times*, and they had a meeting, because the old 'grey lady's' office at that time was on 43rd Street. We were one of the invited participants. And Sulzberger Jr., the guy who runs the paper now, hosted the meeting and he said, 'We have to form a Times Square improvement district because we cannot let these vigilantes, the Guardian Angels, embarrass the entire community. There has to be a much more civil way of doing this, where we provide sanitation services and police—private security—but we tax, put a special tax on all commercial properties.'"

Just to make sure that I understood his implication correctly, I asked Sliwa if he thought that the Angels, by providing localized "security" services for different businesses who felt that the City could not or would not provide them, had been a precursor to modern and now prolific Business

Improvement District models. He said, "We were the catalyst." He understood his organization as having provided an early model for municipal service implementation by parties other than public agencies. Further, he thought that by achieving the results that they did, the motley Angels had shown that such results were possible with the right combination of innovation, initiative, and "tactics" and without costly resources. By showing up bigger players like the City, *The New York Times*, the Broadway theater owners, and other interests who had previously achieved less dramatic results with more resources under previous policy conditions, Sliwa felt that the Angels had played a part in spurring them to take dramatic action and triggering a policy shift.

Meanwhile, other important people were also paying attention to all of this. Sliwa again:

> "Now, it was interesting. U.S. Attorney, Southern District at that time, Rudy Giuliani, was looking at this like, 'Wow. This ragtag group of young men and young women, with no weapons, special powers or privileges, is literally taking over whole blocks and keeping them.'"

Anticipating where he was headed with this, I asked Sliwa whether he thought that the tactics which the Angels developed and employed on West Forty-Sixth Street bore a resemblance to New York City's particular uptake of the policing philosophy known as "broken windows" which had been outlined in theory in the early days of the Angels and was later put into practice by Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Sliwa said:

> "He [Giuliani] has actually said that he learned quite a bit. In fact, the guy who came up with broken windows theory, we brought him over to Japan to lecture because we have groups . . . I forget his name but . . ."
>
> "Kelling?" I said.
>
> "That's right," Sliwa continued, "He came up with that. But he said, 'Oh, yeah, a lot of this was Guardian Angels. It's obvious. Because you guys also focus on the graffiti, the small things that you treated as if they were major.' And obviously Giuliani perfected it with 'zero tolerance' . . ."
>
> "Giuliani definitely said he learned a lot when a volunteer group could be called into Times Square, the gateway of the world, and the most professional, trained police

> department was not able to get the same results we were. The reason they weren't able to get the same results we were is that we could be focused, we used a lot of the tactics that later on they were permitted to use. And there is no doubt that later on they used profiling, when Giuliani came in."
>
> "Oh yeah," I agreed.
>
> "And sometimes mistakenly," Sliwa continued. "Sometimes obviously mistakenly us too, except what we would do is apologize, dust them off, and say sorry. And luckily it didn't come back to haunt us. But clearly, we were over the top then. But . . . anarchy. You would have forty crack dealers on a whole street. It was like you were running a phalanx of crack dealers."

At this, Sliwa completed a distinct kind of narrative loop. He had started by outlining how a specific situation gave rise to a particular set of responses. He then talked about how these 'tactics' were eventually abstracted out and applied beyond the specific context in which they were born. Finally he circled back and used the original context as a means of justifying and infusing with a sense of compulsion the abstractions and tactics that mutated out from it only afterwards. It was a remarkable story, indeed. The notion that renowned urban policies like business improvement districts, Broken Windows, and Zero Tolerance might have drawn, even in some small way, from the well-spring of such a thoroughly contingent and contextual episode as the Guardian Angels incursions on West Forty-Sixth Street opens up a somewhat unconventional way of understanding how such policies take shape—not top-down or determined a priori, but reactionary and acting by appropriation and subsumption of disparate bits and pieces from actual experiences in conjunctural social space.

By the early 1990s the "crisis" conditions that had beset West-Forty Sixth and the surrounding area since at least the 1970's began to abate to a considerable degree. Sliwa described what happened then:

> "All of a sudden, the whole area had an economic revival. All the restaurants were full again. And they forgot us like a . . . like a girlfriend's number they wanted to lose."

The owner of the building the Angels had been operating out of suddenly demanded that they start paying commercial rent. Another woman whom Sliwa described as a vile "dragon lady" stepped up and offered to give them space. Shortly thereafter, in true slumlord fashion, she tried to charge them exorbitant back rents. In essence, the Guardian Angels left West Forty-Sixth Street because they got priced out.

These stories open up questions about why some aspects of the past endure in the present while others are forgotten, and the answer seems to hinge on everyday life. Some events and social formations find traction in the spaces of the routine and carry on as traditions, while others that may be viewed as potentially disruptive—or maybe just inconvenient, pie in the sky, or impractical—are suppressed or forgotten. At the same time, these stories show intriguing examples of the kinds of historical and macro social formations that have not only touched West Forty-Sixth, but that in some ways were born here and in places like this, and which needed particular forms of social infrastructure to emerge and grow. The story of the Guardian Angels in particular is almost shocking for its portrayal of policies and practices that are now global and hegemonic emerging in a seemingly slapdash, contingent way from a highly particular set of circumstances in urban space. That story further portrays a process of structural formation that came together primarily because enough people were invested in finding ways to go on with life as usual. Practices that—at least according to Sliwa—started out as acts of defiance and resiliency in the face of crisis slowly gained steam until they intersected with consolidated power and were appropriated as a means to ensure social continuity more broadly (and protect fixed capital!), at which point, an abstraction of the original idea had taken it far beyond the original spaces in which it was born and the progenitors were cast aside.

These are complicated and compelling stories. Some of the potency is surely an artifact or after effect of Sliwa's gift for narrative. Nonetheless, these stories complicate my arguments about everyday life by showing how attention to everyday practices can contribute to our understanding of how events and social formations stick in space and endure as traditions, and further, about how abstractions can emerge from and exceed particular concrete social activities in ways that circulate more broadly and get taken up and enacted elsewhere. All of these processes seem to rest on the social infrastructure of everyday life.

The past is not dead, nor is it past on Restaurant Row (Faulkner)

There goes the neighborhood?

Most people who have been there for any length of time can point to some moment when they knew the neighborhood had really changed:

> When a Buddhist-themed vegetarian restaurant opened up on the southwest corner at Ninth Avenue.
>
> When they looked into the window of the apartment across the way and saw a giant flat screen TV mounted to the wall.
>
> When an American Apparel store took over the little green grocer down the street.
>
> When the liquor store started to call itself a vintner.
>
> When people were willing to pay a million dollars to live in a weird looking condo building all the way over between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, where not long ago most people did not dare to even tread.

All of these things served as markers that some kind of transition had taken place—that the gritty backwater of a neighborhood that was once in this space was no longer fully here and was disappearing a little more day by day. While people certainly have mixed feelings about these changes, the general consensus seems to be that they are tolerable if not good and that, at the least, they are definitely preferable to a neighborhood full of violence, drug-addled criminals, and prostitutes. Sara, for example, says:

> "The neighborhood is changing a lot because with these nouveau groups coming in, they have different wants and needs for the neighborhood, like me, where I appreciate the old of the neighborhood but I want it to be cleaned up."

Sara thinks the neighborhood will only get better as new people come in and keep the good parts of "the old" while facilitating new things like more retail and cleaner streets. For Sara, there is a certain sense of value and pride in acknowledging what the neighborhood used to be like and how far it has come since then:

> "It was actually a very bad place to be. What's interesting I think is that I refer to it as Hell's Kitchen, but there are so many people, even a lot of real estate people who won't

> call it Hell's Kitchen. They want to call it Clinton. I am sure they have different reasons, but it is interesting how they try to take away that name from what it is. And you know, it's changing, and I don't know if they don't want the association from what Hell's Kitchen was, or what it means, or what. But a lot of people find that [the name Hell's Kitchen] is actually very chic."

For Sara, the name Hell's Kitchen is all about the vision that she has for the place in the future.

Watty, meanwhile, is fiercely and resolutely against the name Hell's Kitchen. I probably heard him give the talk citing his reasons for this on no less than five separate occasions—in our conversations, at Block Association meetings, even to random patrons at the Ritz. Watty says that the name Hell's Kitchen "does not give the appropriate information" because it references a place that he thinks long ago ceased to exist. Related, he thinks the name conveys a negative connotation and that it invites trouble. As an example, he mentions the same park at Tenth Avenue and Forty-Seventh that Curtis Sliwa said was once like a beehive for crack addicts:

> "They called it 'Hell's Kitchen Park', and look what they got when they did that—a drug infested, crime infested park. It didn't open pristine like it is. It *is* a very troubled park"

Watty views the name as having attracted a negative element to that park. He worries that the name could do the same thing to the neighborhood—that the neighborhood that was once Hell's Kitchen might reappear in the present if people are not careful to avoid conjuring it back. What's funny is that Hell's Kitchen Park is now a beautiful—and very securitized—space. Franc hung out there all the time, and he and I played chess there. But Watty seems to feel that underneath the pristine façade there is—still, present tense and as with the capeman—an element of trouble, danger, and disorder that could flash up and take it over. Similarly, when Sara named an event that the Block Association was throwing for kids in Mathews-Palmer Playground "Hell's Kitchen Summer Fest", Watty was extremely worried about who might show up. Instead of Hell's Kitchen, Watty is a booster for the name Clinton. He believes Clinton reflects a legacy of improvement that was started by Dewitt Clinton himself, and which was later continued through

the spirit of the Special Clinton District legislation that has protected the low-rise character of the area since 1974.

Sentiments about the direction of the neighborhood and disagreements over the name of the place speak volumes about the changes that are going on there. Despite their differences of opinion over the semiotics, there are some telling similarities between Watty and Sara's positions. They both impart a sense that the neighborhood has changed, and for the better. They both attempt to selectively curate certain aspects of the past and leave others behind. They both view the name as a sort of conduit between this past and the material and social space of the neighborhood in the present. Likewise, they both treat the name of the place as something like an exercise in brand management. The changeover and the movement away from the really bad past is almost done, now just a matter of maintaining what has been accomplished and moving into the future. Clear and hold. Life continues on as usual and, at least for them, that is progress.

Lost in the flood?

Of course Watty is right to think that there are residual aspects of the past that might still flash up to overwhelm the present. There are. They just might be different, or at least more varied, than the ones he imagines.

Benjamin's most enduring and poignant image is probably that of the angel of history (1968). Facing the past with out-stretched wings caught up in the winds of time—"a storm is blowing from paradise"—the angel eternally faces towards the past. The angel can only watch in horror as the wreckage of the catastrophes and possibilities of history visibly pile up in the wake of its movement through the present. Benjamin offers this image as a critique of progress, which he says is the source of the storm. But I wonder if it isn't also a bit of a play on the way that history can come to be curated in certain situations. What kind of angel looks at the past with

eyes only for wreckage and horror? Perhaps the real critique hinges on what such a peculiar angel does not or cannot see.

There are plenty of people around West Forty Sixth who remember a different old neighborhood and tell a different story about the past than the narratives of crime and chaos that are so abundantly brandished by some. The first time I ran into someone who narrated a totally different version of the past it took me by surprise and delighted me. I was sitting and talking to a man named Doug about his experience in living in a rent controlled apartment in a building with a shady, negligent landlord when he started to tell me a different story about how the neighborhood used to be:

> "I don't know if anybody has mentioned this," he said, "but there was very, very open prostitution here."
>
> "Yeah," I said halfheartedly, next expecting the usual spiel about how much the neighborhood had changed for the better**.**
>
> "Not even thinly veiled, He said. "Completely open. I mean, you could see tits. You know, police cars would pull up and roll down windows and just talk to the prostitutes because it was just considered, 'Oh, nothing we can do about that,' I guess. I had the same feeling, and it was here before I was, so I didn't object to it. And back then, I felt endangered if I were in an empty part of the city. That is what scared me. And you were never alone on this street. I was never bothered. I think there is that New York thing where people can read you. I was very rarely approached by a prostitute because it was very clear who lived here and who didn't. You know, I used to sit on the stoop and we would sort of laugh like, 'Ohp, that is the seventh time that car has circled.' And you know, watching the Hasidic Jew circling around and around. I loved the fact that people felt like this was such an anonymous neighborhood that they could do anything. And yet, when you live here it is not anonymous. You notice every little detail. So I could watch all of that. And then my brother would come to visit from Boston with his friends. He is a musician. And I would come walking home to see my windows open and they would be like, 'Heeeyyyy!' And I would say, 'Ok guys, I have to live here. Could you please not talk with the prostitutes out my window?'
>
> Now Doug had my attention, and we were laughing.
>
> He continued, "For me it was all sort of amusing. And for a few years, one of my friends moved in here from Boston. She was a very attractive woman and she was bartending in the neighborhood in a couple of different places. She had to turn herself out to go to work

at night and it was the same thing. She didn't feel endangered or particularly offended. She got very accustomed to opening the door and going out and saying, 'Nope, not working, thanks. Nope.' So because all that existed before, I never objected to it.

"It was just sort of part of the character of life here?" I asked.

"Absolutely," he said. "I even developed my own theories about why people would be addicted to crack. I could tell when someone had just gotten high, because I felt like they were not at all dangerous. They were very benevolent, like someone who *really* meant you no harm and just wanted to feel connected to you. So you got this sort of very friendly outpouring. I would sometimes interrupt people smoking crack, for example, under the steps, and they would be like, 'Oh man, I'm sorry. You shouldn't have to see this.' There was sort of a benevolence to that culture, that I saw. Of course it is also a very violent culture. That may sound ridiculous. I know there was violence too, but there was sort of . . . I sort of got what they were going for. I am being very long-winded here, but what I am saying is that when things got cleaned up I thought to myself, 'Oh, what is this fascist city coming to?' I really can't imagine walking through that now, but I do long for the gritty days . . . One of the things I really long for is people riding on the subway with a beer can in a sack, which used to be totally ok. That was the spirit of New York to me. Just that fact that . . .

"If I ever wanted to," I said in my best approximation of a liberated commuter, "I could crack open a beer right here on the way home from work and nobody would even blink!"

"It was totally acceptable!" Doug said. "It was common sense. Like, if you were not a troublemaker, you could have a beer. Now if you are hootin' and hollerin' all drunk, then you would be bothered. But if you were just some working person, then that would be totally acceptable. So I sort of miss that all that got thrown out, like the baby with the bathwater. All sorts of common sense . . . like the smell of pot all over the city. [My neighbor] will always report to me, 'Oh, I smelled pot on the street the other day!' We both think that that is a sign of the renegade freedom that we both miss, that went away from this city. People smoking pot, you can just drink a beer . . . not feeling like you are under the watch of a security camera at all times."

"Yeah?" I prodded.

"Because that does, frankly, scare me," he said. "The fact that . . . I want to feel safe but . . . Maybe it was a fool's paradise, but I always did feel safe. I never felt threatened. And actually I got mugged twice in New York, never in this neighborhood. Once in a very nice neighborhood, and once in the middle of nowhere, really late at night. My fault. But even after that I never got like, 'Hhhhh, I am scared now.' It just seems to go with the territory. You live a big city, you are at risk of *something*. So I never felt like this neighborhood was particularly dangerous, or even like I said, for my woman friend who lived here, because it was always so active."

"This is interesting," I said. "There are a couple of things that I hear you saying. The first is something about how you get used to it, you get acclimated to things . . ."

"Yeah," he said. "Especially when it is here first."

"And another thing," I continued, "is that you are saying the actual experience of these things told you that it was way less dangerous than the hype about it made it all seem."

"Exactly," he said.

"So it turned into a monster once it got detached from that experience?" I asked.

"Absolutely," he said. "One thing, for example: My parents were living then, and in a phone call with my father . . . I wish I could think of a real for instance . . . but I would say, 'Oh I blah blah blahed last night.' And he would say, 'You were out on the street last night?!' And I would say, 'Well, yeah.' People really thought that it was like a war zone, right outside my own house."

"In the 80s, early 90s it was all crisis and murder!" I said.

"I don't know if you know," he said, "but there are people who wouldn't ride the subway. They thought going into the subway was instant doom. Or they would not set foot in Central Park. I remember people absolutely saying, 'I would never go into Central Park.'"

"Because you would get mugged?" I asked. "Or 'Wilded'[75]?"

"Yeah," he said, "exactly . . ."

"It is sort of an irony or weirdness when things get inflated into this general phenomenon that is somehow going to happen to everybody even though it is really just a one-time, couple-time thing." I said.

"Exactly," he said. "The hype was incredible. There was a time, I guess it was early Giuliani, when I would ride my bike into Central Park and sit on a bench, like in the Ramble[76]. And over the course of 20 minutes I would see two cops on foot, and then a scooter would come by, and then I would see a horse. And one time I finally said to one of them, after the fourth or fifth time in several months that I went up there and it was like this, 'Did something happen?' 'What do you mean?' 'Well why are there so many police here all of a sudden.' 'Nothing is different. It has always been like this.'"

[75] This is reference to the case of the Central Park jogger that took place in 1989. A woman was savagely raped and beaten, and a group of five black teenagers from Harlem was wrongfully imprisoned for the crime. The crime caused a moral panic, and "wilding" was a highly racialized and bestial term that the police claimed one of the boys used, which was subsequently used by public officials and the media to describe the activities of these and other youth who allegedly roamed the park in packs looking for victims.

[76] A wooded section of Central Park featuring winding walking paths and relatively dense foliage. The area is also known as a sight for sex, often anonymous and reputedly gay.

“Cops have always been a part of nature,” I joked.

He continued. “I said, ‘With all due respect, I have been coming here for years and this really is different.’ ‘No it’s not.’ And all the bushes were cut back so there was no place to be invisible in the park. And I was thinking ‘Why not totally bulldoze the park and just shine a light on it. Then you really wouldn’t risk people doing things that you weren’t seeing’ There was this feeling that they wanted the city to have no hidden corners, inside and out, under Giuliani. I found that so sad. Like here is this city, and suddenly we are not trusted to be alone. . . .”

“So it seemed to me,” he continued, “and I am saying Giuliani, but it was also the zeitgeist, anything that was sort of . . . I don’t even know how to say it, edgy, was not ok suddenly, and I thought, ‘This is New York City! What is happening?’ So I guess the connection I am trying to make is that this neighborhood got cleaned up with that. And when I say it got cleaned up I mean that the prostitution and all of that got cleaned up. And when I saw that, I sort of mourned it because I didn’t want the other parts of the city to be cleaned up either because I was enjoying it. I was enjoying the nightlife and I enjoyed people sunbathing nude. I liked that people walked around Central Park selling beer, and I really loved that a Bud was a dollar. That is what it was in the deli too. They weren’t even gouging you!”

“No markup?!” I said.

“Clearly they bought it by the case, but they passed on the savings,” he said. We laughed hard at that. “There was a definite renegade feeling in the city, but I always felt like it was benevolent. And I know that could sound foolish. I know there was a lot of violence . . . but it wasn’t all violence. I guess that is what I am, round-about, trying to get to.”

“Sure,” I said.

“And I saw the prostitution going out of this neighborhood as part of homogenization of everything,” he said. I looked at all of that happening at the same time as, ‘There goes the character.’ And yet, as I said, would I want the character of open prostitution on my street right now? I don’t know how that would feel. I wonder if I would be annoyed by it or disgusted by it.”

“Or maybe annoyed for the first month,” I speculated, “and then . . .”

“And then I would get used to again and wonder if it was sad or if it was some flaw in me that I could co-exist with it and not be outraged,” he said.

“I don’t know if that is a flaw in you”

“It is hard to see. It is hard to look at your younger self and think, ‘Was I logical? Am I romanticizing this?’”

Romantic or not, Doug's account of the way things used to be offers a tempering counterpoint to the myriad stories about how bad things used to be. He is not the only one who told such stories but his were some of the most insightful and his enthusiasm for the merits of the past was rivaled perhaps only by Carmen.

Doug doesn't attend Block Association meetings and is not generally involved in the kinds of neighborhood affairs that are discussed there. Still, he does contribute his own little imprint to the place. He maintains a tiny sort of garden in a planter in the little three by seven rectangle right outside the window of his sidewalk level apartment, right next to where the garbage cans sit. Among the vines and plants, he likes to display different found objects out there just to give people something interesting to look at and think about. He fantasizes about getting a lawn chair some day and just sitting there doing whatever the hell he wants—reading the paper, drinking a beer (maybe even selling one?!), and talking to people passing by as if to say I'm still here, and that gritty old benevolence is not entirely gone just yet.

A snapshot of Doug's garden

When evaluating and exorcising the specters of history, Doug's story serves as a reminder that the present order is not, despite what the cops might say, a natural and immutable condition—that it is all too easy to overlook or deliberately forget the alterity that persists even amidst wreckage. Numerous scholars (e.g. Chronopoulos 2011, Delany 1999, and Reichl 1999) have lamented what was lost when New York City, and in particular Times Square and the surrounding areas, were "cleaned up" in the early 1990s. They, like Doug, argue that many of the aspects of a bygone New York, which are now remembered and discussed as "seediness" were actually reflections of the real mixed uses, tolerance, heterogeneity, and collective generosity that were embedded in the lived fabric of New York City at that time. It may not have be neat or predictable, but the West Forty-Sixth Street that Doug remembers reflects a different sociality—one with a much more overt and indeed benevolent sense of the qualities of social mingling that Micheal Sorkin (1999) calls "propinquity" and Samuel Delaney (1999) calls "contact"—than the one that seems to be dominant there today. Much was forgotten and willed forgotten when the new common sense overwrote the other, though as Doug's stories attest, not by everyone.

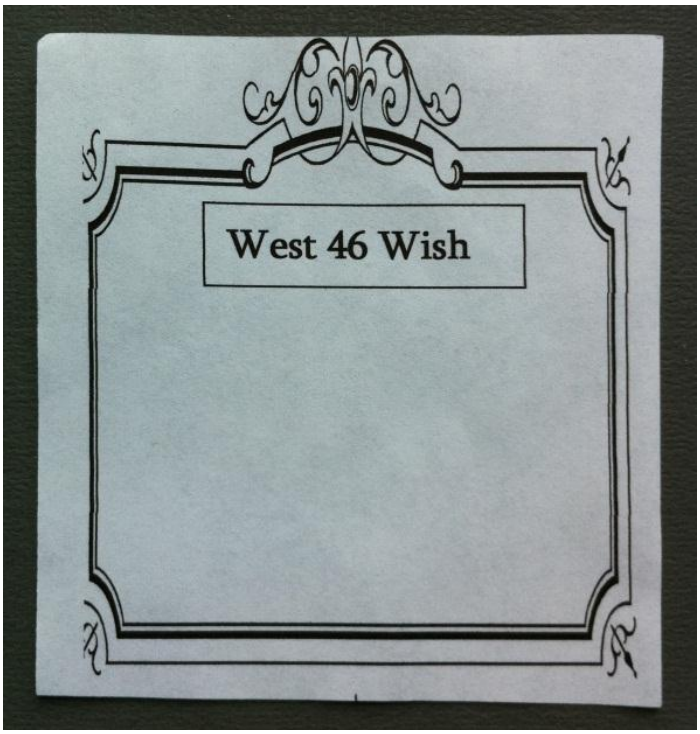
Lamenting a lost past, however, is not quite adequate to the situation. Instead, notions that the Hell's Kitchen of the past is entirely gone should be greeted with much critical skepticism. Raymond Williams writes:

> It is at the vital points of *connection*, where a version of the past is used to ratify the present and to indicate directions for the future, that a selective tradition is at once powerful and vulnerable. Powerful because it is so skilled in making active selective connections, dismissing those it does not want as 'out of date' or 'nostalgic,' attacking those it cannot incorporate as 'unprecedented' or 'alien.' Vulnerable because the real record is effectively recoverable, and many of the alternative or opposing practical continuities are still available. Vulnerable also because the selective tradition of a 'living tradition' is always tied, though often in complex and hidden ways, to explicit contemporary pressures and limits." (1977, 117. Emphasis in the original)

As I have foreshadowed in this section and as I further detail in the next section, such "points of connection" are evident on West Forty-Sixth Street. They are there in the stories that people tell about the past and also in the sensibilities that they enact in the practical activities of the present. At these points there is a subtle conflict between, on the one hand, the suppression of some aspects of the past alongside the selective curation of some other aspects and, on the other, the perhaps subordinated but still available narratives about the differences that once were, might still be, and could be in the future if carried forward in action. The makings for both of these divergent histories and the futures that they suggest are suspended like solutes in solution, just *there,* in the material and social spaces of everyday life in the present. Such conflicts over which aspects and points of connection to acknowledge and incorporate into the present persist between institutions, groups, and individuals and even within individual people themselves. This is significant because conflicts over how and whether or not to see the blood, the misery, the violence, even the dog shit, or the benevolence, the cooperation, and the propinquity that are all true and available within every historical geography are ultimately conflicts over what the present social order is and what the future social should look like. As I argue in the next section, these can be analyzed not only as discrete events and narratives, but as conflicts about which existing abstractions are going to be taken up, and what new ones are going to be created and embedded in social space. The outcomes of these conflicts can deepen and further existing power relations and hegemonic social formations, but can also reveal points where they could be destabilized.

As with Benjamin, these observations are not merely stylistic, discursive, or philosophical. They raise consequential questions about the kinds of social relations that are being produced and reproduced here. Hegemony is at once powerful and vulnerable because it

depends on social forms and practices that are embedded in the practical activities and experiences of everyday life. Thinking about history and tradition is a good point of entry into understanding how this is so, but these issues open up to reveal a much broader conflict, a never ending battle between abstract and concrete that is always taking place in and through everyday life, never complete and always invested. I want to sharpen focus on this social space of conflict and indeterminacy within the production and reproduction of hegemony as it was manifested on West Forty-Sixth.



Versus

> "The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will. The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men [sic], the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. -- real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process."
>
> Karl Marx—*A Critique of the German Ideology* (2000, 9-10)

> "To study the everyday is to wish to change it. To change the everyday is to bring its confusions into the light of day and into language; it is to make its latent conflicts apparent, and thus to burst them asunder."
>
> Henri Lefebvre— *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume Three* (2005, 226)

At the Block Association meeting on June 1, 2010, there was a lot of talk about the mural in Mathews Palmer Park[77]. Most of the conversation centered on what it would take to restore the mural and whether or not it was worth the investment. Watty had been making some phone calls, and he figured that it would cost somewhere between three and six thousand dollars just to get a professional assessment from someone qualified to say whether and how the thing could be

[77] The mural is called "Against Domestic Colonialism". It was created as a part of a collaborative community project in 1972. The muralist--Arnold Belkin, an associate of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera who worked in a similar style—developed the mural in discussion with residents who were then very worried about urban renewal efforts such as those that had leveled communities at the sites of Lincoln Center to the north, and the Port Authority Bus Terminal to the south. The mural uses the side of a whole building (roughly 60 feet wide and 50 feet tall), and depicts a multiracial group pushing down a set of grey monolithic tower blocks and raising up a colorful and diverse array of buildings, flowers, and signs. One of the signs originally read, "Communities for people, not profit." Another said, "We the people demand control of our communities." Since the time it was created, large sections of the mural have been plastered over or have flaked off.

restored. Someone asked whether grants were available to do this. Probably not, someone else replied. Another person worried about the logistics involved in coordinating between the building the mural was painted on, the Parks Commission, and the Heritage Society, which would actually oversee the restoration. Then the discussion turned abruptly to the question of whether the mural was really worth spending thousands of dollars on:

> "Yes, why not?" said one woman.
> "We should spend it on kids," someone else said.
> "Or fix the street," said another person.

This escalated for a while. One person suggested that the money would be better spent hiring a private security detail for the street. Someone else chimed in that other projects[78] the Block Association had started might end up costing more money than expected, and that a reserve fund should be kept for that.

At that point the treasurer raised the possibility that the restoration of the mural itself—not just the assessment to see if it could be restored, but the actual work of fixing it—could cost up to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. That triggered a cacophony of opinion. One man urged everyone to think about the Block Association as if it were a business. "This doesn't seem like a good investment," he said. Sara countered this argument by talking about a 'broken windows' approach to neighborhood improvement. She explained how it was a philosophy all about quashing small things like graffiti, panhandling, and minor forms disorder because those things are symbolically powerful and make people think they might be able to get away with other, more sinister things in a place. The Block Association should consider restoring the mural, she said, because the park would invite criminal activity if it looked run down. If, on the other hand, the mural were to be fixed it up, it would send a message that this was an orderly place and

[78] Specifically, the widening of those iron tree grates, which seemed to come up at every meeting in a way that was never resolved.

deter crime. A few other people agreed about this point, and even brought up further nuances of the theoretical argument behind 'broken windows'.

Just as it seemed like the restoration camp was gaining momentum, another guy, a recent comer to the neighborhood and a condo owner said, "I am all for historic preservation, but, I'm sorry, that mural is basically ugly. It also doesn't really belong in Hell's Kitchen today because its message is outdated." Others agreed with this and tried to pull to the conversation back to other things that might be improved with this kind of money: "How about a whole new art project?" "Revitalize the park! Clean it up and make it safe." Sara suggested updating the mural with a kind of spin-off that kept elements of the old one and added a few newer, more updated themes. A woman who had lived in the neighborhood for decades tried to argue against this by saying, "I am not sure that domestic colonialism is outdated." Nobody commented on that, but another condo owner took the opportunity to suggest that they might just go ahead make the park private "to help get around the rules about painting and updating." Sara expressed some interest in doing this if it were possible. The president of the West Forty-*Fifth* Street block Association, who was also present for this discussion, since Mathews-Palmer Park is shared between the two blocks, said, "We are definitely interested in thinking about different options like this too."

"Against Domestic Colonialism" in its state of disrepair

Scenarios like this, where an issue led to quibbles and elicited a range of practical sensibilities and solutions from different people, were the norm at Block Association meetings. Sometimes the subject of these discussions was something virtual that—at least during the duration of my time there—never came into being. These included various forms of privatization[79] or organized campaigns against businesses or activities that had raised the ire of some resident fleetingly. Other issues could be very concrete, for example how to care for trees, what to do about flyers that were taped to lampposts, and so forth. Either way, the comments and suggestions that people made in these situations were often very revealing. Typically suggestions tended first towards the anecdotal, framing whatever the issue initially being defined was in reference to everyday experience and to the potential costs and benefits to everyday life as usual, and then towards proposing a relatively narrow range of solutions that also used life as usual as the criterion. As with the discussion of the mural, aspects of what has already been discussed in

[79] In addition to suggestions to privatize the park and hire private security for the street which I have already mentioned, some residents also suggested at various times that sanitation could be privatized. There was even talk of selling add space on waste receptacles in order to finance this proposition.

terms of tradition, or the process of selectively incorporating and activating certain elements of the past in the present were often on full display in these discussions. Concurrent with this, however, an additional and consequential kind of enacted process also seemed evident.

Scenarios deliberated and acted upon by the Block Association often evinced not only the power of everyday inertia and the ghosts of history conjured from the spaces of the street in the present, but also demonstrated the way that new social relations which innovate on the past and reflect contemporary concerns can become real in ideation, in space, and in social practice in ways which may in turn alter the course of future events. In the context of this process, seemingly minor social occurrences such as discussions at a Block Association meeting, off-hand comments or judgments made in the course of daily life, or actions taken in different instances can be read as something like snapshots of social relations in motion, of a current conjuncture, of incipient forms in which powerful abstractions are emerging from and becoming attached to lived experiences, particular narrations of the past, and concrete situations in always novel ways. This ongoing churning is what gives everyday life its constant generative heat and connects it to processes and social forces that far exceed any particular location in time or space. This is also the point where everyday life can be understood as utterly bound up with broader hegemonic and indeed 'global' social formations.

Raymond Williams (1977) cautions that hegemony must be understood as an ever unfolding and incomplete process and never as something that is fully accomplished, static, or total. Hegemonic social relations have to be continually renewed, enacted, and created through practical activity. Only in analysis of particular moments, Williams says, does hegemony ever really crystalize as a structure. When social thought treats hegemony as if it is a completed thing

or a total system, it ascribes vulnerable, partial, and historically particular conditions a kind of universality, cohesiveness, and abstract power that they simply do not have as they are lived and enacted.

Crucially for Williams, the processes of hegemonic formation need to be understood as operating through common sense, lived culture, and human emotion just as much as, if not more than, through political economy. Williams coined the term "structures of feeling" as a way to describe, without reifying, the process by which emerging hegemonic social relations constantly appear in and precipitate out from lived experience. For Williams, structures of feeling are not static objects, but a way of thinking about social relations in a manner that grapples with "selected and interpreted beliefs and acted and justified experiences" (1977, 132) as they relate to broader historical and social formations. Williams writes:

> "We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living interrelating community." (1977, 132)

For Williams, interconnections among subjectivity, feeling, and practical activity are integral to the production and reproduction of hegemony in particular situations. This argument resists any analytical separation of the social from the personal or the political from the practical sensibilities and experiences of everyday life.

Henri Lefebvre echoes and extends Williams's emphasis on the subjective character of hegemony in his critique of everyday life, which tries to understand how human social relations and broader structural formations emerge, endure, and are transformed through ongoing creative activity. Lefebvre writes:

> "[I]t is in everyday life and starting from everyday life that genuine creations are achieved, those creations which produce the human and which men [sic] produce as part of the process of becoming human: works of creativity.

> These superior activities are born from seeds contained in everyday practice. From the moment groups or individuals are able and obliged to plan ahead, to organize their time and to use whatever means they have at their disposal, reason is formed in social practice. As day follows trivial day, the eye learns how to see, the ear learns how to hear, the body learns how to keep to rhythms. But the essential lies elsewhere. What is most important is to note that feelings, ideas, lifestyles and pleasures are confirmed in the everyday. Even, and above all, when exceptional activities have created them, they have to turn back towards everyday life to verify and confirm the validity of that creation. Whatever is produced or constructed in the superior realms of social practice must demonstrate its reality in the everyday, whether it be art, philosophy or politics. At this level alone can it be authenticated. What does such and such an idea or creative work tell us? In what way and how far does it change our lives? It is everyday life which measures and embodies the changes which take place 'somewhere else', in the 'higher realms'. The human world is not defined simply by the historical, by culture, by totality or society as a whole, or by ideological and political super-structures. It is defined by this intermediate and mediating level: everyday life. In it, the most concrete of dialectical movements can be observed: need and desire, pleasure and absence of pleasure, satisfaction and privation (or frustration), fulfillments and empty spaces, work and non-work. The repetitive part, in the mechanical sense of the term, and the creative part of the everyday become embroiled in a permanently reactivated circuit in a way which only dialectical analysis can perceive." (2002, 44-45)

As with the metaphor of everyday life being like the soil from which the trees and flowers of social structures grow, here Lefebvre is articulating a sense for the way that broader social formations emerge from necessity, or from the specific practical activities associated with the production and continuation of life. He is also articulating, in a much more abstracted way, something like a social infrastructure that coheres in and through the repetitions of routine and social reproduction. As material human needs have been satisfied, altered, and even expanded over time and repetition, an overarching social body of abstractions has accumulated in the form of the ideas, beliefs, habits, desires, customs, systems of organization, and so forth, which precipitate out from these essential activities. Lefebvre describes this as a 'mode of existence' that is one with changing modes of production (2005, 162).

Lefebvre's arguments echo Marx's understanding of social production in *The Critique of German Ideology.* There Marx writes:

> "By social we understand the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or industrial stage, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation, or social stage, and this mode of co-operation is itself a "productive force". In this sense, the rhythms and realities of individual lives are inextricable from collective processes and vice versa." (2000, 10)

For Marx as for Lefebvre, it is crucial that this "productive social force" be understood not only in terms of concrete activities and material production, but also in terms of the production of ideas and abstractions that emerge from practical activity and collective life over time. Abstractions—for example languages, cultures, and shared understandings as well as specific forms of knowledge and technical expertise—are necessary to sociality and to the continuity of the activities that fulfill the material needs of humanity. At the same time, these abstractions are inextricable from the practical and social activities are necessary to their continuation.

As with the "flowers" of structure in the earlier metaphor Lefebvre, again clearly following Marx, argues that elements of this accumulated body of abstractions can, once they have emerged from practical activity, escape their particularity and even come to appear separate from or alien to it. At this point—and as some of the stories I have already told suggest—these rogue abstractions can mutate within and condition social life in unexpected ways.[80] Relations and situations that are deeply social, collective, historically specific, and contingent can come to appear natural, predetermined, universal, and immutable[81]. Power, agency, and value can seem to

[80] Lefebvre writes, "The realization of the social being known as 'human' found itself thwarted by distortions and alienations that were themselves attributable to a multiplicity of causes—the division of labor, social classes, ideologies and 'values', oppression and repression" (2005, 14).

[81] For example, the separation between work and home, the idea of a 'working day' itself (see for example Thompson 1967), or the hierarchical ordering of different bodies, all of which are historical and social artifacts rather than universal conditions. Here Lefebvre, though perhaps not deliberately and possibly in spite of himself, can be read as supporting arguments from Marxist Feminism (such as those of Federici 2004 and Mies 1986 who argue that separations between production and reproduction and notions about women's 'natural' place as being in the home have been essential to the workings of patriarchal capitalist exploitation), as well as radical race theory (such as the wide ranging work of Stuart Hall and the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2002) who argue in different ways that race is not a stable object or essence, but a shifting social historical assemblage which marks, marginalizes, exploits, and exposes different bodies to harm and death in ways that have been central to the development of modern economic and cultural systems).

originate somewhere other than in the practical activities of living people. Nonetheless, Lefebvre underscores that all of these social conditions and abstract forms can ultimately gain their "validity" only via practical activity. In other words, even the most seemingly detached or abstracted of human creations can only survive and persist to the extent that they are enacted and continually kept alive in social practice. Lefebvre's very human ambition with the critique of everyday life is to understand what these kinds of creations—the social bodies, abstractions, and cultural artifacts big and small that arise in and though everyday practical activity—can tell us about who we are and who we have the potential to become as social beings.

In making these arguments, Lefebvre is appropriating and extending central themes from a particular Marxist tradition.[82] What emerges is a palpable tension between concrete and abstract expressions of human creativity as they are negotiated in and through lived activity in an ongoing process with contours that are hard to grasp because it has no discernible beginning, end, or teleological direction. The only analytical vantage point that is possible is from the middle of things. Such is everyday life. Lefebvre writes:

> "The abstract is not the duplicate of something concrete, but the abstract and the concrete are inseparable, and their unity makes up the everyday. Critical analysis of daily life is thus situated in a region that is difficult to grasp and express. The concrete existence of objects through the abstract assimilates them to abstract idealities that lead to practical, concrete actions: law, right, the accord between wills promoted to the title of contract, and so on." (2005, 163)

In everyday life, there is an ongoing interaction between concrete and abstract wherein both constantly emerge from and influence the other in ways that are difficult to untangle. The goal of analysis in such a context is not to understand causation per se, but to understand, as with Gramsci, the social forces at play in a particular social situation. To complicate things further,

[82] In particular, Marx's materialist humanism, immanent ontology, and historical account of the emergence of capitalism from the *Grundrisse*, which have subsequently been taken up and analyzed by thinkers such as Delueze and Guattari (1983), Negri (1984), and Read (2003). See also Mann and Wainwright (2008) and Gidwani (2008a).

Lefebvre, like Williams, is clearly suggesting that subjectivity—the world of experience, feeling, emotion, pleasure, and pain, as these intersect action—plays a crucial and underappreciated role in the way that the concrete and abstract are mediated and negotiated in practice. All of these elements are crucial to the dialectical analysis that Lefebvre aspires to produce. They also deepen and extend that argument about social infrastructure that I have tried to develop throughout this text.

Fittingly but problematically, the place where Lefebvre most clearly applies these dialectical arguments is not in any of his writing on everyday life, but in his most heavily cited and influential work, *The Production of Space* (1991). I say fittingly because, like Benjamin, Lefebvre's concerns are simultaneously temporal and spatial. His analysis of the way that abstract and concrete interact, are immanent to everyday life, and combine in accumulated social force ultimately hinges upon space as a multivalent social medium. I say problematically because, since it contains the most clear application of Lefebvre's dialectic, many have treated *The Production of Space* as if it encompasses all that is worth knowing about Lefebvre's thinking. As a result, arguments about the production of space have often been divorced from his other work, leaving his life-long interest in everyday life largely disregarded by many of his most influential acolytes.[83]

In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre refines an argument that hegemonic formations are made real only insofar as abstractions (the state, private property, the nuclear family, categories of social distinction and political economy, etc.) are able to realize themselves concretely through practical activity. Such assertions, clearly related to the arguments from his critique of everyday life, are augmented by further claims that such formations and abstractions also depend

[83] That Lefebvre's highest abstract expression should be severed from the particular context of the more fraught work out of which is was born seems strangely fateful and ironic given the content of his arguments.

on and emerge through specific productions of *space*, or, the enactment of social relations in spatial form. This insight has been taken up and expanded by spatial-social thinkers including Brenner (2004), Harvey (1982, 1985), and Smith (1984), among others, who have extended it to produce influential accounts of the way that processes like state-formation, the organization of territory, and capitalist accumulation are dependent on spatial productions which are continuously and unevenly achieved through various circuits of circulation across scales. Such arguments have been intellectually important and politically powerful because they explain how the abstract can come to dominate the lived in inequitable and often violent ways. At the same time, Harvey and Smith in particular tend to emphasize the political-economic and detached rather than the cultural and embodied aspects of the production of space, and in so doing have sometimes upheld analytical separations that Lefebvre strived to move beyond while reifying processes that he worked to show the contingency of and to 'burst asunder'.[84]

From the perspective of everyday life, *The Production of Space* yields a somewhat different line of inquiry and analysis than the one that is most often ascribed to it. To start, Lefebvre is clear that he is trying to work against any totalizing or overly systematic theory. He says:

> "Some over-systematic thinkers oscillate between loud denunciations of capitalism and the bourgeoisie and their repressive institutions on the one hand, and fascination and unrestrained admiration on the other. They make society into an 'object' of systematization which must be 'closed' to be complete; they thus bestow a cohesiveness it utterly lacks upon a totality which is in fact decidedly open—so open indeed that it must depend upon violence to endure." (1991, 11)

Rather than focusing on any particular abstract formation—for example capitalism or the state—Lefebvre evokes Gramsci by name, calling attention back to the question of hegemony as a

[84] See Kipfer et al. 2008 for a more extensive and insightful version of this argument. See also Gidwani 2008a, chapter five for an argument that, while it has nothing to do with Lefebvre, parallels these arguments from a post-colonial perspective.

process, its openness, its social character, and the messiness that it entails. What Lefebvre is after with the production of space is not a political economy of space or even a geography, but a kind of analysis that can explain the relationships among the physical, mental, and social aspects of hegemony as a social and spatial processes. In other words, he seeks a way of thinking about hegemony that accounts for the interplay between the material world, the subjective aspects of everyday experience, the abstract formations that have accumulated within and saturated these, and the creative activities that drive them all. This kind of thinking, he says citing Hegel and Marx, requires forms of analysis that begin with abstractions and then follow them to the concrete. Instead of trying to understand abstract processes as they dominate space, however, Lefebvre wants instead to attend to the much more subjective and cultural processes through which particulars are produced as universals (1991, 15).[85] It is towards these combined ends that he proposes a spatial-social dialectic.

Lefebvre outlines what he calls a "conceptual triad" consisting of:

> 1) *Spatial practice,* which is related to the production and reproduction of broad social formations in space. Social relations are performed in particular locations and social spaces, and spatial practice is what ensures continuity within and across societies. Lefebvre writes: "The spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it." (1991, 38)
>
> 2) *Representations of space* which are tied to the relations of production. These impose order through knowledge. Lefebvre describes this as "conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers" (1991, 38). This, he says, is the dominant space in any society.
>
> 3) *Representational spaces* which are linked to the minor, clandestine side of social life. This is space as actually *lived.* Lefebvre writes: "This is the dominated—hence, passively

[85] This argument has intriguing parallels to Gayatri Spivak's (1999) approach to subaltern history. Spivak aspires to produce a "history of the margin," or a genealogical account of the processes through which a hegemon tries and fails to complete itself by appropriating and effacing difference. She tells the story of imperialism as a series of interrupted, wounded, and never completed attempts to subsume difference. Rather than trying to replace one totalizing account with another or offer a simple history of the marginal, her analysis renders a displaced and troubled hegemon through stories of subalterntity—that which colonial hegemony selectively excluded and suppressed but could never fully subsume.

> experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects." (1991, 39)

Partly because it consists of three pieces, and partly because, at least in English, the names for representations of space and representational spaces are virtually indistinguishable, this triad is notoriously bewildering. I have no desire to delve into the debates and different interpretations, but I do think that there are some under-explored dimensions to this formulation that become particularly compelling in the context of everyday life.

First and clear enough, Lefebvre is arguing that space is complex, multivalent, social, lively, dialectical, and political and not a merely a container, a background, or a passive grid. For Lefebvre, there is no such thing as space outside of the social. Space is only produced through social activity and all space is social. Likewise, space is always both a product and an active component of social activity. Further, Lefebvre shows that space needs to be understood as a mental as well as physical medium—not just a static thing but itself a process that at once occurs and unfolds in material, experiential, and abstract registers. To this effect, I see echoes of Benjamin's haunted materialism and Williams's feeling-as-thought in Lefebvre's argument. A kind of social infrastructure is also clearly essential to this account of the production of space.

These ideas about space as a social product have been written about so much that they are almost common sense in some academic circles. Still, they bear repeating. Meanwhile, something further and equally interesting is evident in Lefebvre's dialectic.

A typical dialectic might consist of two concepts that are in tension with each other—say true and false, self and other, exchange value and use value—which, logically, cannot exist in the same proposition or object simultaneously. Between the two there is a contradiction that must be overcome, one way or another. Dialectical thinking attends to such contradictions and examines what happens in their attempted resolution. The crudest formulations have the two sides of a

contradiction being mediated when one either negates or absorbs the other. The contradiction is resolved, both terms are changed in the process, and a new object or proposition is created. The terms of this process are conceptualized as thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

This description is, I should note, a gross oversimplification for the sake of clarity and brevity. Dialectical approaches can involve rich concepts that are much more nuanced and which have a much deeper legacy than I have room to outline here. Dialectical thinking lends itself to many interpretations[86], and that is part of the intrigue. Much of the debate or leeway for interpretation arises from the question of what happens at the moment of encounter between the two objects or propositions that are contradictory to one another. Does one totally destroy the other in a way that leaves no trace (negation)? Does one overcome or devour the other in such a manner that the other becomes an essential part of it (transcendence or sublation)? Is the result an enriched and stable new object or is it an incomplete and unstable disfiguration, with its own contradictions?

The most decisive feature of Lefebvre's dialectic is that he presents three categories instead of two and does not offer any additional category that would explain what emerges where the three meet in social space. Again, there are many interpretations of this (for example, compare Soja (1989) to Brenner (2004) or Elden (2004)) and much speculation about why Lefebvre formulated his dialectic in this way[87], but the result is clear enough—he does not offer

[86] Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic from *Lordship and Bondage*, for example, outlined an encounter between a self (being in itself) and another (being for other) which resulted in struggle and ultimately in a new category (being for itself). Hegel later used a similar formulation to characterize the development of human consciousness. This formulation had an influence on Marx, Gramsci, Benjamin, Lefebvre and other European Marxists, who modified it to think about the way that capitalism is reproduced by subsuming labor and difference. These dialectics have been further been modified by thinkers contributing to other theoretical formations including, for example, post-colonialism (notably in the work of Gayatri Spivak) and feminism (notablyby Judith Butler) who highlight the perpetual instabilities and differences within hegemonic categories and social formations.

[87] The folk wisdom imparted to me by one Lefebvre scholar implied that it is because he was from a Catholic country and was therefore prone to carry the holy trinity forward into philosophy. Probably bogus, but an interesting

any resolution, only conflict. He has set up an unending tension between concrete and abstract that is played out in the interaction between consolidated material social practice, the abstractions that organize it, and the lived creative activity that emerges from and is necessary to the enactment of these but always also exceeds them and retains something of its own. Each of these appears to have some degree of autonomy and can become dominant—but never totalizing—at different moments. Lefebvre offers no category to resolve the contradictions between these three because, as they are lived, they never *are* fully resolved.

Lefebvre takes the contradiction within social reproduction, the tension between life as usual and life as an agent of social change, and inflates it with a much more extensive set of existential and social spatial questions. He also amplifies and unsettles the political possibilities that are implied. Evaluating Lefebvre's dialectic and quoting *Dialectical Materialism*—another in his huge body of works—Christian Schmid writes:

> "Logical and analytical reason, coherent, strictly formal discourse, cannot capture the becoming, the movement of the sublation in the creative act. 'We would like to say that the 'concept' of sublation points to that which, living (productive, creative) activity, cannot be grasped through the concept itself. Why not? Because this creative force just cannot be fully defined, cannot be exhaustively determined.' In the sublation, there is always risk, a possible failure, and at the same time, a possibility—a promise." (2008, 43)

This interpretation dovetails perfectly with the critique of everyday life. Lefebvre's dialectic directs analytical attention always back to the indetermination and to the messy unfinished processes of hegemony as it is lived and contested. Rather than presenting a completion or a closure, Lefebvre points us towards vulnerabilities and openings in social space so that they

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admission of the relationship between lived, subjective, experience or culture and the production of analytical abstraction!

might be *detourned*[88], re-appropriated, and taken advantage of in the production of a radically different and more humane future.[89]

The production of hegemonic space is fraught. It can involve a discernible violence of erasure. At the same time, however, the space where hegemony confronts difference is also one of indetermination. To the extent that everyday life is a condition of possibility for the production of hegemony through the production of space, the spaces of everyday life are also a condition of possibility for the production of counter-hegemonic practices. The upshot is that adequate theorizations of hegemony and transformational, counter-hegemonic social change require rigorous conceptualization of the spaces of everyday life—not as static backdrops upon which social forms unfold, but as unstable aggregates that are at once produced by and productive of social relations. To be clear, this is not a dialectic involving spaces 'inside' and 'outside' of some universal hegemony, as it were, but a matter of locating the erasures, instabilities, and effacements that are inherent to the uneven spatial constitution of always partial hegemonic forms in order to, again paraphrasing Gramsci, renovate and make critical already existing activities—to free everyday life from the concrete-abstract thrall of hegemony.

Structures of feeling, the production of space, the process of hegemony replete with particulars aspiring to be universals and never-ending encounters between concrete and the

[88] The situationist word used to describe the joyful, playful process of turning the excesses of capitalism against it. See, for example, Debord and Wolman in Knabb (1995).

[89] Again I would like to note a parallel to arguments from subaltern studies and post-colonial theory. Gidwani (2008b) outlines a similar insistence on indetermination within Frantz Fanon's uptake of Hegel in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Gidwani concludes, citing Fanon:

> "Above all, Fanon gives us an 'untidy' dialectics that is a force of disorganization: 'not a treatise on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute.' I leave you with Fanon's enigmatic—no, dialectical!—affirmation of (a new) 'humanism':
>
> > 'Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and furious determination to deny the other person all the attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: In reality, who am I?'
>
> This question can deepen submission to the 'master', or spark revolution." (2008, 2586-2587)

abstract—the social realities which these concepts label overlap proliferate in everyday life. Again, I want to tell some stories that show this conceptual cacophony enacted in the actual stuff of everyday life. Many of the concepts I have outlined and the texts that describe them are notoriously obtuse and almost insufferably abstract. Part of my challenge as an ethnographer has been to seek out these concepts in the lives of actual people and present them in a way that clarifies their content and urgency. The stories that follow extend the content and form of the previous sections in order to show how such social realities appear in and precipitate out from the spaces of everyday life on West Forty-Sixth. These stories reveal that hegemonic relations and abstractions that seem to be dominant and violent at one moment can appear human and vulnerable in another. Always, there are differences, excesses, and indeterminations to be attended to. Always there are contradictions in the self-constitution of social life. Amidst it all, the social space of West Forty-Sixth Street expands, contracts, and appears permeable in surprising ways that span the intimate and the global as well as individual and collective.

Kids (a spatial dialectical story in three acts)

For six months in early 2008, I volunteered once a week at Hartley House as a tutor and general helper in the after school program there, which serves children ranging from 6-12 years in age. Like a lot of programs of this kind, the idea is to provide a structured place where kids can come to do homework and have some supervised social activity between the end of the school day and the time that parents get off of work. Hartley also runs a summer program filling a similar niche. The kids in these programs demonstrate some of the heterogeneity that still persists in the surrounding area. They largely come from working class families that live nearby, and many

have parents who recently came from other countries including Mexico, Ecuador, Russia, and China.

One of the things that struck me most about the children was the way that their thoughts and actions provided a kind of oblique commentary on some of the events that were taking place during the period that I spent working with them. Once, trying to motivate a table full of them to concentrate on their homework, I tried to explain in typical adult fashion that doing well in school was the best thing they could do at their age because it would allow them to get a good job and have a good life in the future. This was in the midst of the then still unfolding economic crisis, and an eight year old replied to me quite earnestly that this may have been the case when I was young, but that these days the good jobs were going away because of "the economy." Around the same time, concerns about the pandemic spread of swine flu were raging. While people on the subways were wearing masks and giving every wayward cough or sniffle a paranoid sidelong look, the kids chased each other around fake coughing or pretending to puke on one another, laughing, and taking turns exchanging imaginary sudden onset illness. At snack time one kid stuck his hot little hand into a box of the crackers that everybody else was eating in surgical doses that had been dispensed by a staff member. His reaching into the box caused a moment of irrational horror where, as if in slow motion, the staff member lunged out to try and stop him shouting, "Noooo!" just a second too late.

"When was the last time you washed your hands?!" the staff member asked sternly.

The kid shrugged, smirked, and replied, "I guess we're all gonna die now."

That same week a hand sanitizer dispenser showed up in the lobby of Hartley House. Sadly, due to the impact that "the economy" was having on non-profit budgets everywhere, they couldn't afford to stock it with the real stuff. They filled it with diluted rubbing alcohol instead.

The mascot of a bar on Ninth Avenue took all necessary precautions against the swine flu

The children echoed the wider world in other ways too. Once I did an activity where I tried to get an older group to teach me what was important to know about West Forty-Sixth Street by imagining that they were making a movie or a video game about it. I asked them to write a journal entry about the kinds of things they would include. In their imaginations, the street turned out to be somewhat sinister and menacing place. Mathews-Palmer Park was a place where could get your teeth knocked out with no provocation. There were gangs that hung out there, "Crips and Bloods." They also informed me that there were lots of 'hobos' around, whom they defined as, "crazy homeless people who are high on drugs." The kids said there were several of these hobos whom they knew by sight and saw frequently in their rounds throughout the neighborhood. Their mothers told them to keep their distance from these people.

It wasn't long until the kids got bored with my activity and wanted to know why I was asking them to think about these things and what I was even doing just hanging around an after school program in the first place. It was a fair question. I told them about my project and they were totally befuddled about why I would want to watch what other people do all day. In fact, they thought the whole idea was sufficiently weird to warrant adding me to the list of the sketchy people who had populated the street of their imagination.

The common space at Hartley House, shared between kids and adults

In September of 2007, just as financial systems everywhere were becoming seized up with mistrust, the Block Association met—in that same space at Hartley House where the kids had been just a few hours earlier—to host a collaborative meeting with the Associations from the blocks immediately to their north and south. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a perceived 'gang problem' and a spike in street crime that were purported to have begun afflicting the area recently. Several stories were offered to substantiate this perception. A few muggings had taken place at knife and gunpoint on the block closest to the river. Supposedly someone had

been stabbed. Auto parts had been stolen from parked cars. On Restaurant Row, a credit card had been snatched right off of a table in a manner so bold that outdoor diners could only sit by in stunned disbelief. Several people said they saw young people of color congregating in Mathews Palmer-Park at strange hours and roaming the street in raucous groups. Residents thought they saw a pattern and continuity in these events.

There was some debate about what should be done. An artist who lived in a building across from the park but who rarely came to meetings suggested that a group of residents should talk to any people under suspicion and find out who they really were and if there was anything that they needed. He argued that the Block Association should not assume that the people in question were anything as coherent as a "gang,", if indeed they were criminals at all, and should instead think about how to provide resources to vulnerable people so they would not need to resort to crime. Others listened to him patiently, but tempered fear and anxiety eventually carried the day. Most everyone agreed, in the end, that pressuring the police to provide a more robust street presence was the best solution to the problem. Someone even nostalgically lamented that the police had gotten soft over the last couple years and hinted that this kind of thing would not have happened under Giuliani. Now, with the unfolding financial situation making things dicey enough for small businesses and property owners as it was, pushing for a police clampdown was seen as the best, and, for some, even the only way to adequately address this problem.

In the months after this meeting, the follow-through was evident. Block Association members actively petitioned the police to beef up their street presence. More cops were visible on the beat. Plainclothes officers were placed on Restaurant Row[90]. At the same time, private security personnel were hired to stake out Mathews-Palmer Park. There was a building on the

[90] At the Block Association, there was debate about the effectiveness of plainclothes officers. Some people thought that cops were not effective unless they were prominently visible.

Forty-Fifth Street side that formed half of the western wall of the park and had windows overlooking it. This building had recently been purchased by the celebrity Rosie O'Donnell[91], and at the time it was being renovated to become the home of a new youth program called "Rosie's Broadway Kids" that would teach small cohorts of young New York City Public School students to sing and dance like professionals. While the building was undergoing renovation, "private investigators"[92] were hired to sit inside and monitor the playground. Their job was to call the police if they saw anything suspicious going on.

As a direct result of these efforts, several arrests were ultimately made. These were discussed without much specificity at subsequent Block Association meetings, and people clearly felt a sense of relief and accomplishment. It was never quite clear who was arrested or how these arrests would make life any better for residents, but that didn't seem to matter.

Several months later, I talked informally with a police sergeant at the Midtown North Precinct about this series of events. The sergeant didn't know anything about any "gang" or spike in street crime in the area around that time[93]. There had been some thefts and robberies committed by a few kids from a homeless youth shelter down by the Port Authority bus terminal, but the sergeant did not think any of them had been arrested on West Forty-Sixth. A few people had been "collared" in the playground for petty quality of life crimes and minor marijuana related offenses. The sergeant said they were "probably just high school kids," probably "playing hooky."

[91] In 2007, O'Donnell purchased a multi-million dollar a condo on the twenty-second floor of a massive luxury building called the Platinum on the northeast corner of Eighth and Forty-Sixth—one and a half blocks from the building which houses Rosie's Broadway Kids, where the Special Clinton District ends and the buildings of Midtown abruptly rise—from which she supposedly has a view overlooking Mathews-Palmer Park.
[92] This was the term used to describe them at subsequent meetings.
[93] I also compiled a record of crime reports from the monthly CompStat data that, at the time, was available by precinct on the New York City Police Department website. Though this data is only at the precinct level and not specific to West Forty-Sixth, it does not show any significant increase in crime during the period when these events were said to have taken place.

On a few occasions before these months I had encountered groups of teenagers, mainly nonwhite but also a few white kids, smoking pot in or around the bathroom of the park when it seemed like they should have been in school a few blocks away. Once I barged in on them smoking in a bathroom stall, and they simply apologized and walked out. It seemed harmless. After the clampdown, I never saw them again.

The kids from the program at Hartley House met the plans of the Block Association at a public event held in Matthews-Palmer Park on July 24th 2009. This was the inaugural 'Hell's Kitchen Summer Fest'—the very same that Watty had rued the name of for fear that it would attract an unsavory element. Quite the contrary.

The inaugural Summer Fest was planned for many months and was advertised with flyers and on community billboards. It was a collaboration between the West Forty-Fifth and West Forty-Sixth Street Block Associations and Rosie's Broadway Kids. Together they organized this event which involved filling the playground with as many kids as they could rustle up, and getting them to dance and sing Broadway show-tunes. The kids from Hartley House were invited, and they sang and danced alongside a more polished troop of Rosie's Kids. There was a public address system and a keyboard player, and people from the surrounding blocks showed up to watch or encourage their own kids to participate.

Representatives from the New York City Parks Department were also there and they produced a short YouTube video[94] to document the event.

[94] Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZJZICkt1gA as of July 2012

A screenshot from the Summer Fest video produced by the Parks Department

The video starts with images of children playing. A female voiceover says, "Mathews-Palmer playground bridges Forty-Fifth and Forty-Sixth Street in Hell's Kitchen—an ever-changing neighborhood where residents have organized to *reclaim* their park" (my emphasis). The video goes on to feature interviews with residents, kids, and officials all expressing joy at the success of the event and the community organizing that led up to it. One official says, "I really think it is the efforts of the volunteers, who were so active in organizing this event and also just *advocating* for their neighborhood, that have helped, you know, make this a more *livable* space for everybody, and really helped turn things around." The video also includes a clip where Sara says that she really hopes the event will inspire other people to get involved and become active in the community.

By almost all accounts, Summer Fest was a great success. A few politicians even showed up to glad-hand, and just about everybody seemed to go away happy. Nonetheless, I left the event feeling deeply disconcerted . . . and curmudgeonly about being disconcerted. Who could possibly interpret a bunch of kids dancing and singing in a park on a beautiful summer day as something sinister? In fact, the language used in the Parks Department film hints at the source of

my unease. The park had been 'reclaimed'? From what? By and for whom? What did 'advocating' to make this space 'livable' really involve? When Sara said she hoped more people would become 'active' in the community, what exactly did she mean? When residents later recounted the success of this event at subsequent Block Association meetings, they did so in very similar terms. Such characterizations ignore or erase many of the social antecedents that combined in this instance.

One group of kids, maybe opting out of an afternoon of New York City public education, gets arrested for smoking pot in public space. Instead of being lamented or examined as a social question involving multiple layers of institutional and collective failure—or more troublingly, collective and institutional indifference and punitive force—this activity is criminalized, which is then implicitly celebrated with an event involving another group of kids singing, dancing, and being symbolically venerated in their place. The fate of both groups appears to have been directly manipulated by the concerted efforts of a few well-intentioned residents. To me, the dancing children were a talisman marking the failure of one kind of collective social reproduction then overwritten and forgotten by another. The desire to quash disorder trumped an opportunity to address a collective problem. In the end, no violent criminals appear to have been apprehended. Yet, people form the Block Association seem to have looked upon those dancing children as some kind of triumph, an overcoming and an affirmation their own desires and needs for self-constitution. What started out as a concern about violent crime two blocks over got channeled towards the implementation of intense policing strategies and somehow transferred to two targets—the commerce of restaurant Row and kids in the playground—that were very different from the sites of original concern. This was a kind of erasure, an act of subsumption ending in a new round of confidence and self-affirmation for some while others were made to

disappear. It made me uneasy because it left open the possibility that others—perhaps people like Franc who might look ominous but whom I knew depended on the availably of public space for sanctuary, sanity, in their own lives as usual—could become the targets of such erasure.

On the day of the Summer Fest event, Sara carried with her a large green tote bag. On the side, the slogan of the brand proclaimed the words ‘OUTFITTERS TO THE GENTRY.’

Just a bag?

This struck me as particularly prescient. Later I asked her about it—asked her if she thought it was ironic or symbolic that she of all people carried this bag around with her to community events. She said she hadn’t ever even noticed that it said that before, and that it was pretty funny. Then said she heard that brand is doing very well, and that she wished she worked with them.

These walls talk

In 2007 a new condominium was completed at 517 West Forty-Sixth**.** It stands facing south on the north side of the 500 block, between 10th and 11th Avenues. Some small businesses were torn down in 2005 to make way for it. The street facing exterior is clad with red enameled tiles of different sizes. There are 45 condominiums packed into seven stories, including two floors below street level. These sub-levels were an innovation that allowed the developers to adhere to the strict height restrictions zoned for this block, while maximizing the value they get out of the property. The entrance to the building is down a small set of concrete stairs that leads from the sidewalk into a sunken lobby.

When the initial listing for the properties came out, the prices started at $600K for a one bedroom, and ranged up to $1.2 million for the biggest penthouse units. This was considered a bit pricey for a location relatively far from most conveniences and subway stops, but the building did have a lot of amenities, including a concierge and private balconies or gardens for most residents. The chatter on the real estate blogs indicated that this might turn out to be good value for money after the neighborhood had a few more years to ripen.

By the spring of 2008 the building was mostly full of relatively young energetic professionals who worked in various tertiary sector jobs, enjoyed the proximity to the professional and social life of midtown, and wanted to be involved in making the neighborhood a nicer, in their opinion, place to live. Several high-powered people from Wall Street and the entertainment industry also moved in there. One time at a social function, a resident told a story about some big shot Wall Street executive who got all coked-up and started acting crazy in his bathrobe to the extent that the cops had to come and calm him down. It seemed like this story was intended to demonstrate how glamorous life in the building could be, but it also sent a

message that drugs were stylish and edgy for rich guys in bathrobes while grievous and criminal for other people in other circumstances who maybe didn't have million dollar condos to get high in.

It wasn't long before people who had moved into 517 began showing up at Block Association meetings. They stood out because of their particular enthusiasm, and they seemed to share a certain point of view on things. They seemed to think that they brought a new kind of civic energy that the street didn't have before. These residents often talked about the connection between property value and civic virtue, even suggesting that nobody on the block really had cared about issues like garbage, noise, and nightclub traffic before the condos were built, because nobody who lived there—meaning renters—really had an investment to look after until then. One time a man from 517 showed up at a Block Association meeting and, by way of introduction, said "We have invested over a million dollars in our property, so we are committed to doing whatever we can to see this neighborhood be as nice as possible. My wife and I plan to have a child and bring it to the beautiful park." It was like he was framing his financial investment and intention to procreate as if they themselves were noble civic actions. On yet another occasion a resident of 517 commented in an offhand way:

> "There are a lot of people in my building who want to see our block look like when you pull into a beautiful condo in Jersey where it's a gated community. I think that is what they envision. I'm not saying that's what we should do, I'm just saying . . ."

Unsurprisingly, some of the old-timers and renters looked with suspicion upon these brazen newcomers.

It turns out, though, that even with a million dollar property and an abundance of reformist energy there is no guarantee that everything will go smoothly. After all of these people started to move into the building a few issues became clear almost immediately. First off, the workmanship in the building turned out to be shoddy and cheap. There were issues with flooding

on the lowest floors. Plaster was cracking off of the walls. The railing on the rooftop terrace where the private cabanas were located wasn't bolted on properly and people were afraid that it could give way and allow someone to fall off if they leaned against it. Liability for these things was argued among developers, contractors, sub-contractors and builders, and the residents were working through a lawsuit for restitution.

At the same time, some of the abstract considerations that drove the architecture of the building created unforeseen issues once they were rendered in concrete form. The biggest problem was that the sunken entry to the building—a spatial innovation conceived as a way to facilitate the accumulation of additional wealth by creating two extra sub-street floors without being in violation of the strict height restrictions of the Special Clinton District—led in practice to an altogether different and unanticipated type of accumulation. On weekend nights when the nearby clubs and bars were in full swing and people were traveling back a forth to their cars, that sunken space proved to be an ideal place to stop, dispose of some waste, socialize, make out, have a smoke in a place sheltered from the elements, and all sorts of other creative uses. A resident from a different block commented that the entrance to 517 reminded them of the sunken living rooms or "conversation pits" that were popular in the 1960s and 70s. It became its own sort of after-hours democratic public space, to the great chagrin of the people who lived there.

To top it all off, in April of 2010 somebody stole all the big metal address numbers off of the wall in front of the stairwell down into the building. After that, somebody bought some of those cheap little sticky-backed diamond shaped metal numbers that can be purchased on spinning racks at hardware stores and that people put on their mailboxes in suburbs and rural areas. They have been stuck up on the front of the elegant metal and glass overhang above the

conversation pit for at least two years now. If they wanted it to look like Jersey, this may or may not be a step in the right direction.

If the stories of the children suggest an ominous and tenacious enacted force that teams up with state power to cut difference down in its tracks and constitute itself, the moral of this story is more ambiguous. It is important to think about what was lost and gained when such a condo got built in this space to begin with, but this story suggests that even the best laid plans of the powerful and wealthy can go awry when they meet the untidy stuff that is there circulating in the currents of everyday life. The people in this building want their investments to pay off, but that abstract value is not going to make itself. Things can diverge from plan, the riff raff need to be kept from partying in the stairwell, and the bodies in motion that are passing by and finding it convenient to make creative uses of this new space for their own ends might need to be re-routed or repelled. That work is only going to be done by the people who live here, and so far the results are mixed.

"[C]hanges that take place 'somewhere else' in the 'higher realms'" . . .

El Centro de Educación de Trabajadores is a volunteer-run organization that offers programs out of Hartley House. These days most of their activities consist of English as a second language courses for Spanish speakers, occasional legal clinics for immigration related issues, and some skills training classes. As a way of producing revenue, they also run Spanish courses for "gringos"—economically stable white people who want to learn Spanish—often taught by people who have come up through the ESL sequence. El Centro was first started in the 1970s as a kind of free university by and for people who had fled political turmoil in Central and South America and who wanted to actively work to redress the poverty, oppression, and economic and

military imperialism that affected the life prospects of people in those regions at that time. Over the years the focus at El Centro has shifted to more systematic programing, but some of the spirit of the earlier days still persists.

A woman named Leslie who for almost twenty years has been one of the volunteers that helps to run El Centro told me a little bit about the kind of people that come through their doors. She said that while the progenitors of the program came from Central and South America, the population that they serve has shifted a lot over the last two decades and is now predominantly Mexican. Many of the students are relatively new to the United States and are here by themselves, working in construction, in the garment or restaurant industries, or as cleaners. They don't necessarily live in the neighborhood—though many certainly do—but since these employment clusters are abundant in Midtown and in the Theater District, the West Side location of Hartley House is convenient for them. Many send remittances back to families elsewhere, and are hoping to gain English language skills as a way of increasing their earning potential.

I had a lot of questions about the students at El Centro, and Leslie was gracious enough to lend me a copy of a film that she had helped students to produce. It was a little dated, produced in 1998, but she said it would explain more about students' lives and some of the circumstances that they were still routinely facing. The film, *Por la Necesidad de Trabajar* or *For the Need to Work* is about a half hour long. Almost all of it is in Spanish with English subtitles. It begins with several images of landscapes and everyday life in what appears to be Mexico, but which could be many different places in Central or South America. There are images of villages, churches, and beaches as well as of people just going about their daily lives, working in fields, or eating. A voiceover says:

> "Our countries are rich in natural resources and hardworking people. Every year, people from all over the world come to enjoy the fruits of our lands, the warm breezes of our

> beaches, and our magnificent countryside and ruins. Visitors are also drawn by the magic of our towns and cultures, the variety of our music, the flavor of our foods, and the beauty and tradition of our handicrafts. Everyone comes to admire and enjoy the riches of our lands, but ironically, everyday life is anything but rich for many of our people"

The film then moves into a series of interviews with different people, all undocumented migrants in New York City, describing the circumstances that compelled them to uproot themselves and undertake the risky journey north. Different groups and individuals are seen talking about how already limited employment prospects at home had started to disappear. Wages were stiflingly low. Someone needed to do something or the family would starve. Women tearfully tell of leaving infant children behind, others of leaving family and community only spurred on by the dire necessity to take some action. People recount the fear and pain that they experienced while being smuggled across the border to the United States, the humiliation that they felt when they were caught and detained, the commitment that made them try again despite the high prices charged by the smugglers, and the disappointment that they encountered when they finally got to New York and discovered the conditions that had to live and work in there.

Most of the people interviewed were workers in the Garment District, a center of textile finishing, in Midtown just southeast of West Forty-Sixth. When most people think of sweatshops they probably imagine them as a phenomenon that happens in some developing country. *Por la Necesidad de Trabajar* demonstrates, however, that this imagined geography upholds too neat and differentiated of a split—that the so called developed and developing worlds are in fact folded into each other in complex ways which are impossible to understand in absolute spatial terms. The workers interviewed discuss many of the complaints that are usually leveled at sweatshops: they are forced to work very long hours, they are not given breaks to eat or go to the bathroom, they are constantly overheated, and sometimes they are not paid for their work they perform as many employers assume, often correctly, that undocumented workers will remain silent rather

than risk attracting legal attention over a wage conflict. Meanwhile it is clear that these places are well known to law enforcement. Workers talk about the immigration raids that happen sometimes at work, and they say that Mexicans and other Spanish speaking people have been rounded up and taken away while undocumented people from other locations and ethnic groups are left to work and the abhorrent conditions they work under remain unchallenged.

The film takes on a different tone when several labor organizers and migrant rights advocates are interviewed. *Por la Necesidad de Trabajar* was first and foremost intended to be an informational video for undocumented migrants, emphasizing that people are not alone in these struggles and that migrants have good reason to organize and stand up for wages and more inclusive legal rights. One advocate explains:

> "First, we have to realize that we are people with dignity and that no one should treat us badly because we're undocumented. And second, we must realize that being undocumented, we feel oppressed, because we're afraid that someone will discover that we're undocumented. But we don't need to be ashamed, because we are not stealing. We're working and living with dignity and honesty. We don't need to feel any shame for being undocumented. We're here because the economic situation in our countries has been impacted by the economy of the United States, and this has forced us to leave our countries in order to survive."

The advocate then proceeds to make an argument about the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). He says that migrants from Mexico, for example, need to understand that when NAFTA was put into place, the governments of Mexico and the United States were essentially making a deal that they both knew would result in the displacement and upheaval of a huge number of people.[95] By manipulating agricultural markets and trade policies, Mexico was deliberately flooded with heavily subsidized, mass produced corn and beans from the United Sates. This made the price of these commodities plummet, and essentially meant that small-scale

[95] This is an argument that has subsequently been elaborated and substantiated by numerous other sources including activists (Ojeda and Hennessy 2006), academics (Rivera et al. 2009), former policy makers (Castañeda 2007), and even the World Bank (Fiess and Lederman 2004)

subsistence farmers—the majority of the population in many areas of Mexico—could no longer make a living off of the land. Maquiladora factories stood to benefit from the swelling pool of cheap labor as people were forced to leave the land and find work elsewhere. Both governments saw this situation as mutually beneficial because the U.S. corporations that owned the factories would save on labor and environmental costs while Mexico took a crucial step towards industrial modernization and an export economy. The goal was to create a population of surplus laborers and conditions ripe for economic development, and the results seem to have exceeded even those that may have been imagined or anticipated by the people and institutions that implemented these policies[96].

Faced with the prospect of working in factories for extremely low wages, millions of Mexicans took the decision to journey to the United States and try to make a living there. The film reveals that when they got there many were treated as second class citizens, exploited, and told that they did not have any right to be there. They lived in a constant state of fear and precarity. In this context, the advocate urges migrants to stand up for their rights:

> "We don't need to be ashamed," he says. "Those who should be ashamed are those who have forced so many people to leave their countries. They are the ones that should be ashamed. Not us. We're only looking for a way to survive."

The implication is that any rhetoric about undocumented migrants being somehow economically parasitic or outside of the structures of legality was simply not defensible. The name of the film, *For the Need to Work*, refers to the ongoing struggle that these migrants, organizers, and advocates have undertaken to demand the right to and the dignity of working for a living. If that

[96] In addition to a massive uptick in undocumented migration from Mexico to the U.S., there were other unanticipated consequences. For example, many activists and observers called the H1N1 swine flu strain the "NAFTA flu" because the conditions that spawned the outbreak were only possible after the large scale consolidation and environmental deregulation which were enabled by the free trade agreement allowed U.S. companies to establish huge, under-regulated feedlots in Mexico. Not coincidentally, after small-scale Mexican butchers and hog farmers were driven out of business by U.S. corporations in Mexico, many came to do low-waged work for the same companies in meatpacking plants in the U.S. See Bacon 2012 for an insightful overview of this argument.

living can no longer be made in the eviscerated economies of their homelands, then it makes sense that the demands be taken to a place where that living is still possible partly because of the social and economic relations that led to their displacement in the first place.

These connections between everyday life on the West Side of Manhattan and the disruption and re-ordering of everyday life elsewhere highlight some of the ways that abstractions and processes which may seem very distant or detached are made real in places unexpectedly close to home. Cindi Katz (2001, 2004) describes such connections as "countertopographies"—contour lines among the concrete activities that constitute and compel political-economic processes as they cross multiple scales and are manifest in the everyday experiences of people in disparate locations[97]. Katz writes, "the notion of countertopography is meant to invoke the connections among particular historical geographies by virtue of their relationship to a specific abstract social process or relation" (2004, xiv). To a remarkable extent, such lines of connection have always been part and parcel of the social spatial fabric of West Forty-Sixth Street and its surrounding area. From enclosures and famines in Europe to Operation Bootstrap[98] and NAFTA, from industrialization to tertiary financialization, and from the fiscal crises of the 1970s to the economic crisis of 2007, the seemingly distant, global, and abstract have clearly made a home and been articulated here for as long as this has been an urban space. All of the abstract ideations and processes that have accompanied these moments could not exist

[97] Katz finds, for example, connections between processes of economic restructuring in Sudan and Harlem as they affect the life prospects of children and young people in surprisingly similar ways. She stresses that the concept could be useful for understanding connections and processual dynamics in countless other contexts as well.

[98] Central and South Americans, of course, are not the only populations to have been forced off of the land and into wage labor. Many of the storied immigrants from Europe who populated the early U.S and later came to or through New York City were leaving their countries of origin under circumstances of poverty and forced displacement that echo the conditions of NAFTA (see Massey 1988). So too the influx of Puerto Ricans who arrived only after the U.S.-led agricultural reforms and modernization efforts of what was called "Operation Bootstrap" wrought similar displacements on the island (see Ayala 1996).

without the spaces, everyday lives, struggles, and sundry social accomplishments in countless places like this.

Meanwhile, the real countertopographical element of this story comes where life as usual and the necessary means of reproduction for some are eroded by the very same processes that have allowed life as usual and the necessary means of reproduction for others to remain intact and perhaps even to become fortified in the form of cheaper commodities and cheaper labor. Here the social reproduction in one place is guaranteed by disruptions somewhere else. This is the contradiction at the heart of social reproduction visible at a global magnitude.

The story of NAFTA on the West Side also opens up onto a related and equally global argument. As this and some of the other stories I have told demonstrate, contemporary urban space involves a startlingly complex relational geography in which people's experiences and daily activities are constantly in contact with those of others. Manifold and often far flung connections—spanning both distance and time—intertwine to form an extended social fabric which at once conditions experience and extends the scope of everyday activities far beyond any individual or absolute space. The ability to sustain ones-self and meet the basic needs of survival depends, perhaps increasingly so, on the labors, practical sensibilities, and sociality of countless others both near and far. While on its own this is not necessarily a new argument[99], these are conditions that warrant careful consideration in the context of everyday life.

[99] Since the onset of industrialization, social thinkers—including many within the same Marxist tradition that I have drawn upon to articulate the concept of everyday life—have observed urban life and been astounded by what is evident there. Observers from Fredrich Engels (in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* written in 1844), to Georg Simmel (in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* written in 1903), and on to Benjamin and others, including notably David Harvey 1982, 1985, draw from Marx and extend his arguments about material circulation, money, and the commodity form to show how urban space and the experiences of people in it reflect and help to constitute the relations of production. Urban space, it is argued, is geographically extensive and intensively collective. The products of past labors and creative activities crystalize in urban space in ways that are increasingly necessary to the continuity of future material production—historically speaking, first as a location of surplus accumulation, and later as a concentration of labor and fixed capital which themselves become a means of surplus valorization. Likewise, the metabolic and material inputs necessary to production connect urban space in all sorts of ways, both obvious and

The urban is a space of layers at once concrete, abstract, and lived—of concretized practical activity alongside abstractions made real in concrete form; of past, present, and future colliding and being selectively produced in creative activity; of real and imagined connections to elsewheres and others; and of all of these things becoming increasingly concentrated in space in ways that are contingent and consequential. Urban space in a place like West Forty-Sixth cannot be treated as if it is distinct from some outside—the rural or some hypothetical other space that the urban somehow organizes but is not. NAFTA, the swine flu, the economic crisis of 2007, the macro-political economic and social processes that define our time were manifest in the countless enacted filaments that connect recognizably urban places like the Middle West Side to reciprocal locations elsewhere, which are inextricable from them. In essence, it increasingly seems that the urban *is* the predominant social space in which contemporary life takes shape—not the exception or an expression, but the social space where the way we now live as collective, creative human beings is increasingly reflected, negotiated, and produced in ways that are contingent and fraught.

In *The Urban Revolution,* Lefebvre (2003) makes an argument that ties his ideas about everyday life and the production of space to the urban. Based on a deeply historicized understanding of how cities and urban spaces have changed from the dawn of agriculture to the present, Lefebvre outlines how urban space emerges where the mode of existence intersects the mode of production over time. He argues that the organization of social life in urban space both expresses and is absolutely necessary to increasingly more complex ways of satisfying human needs and producing and accumulating surplus. Looking towards the future, Lefebvre speculates

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invisible, to processes and places very far away. At the same time, all of these aspects of urban life can become obscured over the social distances of an exchange process that is mediated by money and abstractions of value, both of which have become rampant under industrial capitalism. As such, urban inhabitants often fail to realize just how connected and collectively social their lives really are with the broader—and more intimate—historical geographies of which they are a part.

that, following on the heels of de-industrialization the forms of social reproduction which take place in urban space —what he calls the reproduction of the *social relations* of production, as opposed to the *means* of production in the sphere of wage labor and fixed capital[100]— will soon move to the center of the process by which hegemony and accumulation are achieved.

As with Lefebvre's arguments about the production of space, these claims about the relationship between urban space and production have been influential. Again the uptake has tended to emphasize the political-economic implications and the mode of production side of the argument, calling particular attention to the ways that the production of urban space and urban fixed capital are essential to broader circuits of capital circulation, accumulation, and surplus valorization (see Harvey 1982, 1985). Thinkers in this vein have tended to view Lefebvre's claims about the increasing importance of social reproduction with a high degree of skepticism (see Smith 2002 for such) and have interpreted Lefebvre's argument as an easily contestable claim that social reproduction will eventually supplant commodity production as the primary source of capitalist value. In projecting this political economic argument onto Lefebvre, however, such critiques have overlooked or disregarded other implications of Lefebvre's emphasis on the mode of existence and social reproduction. In essence, they overlook the contradictions and nuanced forms of spatial production that are evident from the perspective of everyday life.

I interpret Lefebvre as arguing not that social reproduction will supplant production, but rather that social reproduction is *already* an essential infrastructure to the production of social life in and through urban space, and that the contradictions at the heart of social reproduction have become extremely pronounced as the form and pace of urbanization has extended the relations of contemporary life far beyond any discrete location and amplified the contradictions

[100] These are concepts that Lefebvre outlines in more detail in another text, *The Survival of Capitalism* (1976).

that overlap in urban space. This is a distinct and differently unsettled version of urban space than what appears from the vantage point of political economy alone. It also suggests a different, though certainly not mutually exclusive, political sensibility in and through everyday life in urban space.

Bedbugs and social suffering bite

Another program running out of Hartley House is called HOPE, an acronym for Home Outreach Program for Elders. As the name would suggest, they provide in-home social services for seniors in the area. The program serves about fifty people throughout the West Side, five of whom live on West Forty-Sixth. HOPE is directed by a social worker named Yesenia who grew up just a few blocks away and in fact participated in several Hartley programs herself when she was younger. She agreed to meet with me to tell me a little bit about what her program does, and it turned out that they too are engaged in a few small battles.

Yesenia described HOPE as a sort of lifeline in a very precarious situation, and she didn't even want to think about what would happen to her clients if the program didn't exist. The people they serve are elderly, often housebound and/or ill, and tend not to have any children (like Carmen), relatives, or friends who can help them address their needs and assist with their care. Yesenia said that these are largely people who came to the Middle West Side 40 or 50 years ago, "Still here, and still living in the same apartments," only largely invisible because they go out rarely, if ever. Over time, the neighborhood around them has changed into a place that is no longer hospitable to them. Many can't afford to buy groceries as all of the affordable grocery stores and "mom and pop" green grocers have been priced out of the neighborhood and the delis have gotten too expensive. The HOPE staff do whatever they can—including meals on wheels,

and other programs—to supplement what they have. These residents also have health care costs and prescriptions to be taken care of. On top of it all, there is constant pressure from landlords who want them out of their rent-controlled units. I once had a brief conversation with another social worker at HOPE, and she said the top three issues that they deal with were, "Eviction, eviction, and eviction."

Yesenia said that most of her clients pay between one hundred and five hundred dollars a month for units that would otherwise rent for two or three thousand. This may sound like a plum deal, but in reality it is more like a lifesaving subsidy. These are people on a fixed income who are often barely able to pay the bills that they have. The landlords know it, and Yesenia says that though they definitely do have good relationships with some landlords, there are others who are totally unscrupulous and try to exploit this situation. If people are late on a rent payment by one day, for example, some landlords will charge them a fee that they cannot afford, and begin eviction proceedings the moment that the tenant falls into arrears. The ability to pay the bills and get the rent out on time or, failing that, to absorb that late fee, can be the difference between having a home and becoming a ward of the state in some institution. Or worse.

The most surprising issue that Yesenia and her colleague both talked about facing was chronic bedbug infestation. Landlords have even used bedbugs as an avenue to eviction. Many of the elderly clients who participate in HOPE live in apartments that are cluttered with the sediment of several decades' worth of stuff. As they become less mobile and more likely to get things delivered without having much recourse to get rid of whatever accumulates, the clutter is compounded. Some of these clients have gotten bedbugs, maybe because they brought them in somehow or maybe because they were already in the building and they spread. Legally, pest infestations in a rental building are supposed to be the landlord's responsibility unless a tenant

has done something egregious to invite it. Many landlords have tried to blame bedbug infestations on these elderly folks, on their clutter and their lack of mobility, claiming that they are causing and harboring infestations and posing a hazard to the rest of the people in their buildings, and moving to evict them on these grounds. These situations have left some of the elderly clients in a very dicey position. Those who tell their landlords about a bedbug problem might find that they have a landlord who is willing to help them deal with it. But they might just as easily find themselves fighting eviction or having to provoke a landlord who is otherwise not willing to do anything about the problem. Faced with this situation, many people—some of them bedridden or immobile—have resigned themselves to living with bedbugs.

When they learned about all of this, the social workers at HOPE were horrified and they did the only thing they could think of: they took matters into their own hands and went in to clean and treat apartments themselves, meticulously going through the clutter to try and maintain these people's housing, their dignity, and maybe their sanity too. There were a few times when the social workers themselves ended up bringing bugs home to their own apartments, and after that they started wearing a Tyvek hazmat suits whenever they went in to treat an apartment. They had to be sensitive in getting clients to buy into these tactics, but in many cases the bedbugs forced their hand.

Once I became attuned to bedbugs as a potential social issue, more people with stories started to appear. One time a woman came to a Block Association meeting to tell to her neighbors about an infestation in her building. She argued that an infestation was a problem bigger than any one person, and that it should be considered a "quality of life" issue that people should organize to do something about. As she spoke about her experience, people visibly started to inch away from her and scratch psychosomatic itches. Nobody said much and it seemed as if

everyone was thinking something along the lines of, "Eeyuck. You are on your own lady." Maybe she got the same feeling, because she quietly got up and left after speaking. Nobody said a word to her as she left, and the other residents didn't seem to give it much further thought.

At another meeting a few months later, the topic of bedbugs came up again, briefly, in a memo from the City Council. The two people sitting across from me—both new condo owners—literally laughed out loud and said to me sarcastically, "Now there's something for your study!" Again, nobody seemed to take the issue seriously.

Several months after the fact, I managed to track down the woman who had come to the Block Association meeting. She agreed to talk to me about her bedbug problem over lunch, though she asked that her name and the location of her residence not be given. She is an artist and her husband is from Central America and has had on and off employment. Both saw their incomes dry up during the economic crisis, and their bedbug infestation had come at a time when they were hurting financially. They managed to get the problem under control despite a lack of cooperation from the management company that they lease from or anyone else in their building, not to mention their other neighbors on the block. But nearly $7000 in bedbug-related expenses—for endless laundry, new furniture, new bedding, countless plastic bags and bins, and so on (see *New York vs. Bed Bugs* 2009 for a similar expenditure list)—had come at a time when they could not afford it, and they now found themselves in a very tough situation. Although their two-bedroom apartment was rent-stabilized, the rent was still nearly $2000 a month, before utilities. Just prior to the infestation, the management company found a way to squeeze more value out of the building by making cosmetic improvements to the exterior and using those as grounds to legally increase the rent. The woman thought maybe the bedbugs came when that work created cracks in the walls and opened up connections between her building and the

adjacent one. In any case, here was a married couple, both in their early fifties with resources tapped out, who had now been pushed past a tipping point by bedbugs. They could no longer afford to stay in the place where they had lived for more than a decade. Nor, however, could they afford the expense of moving to any market-rate places nearby or to a place that would be more affordable somewhere in the outer reaches of the city. A stranger, a young professional they found on Craigslist, would soon to be joining them as a roommate in order to help them cover the rent. Given all of this, a bedbug recurrence would be disastrous, bringing another round of expenses, driving away any roommates, and eventually leading to who knows what. "Believe me," the woman said, "I am nervous every minute of every day that—god forbid—this should ever happen again."

Nobody is completely sure when or why a scourge that seemed to have been eradicated started to make a comeback in New York. It is generally accepted that bedbugs were all but wiped out in the United States by the mid-twentieth century through the use of powerful pesticides such as DDT. The comeback probably started when such chemicals became illegal. Recent research has supported that idea, and shown that the story may be more complicated beyond that. One study (Szalanski et al. 2008) found that the kind of genetic bottleneck that should be present in a population that survived near eradication is not present in the current bedbug populations of the U.S. The implication is that many of the bedbugs that are here now may have come from elsewhere, proliferating with fast intercontinental travel and human mobility. Another related suggestion is that diverse bedbug populations have found a surprising safe harbor the form of industrial poultry. The lead author on the genetic bottleneck study is on record saying that many large scale poultry facilities "are so bad that if you walk in there even with a (protective suit), you'll still get bedbugs on you" (Thomas 2010). He argues that bedbugs

have become increasingly widespread in parallel with the increased movement of factory-farmed birds and the workers who come into contact with them.

The social context of the bedbug is equally complicated for people who are living through infestations. Bedbugs are wrongly associated with filth and uncleanliness when in fact they will thrive anywhere that there are reasonably moderate temperatures, warm bodies to feed on, and places to hide when they are not feeding. And there are lots of warm bodies and hiding places, often in very close proximity, in a city as densely built as New York. The exact extent of the problem is difficult to estimate, because the available data is fragmented between disparate institutions, and even then is partial at best. Bedbugs are widely believed to be under-reported due to factors such as social stigma and fears of eviction. Nonetheless, the New York City Housing Authority alone documented a citywide jump from 192 bedbug complaints in 2004 to 12,768in 2010 (New York vs. Bedbugs 2010). Overall, in 2010, the combined bedbug complaints registered by 311 numbered 34,123 (ibid). These figures likely represent only a fraction of an unknown and rapidly growing volume of infestations.

Even though the bedbugs themselves don't discriminate, their impact can be very different for different groups of people. I recounted some of the stories I heard from people on West Forty-Sixth Street to Renee, one of the founders of a group called NYC vs. Bed Bugs that provides information about and does advocacy around bedbug related issues. She was not at all surprised. Renee explained that the social dimensions of bedbugs are what make them a tricky thing to deal with. For one thing, the stigma of bedbugs can become erroneously associated with other markers of difference. She said:

> "What we have now is that people are very quick to blame others, and that is feeding into the stigma, because if immigrants have them, if people who are homeless—people who are dirty—then if you have them and you consider yourself to be clean or middle

> class or whatever, you are not going to tell anyone about it. And some people just try to deal with it on their own, and they don't succeed."

This stigma is hard to combat because immigrants and poor people *do* in fact have more problems with chronic bedbug infestation. However this is because of poverty—because they are more likely to live in substandard, poorly regulated housing and to be unable to afford extensive mitigation techniques—rather than any fault of their own.

Renee put me in touch with a colleague named Ray who also had a lot to say about the social dimensions of bedbugs. Renee and Ray were both appointed to a New York City Bedbug Advisory Board that released a set of recommendations in April of 2010—to date, the main action that the City has taken. Ray is a community health specialist at a non-profit in East Harlem. He coordinates a program that helps people out by offering—because Ray is not a licensed exterminator—pesticide-free bedbug management. If someone has a bedbug problem they can call Ray, and when their turn on the long waiting list comes, he will come to their apartment and help them seal up cracks, encase mattresses, steam and vacuum infested areas, and essentially minimize potential bedbug habitats.

Ray told me that of the 84 families that were enrolled in his bedbug abatement program, between half and two-thirds live in situations where multiple families inhabit the same unit. Ray explained:

> "A lot of the families we do see are from Mexico, are undocumented, and are doubled and tripled up. And they are not always in a good position to report and to be persistent."

A further complication that Ray said he is increasingly confronting is that building superintendents—the people who are in charge of the maintenance of the buildings where these people live—are ex-convicts. It's not that these 'supers' are somehow mean or criminal, but that their criminal records make it difficult for them to get employment. As such, they are very

reluctant to rock the boat, advocate for tenants, or report too many expenses to stingy landlords, who are often more than willing to exploit this reluctance. This situation is yet another circumstance involving a complicated interplay between different layers of institutional and collective dysfunction.

Ray said he knows of people who have been dealing with bedbugs for three or four years now:

> "For them it's kind of like, we can get the problem to disappear over the whole winter," he said. "But then once the heat shuts off, for some reason it just comes back, and they have to deal with it for the whole summer. So for some people it is like mosquitoes in the summer . . . and now bedbugs."

Renee said something similar:

> "In some of these buildings, the situation is dire, and people are living with bedbugs. Honestly and truly living with bedbugs. I see a lot of people who are getting used to it now and they are instituting some sort of mitigation program so they have set up their lives so they can deal with this problem. It's becoming a way of life"

Renee was despondent about this, but she firmly believed that the problem could be addressed if people were more willing to work together to solve it. Ray echoed that sentiment. He argued that bedbugs need to be viewed as just one part of a larger public health situation in which the poor and the precarious are also more likely to be exposed to a range of additional housing related issues including mold, environmental toxins, stress and other health risks. He said:

> "To get this problem under control requires collaboration at an unprecedented level, where the property manager, the tenants, the super really just have to communicate. And no one can be afraid of reporting or asking for help or anything like that. The thing I repeat over and over again in all these years of doing home visits is that we try to help people with their problem in their apartment, but we also tell them, 'you are not the only one going through this, this is a building-wide problem, your neighbor is going through the same thing,' and encouraging them to talk to each other."

Ray dreamed of starting a cooperative dedicated to providing low-cost housing health risk abatement services and providing a different, more collective organizing model for dealing with these issues.

The full social, economic, and epidemiological ramifications of a bedbug infestation on the scale and duration of that found in New York City are unknown. Officially, bedbugs are not considered a public health problem because—though they feed on human blood—they have not been found to be a significant vector of disease.[101] This fact, combined with the relatively recent emergence of the problem, could explain the dearth of substantive empirical research into the social relations, economic impacts, and potential health effects of infestation. Early evidence suggests that there could be potentially debilitating and long lasting psychological effects, particularly in cases of *chronic* infestation:

> "[O]ft-mentioned symptoms from respondents living with bed bugs included nervousness, paranoia, anger, frustration, embarrassment, devastation and depression. Anxiety, stress, sleeplessness and depression are medically important symptoms that can lead to other conditions. Dismissing bed bugs as "not a public health pest" on the grounds that they are unproven disease vectors ignores the pain, suffering and emotional distress inflicted on their victims." (Potter et al. 2010)

Ultimately, the most disquieting thing about bedbugs is not the itching or the intimacy, but the prospect of chronic suffering for a large number of people. Moreover, it is clear that this suffering is disproportionately endured by the poor, the already precarious and marginal, much more than by the rich and already secure. Much of the press coverage of bedbugs has focused on them as if they are merely another consumer problem that can be addressed through the right

[101] See New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene 2010 and deShazo 2009. Recently, however, bedbugs were found to be a vector for drug resistant staph infections by researchers in the Downtown Eastside neighborhood of Vancouver (see Lowe and Romney 2011).

combination of commodities.[102] Those who have money can use it to buy peace of mind while those who do not just have to deal with it however they can and make a life of it.

Social scientists Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margret Lock (1997) have articulated a phenomenon that they call social suffering. [103] They write that social suffering:

> "[B]rings into a single space an assemblage of human problems that have their origins and consequences in the devastating injuries that social force can inflict on human experience. Social suffering results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems. Included under the category of social suffering are conditions that are usually divided among separate fields, conditions that simultaneously involve health, welfare, legal, moral, and religious issues. They destabilize established categories. For example, the trauma, pain and disorder to which atrocity gives rise are health conditions; yet they are also political and cultural matters. Similarly, poverty is the major risk factor for ill health and death; yet this is only another way of saying that health is a social indicator and indeed a social process." (1997 ix)

This idea is powerful in identifying the collective character of many of the most severe social problems, suggesting by implication that the solutions to these problems must necessarily be collective as well. Attention to social suffering, then, can destabilize established categories.

In their own way, bedbugs offer an example of such social suffering. Chronic bedbug infestation as it was manifest in New York City during the time of my study was a condition made possible only amidst the excesses and overlaps of collective social life—specifically the close proximity of bodies and potential vectors of circulation in urban space. It is a condition that repeatedly works its way towards and detrimentally affects the already vulnerable through no

[102] *The New York Times* for example has run pieces about bedbug sniffing dogs that can be hired for hundreds of dollars an hour and about how much and on what products the average consumer should expect to spend to get rid of an infestation. In other New York publications, there have been puff pieces about extremely high-end exterminators who will come discreetly, dressed as delivery men or maintenance workers, and apply a customized mixture of chemicals to all the specific nooks and crannies of your home. They are in such high demand that they frequently turn down jobs that seem too tough. Meanwhile, there has not been nearly as much focus on the people who can't afford any of these things.

[103] Bourdieu et al. (1999) also use this phrase, though in a less clear way. They compiled a copious volume of ethnographic stories entitled *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society.* Though the contributors do not specifically discuss what they mean by the term anywhere in the text, the content of the ethnographic work implies a similar meaning to that outlined by Kleinman and colleagues.

fault of theirs, and in so doing often intersects and overlaps with other forms of social violence and precarity. This is a collective issue that cannot be contained by any individual alone and where individualist solutions are plainly inadequate. Rather than hopeless misery, however, this failure may ultimately contain the seeds of ways forward.

Towards the end of my conversation with Renee, she started talking about how bedbugs were starting to irritate wealthy people and businesses. She said they have been showing up in corporate offices and in theaters, not to mention in hotels, where they have been a huge problem. She said that if something isn't done about this situation, bedbugs will spread to such an extent that they won't be just a problem for the poor, but for everybody in New York City. In her description of the spread of this pest, she gave a glimpse of just how porous the boundaries are between different groups, between self and other, and between different forms of collectivity that are interlinked in urban space.

One last set of comparative stories from West Forty-Sixth to drive the contradictions home.

Not long before I met them, Rachel and Harmony had bedbugs. They called their landlord, who came that day before they even got back from work and fumigated the place with "bug bombs" that left a toxic film all over everything they owned but did not faze the bedbugs in the least. He didn't treat any other apartments because, as he said, "nobody else reported a problem." What's suspect is that only a few of the apartments in Harmony and Rachel's building were occupied by people like them—young professionals who pay market rate rent. Other apartments were subleased to employees, undocumented and overcrowded, from the restaurants downstairs.[104] As Harmony put it, "Of course nobody else called. They are all undocumented!"

[104] Rachel and Harmony knew of one apartment the same size as theirs in which a family of five people had lived before just up and disappearing one day.

The problem wasn't taken care of because only one market-rate apartment was treated, and incompetently at that.

By the time I met them, Harmony and Rachel had established a system—no furniture or clothing touching the walls, plastic containers filled with lime powder underneath the feet of every piece of furniture—that they enacted more or less automatically. They had been pretty successful at abating the problem with this system. They knew that the bugs were probably still there in other parts of the building, and they knew that if they came back they would be on their own trying to deal with it.

Around the same time, an infestation was discovered in the apartment of an elderly resident in the limited equity co-op building where Watty lived. Instead of chastising or threatening eviction, the people in his building simply pooled their money and resources and helped get it taken care of. They paid for an exterminator to come to that apartment and also to look at every apartment to make sure the problem had not spread. I asked Watty why they did this and he simply said, "Well, they were everybody's problem."

Thus, in two similar situations, two very different outcomes result from different forms social imagination and collective action, in this case hinging on different relations of property ownership. An endorsement of limited equity co-ops or the abolition of private property? Maybe. What is certain is that forms of social suffering, like the collective conditions that produce them, are not intractable or inevitable. Meanwhile, increased social permeability of urban social space increases the possibility for, and perhaps also the necessity of, collective action.

Battle

One day I accompanied Watty on a trip to get his annual check-up at the Ryan Chelsea community health clinic on Ninth Avenue. We were going to go run some other errands afterwards, and as I sat in the lobby waiting for him to get done, a woman sat down next to me. She was plainly dressed, perhaps in her late sixties. I don't know why, maybe because I said hello, but she just started talking. She talked about health problems and expenses, about the complexity of navigating a fragmented heath care system as someone without much money. Then, unprompted, she said:

> "I have to get out of New York before I die here. Been here 40 years. I don't know why anybody stays. I live in an apartment on Forty-Second where one day they just quit fixing things. So I quit paying rent and put it in the bank. But I got mold and I got urine coming down from a broken toilet up above me and it's making me sick. I need to move back down south where the rent is way cheaper."

Then they called her name and she was gone. It was a bracing reminder that in a place as populated and built-up as the Middle West Side of Manhattan, there are a lot of people dealing with a lot of issues that the people around them might never even know about.

Bob Kalin knows a thing or two about some of these issues. I met Bob through Watty who is on the board of directors at the non-profit called Housing Conservation Coordinators (HCC) where Bob works. Bob has been working as a housing organizer here since July of 1979. Having lived and worked in the neighborhood all this time he has a deep, seasoned perspective.

I met with Bob a couple times, once for a conversation in his office and once for a guided tour of West Forty-Sixth. He didn't shy away from talking bluntly about some of the things that he has seen happening in the neighborhood. During our first conversation he said:

> "There's allll kinds of bullshit going on now. Like ugly like you couldn't imagine . . . because suddenly, the slum area where nobody wanted to live in these buildings is now a

> very desirable area that's gentrified, and where your apartment is now worth a fortune. And that's brought out—like you can't imagine—the worst in human nature."

I asked him to elaborate and tell me what kind of bullshit he was talking about. He proceeded to tell me about the economic incentive that landlords increasingly have to coerce rent-controlled tenants out of their apartments. He said:

> "So let's say you spend a quarter of a million dollars in legal fees over a number of years to get someone out. You are then going to rent that apartment for—for sure—you are not going to rent it for less than about $2500 [per month], and you are probably going to rent it for $3000. So you will make your money over time, or you've deregulated the unit so if you sell it, you have increased the value limit a lot . . . Owners are really spending ridiculous amounts of money trying to get people out. And buy-outs now—giving people money to leave, which was a big trend ten years ago—have started to re-emerge as a trend."

What Bob was saying reminded me of a conversation I had had with Carmen not too long before. She had been talking about why she never moved and she said she knew several people who had been paid off to leave their apartments and move somewhere else. In fact, her sisters had taken such an offer a while back and moved to the Bronx. She said that most of the offers she had heard about were somewhere in the neighborhood of ten thousand dollars to pack up and leave. Her sisters, she said, thought their deal was a lot of money when they took it. They were wowed by getting all of that money at once. Over the long run, though, Carmen figured they had paid it back in the higher rents that they incurred when they moved out of their rent-controlled places. Carmen's landlord made such offers to her on a couple occasions, but that she turned them down. She only pays about five hundred dollars a month for her place, but she said it wasn't really about the money for her. Honestly, she said, she doesn't know any place else. Then Carmen said landlords don't try to make deals much anymore—they just spend the money trying to find a way to get you out.

Carmen's mom's landlord had just gotten done renovating all of the apartments in the building except for the two that her mother inhabits. He ripped up the stairs. There was debris

everywhere and dust pouring in underneath the doors. The entryway was left completely open so that anyone could come or go anytime. Carmen thought he made it dangerous and hard for her mother on purpose with the hope that she might leave, but she had weathered the storm. Her mom was too old and sick to go anywhere else. Carmen just hoped that she could stay in her own apartment for as long as her mom had stayed in hers.

Mindful of Carmen and her mom, I asked Bob a follow-up:

"What other tactics do landlords use to get people out?" I said.

> "You just don't do repairs," he answered. "Or, not so much now, but still, you will hire people to move into the vacant apartment above the person that you want to get out and play loud music all night. Or they will deliberately turn on the faucets in the bathtub and let it run over and flood your apartment. They will have loud dogs that bark all night or try to bite you in the hallway. I mean, that more egregious stuff was happening more in the 70s and 80s, but there are still pockets of it. Now, they will install a video camera in front of your apartment and videotape you to try and prove that you are not spending enough time there to have it constitute your primary residence[105]. They will hire private detectives to follow you around and see if you have a place somewhere else. So there is a lot more up-front investment to try and get you out, because if they get you out, over time, they will make their money back. So they are willing to front a lot more to try and get you out."

When Bob took me for a tour of West Forty-Sixth on a blustery November day, the idea was to point out different buildings where he knew of some organizing that had been done against a landlord or where a building association had made income guidelines part of the ownership structure of their co-ops in order to keep them affordable. Watty came along, as did two interns from HCC. Bob pointed out about a dozen buildings where tenants had taken some form of action—lawsuits, counter suits, and in one case a rent strike that had lasted fifteen years. He also talked about some of the characters he had encountered in assisting with these efforts. One landlord he described as "the Prince-of-Darkness, really-really-bad". He characterized the former co-op board president of one building as "a drunken criminal dictator." He had come to

[105] According to the law, tenants are not eligible for rent control unless a unit is their primary place of residence.

power by threatening his neighbors with violence, and had proceeded to pilfer funds and engage in illegal deals to install members of his family into the building and maintain power. It turned out that this was the guy who had—in an inebriated, illegal, clandestine, and nocturnal effort at a low cost repair to a leakage problem—plastered over the top of the mural in Mathews-Palmer Park. When the guy keeled over dead one day, the other tenants in the building rejoiced and made strides towards making their building permanently affordable. Bob described the conflict between organized tenants, these misanthropes, and the forces of displacement as "battle." It made me feel like there were questionable things happening in a lot of buildings on the street, but that the fight to keep people in their housing and stand up for their rights was far from over.

Not too long after our walk with Bob, I was killing time with Watty in his apartment before a Block Association meeting. We started to talk about the gentrification of the neighborhood, how he felt about it, how he saw it intersecting with his activities or those of the Block Association, and whether or not he thought he could or should do anything about it:

> "I have been very fortunate," he said. "I had a rent controlled place and then I had this[106]."
>
> "Yeah?" I said. "And you feel like that influences your view of these things that are going on on the block? If you were a renter on the block, getting priced out, would feel differently about . . . ?"
>
> "Well, the renters are going to get priced out," He interjected, stammering. "It is going to happen anyway . . . you know there is only so much . . ."
>
> "You sort of feel like it is inevitable?" I said.
>
> "Right," he said. "And then certain people, like the elderly, there are protections in place to . . . I am on the board at HCC and we . . ."
>
> "Yeah, I know you are engaged with these issues," I interrupted, a little impatiently. "But then tell me where that feeling of inevitability comes you think, for you? Is it just having been around and having seen what's happened, or . . ."

[106] As a reminder, Watty lived in a limited equity coop that he bought into for $250 back in the 1970s

"Well, yeah, partly, and partly it's . . ." He paused for a long time and pursed his lips before continuing. "I think it has to do, not to be smug or anything, with a sense of, not well-being, but, if you know the Maslow thing[107], it's becoming a self-realization thing, where in fact you feel, and are in the reality of it, secure. For whatever reasons, we are in a big recession but I'm doing fine thanks."

"Yeah?" I said with a notable hint of skepticism.

"Not to make light of it," he continued. "But I am in a very fortunate financial situation, which makes it very, uh, certainly much easier for me. That's always a big angst if you are financially insecure. You know, some people are in a very shaky position. But I am in a fortunate position . . . and I still have my interest in other things, like the mural or whatever."

"Ok," I prodded, trying to make sense of what he was telling me. "But how about more generally though? Do you not feel like, in your position, you could take on gentrification, for example, the same way that you take on the mural restoration, or picking up bottles? Or is it that those things don't work the same way?

"It's not my . . . " He stammered again. "It's kind of like it's not my issue. I mean, I hear that issue [gentrification] a lot, but my take on the neighborhood, and we are talking about Clinton now, is that it gentrified in the 40s and 50s and 60s in certain respects. There has always been a certain element of affluence in this community. George Gershwin and Ira, they used to party right down the street!"

"So you feel like it has already happened and it's not the kind of thing you could stop anyway?" I asked.

"I think the real take for me is . . ." He paused again for a long time. "People might want to be a part of it but they can't. They are shut out. I mean the reason that gentrification is not something that I want to focus on is that it's too . . ." He let out a sigh ". . . broad, or too widely spread, or . . ." He stopped and then trailed off, "I don't know."

I have gone over the transcript of this conversation countless times trying to understand Watty. His responses to my questions do not feel coherent. There is a vexing contradiction between the ideas he is expressing here and the actions that I knew him to undertake on a daily basis—a contradiction that he clearly had great difficulty addressing. I would have guessed he would say that he thought of himself as someone who was trying to fight against the forces of

[107] Watty was referring, in a somewhat confused way, to Alan Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theories which argue that people will address social, emotional, and spiritual needs only in circumstances when the basic needs associated with survival and comfort are already met.

gentrification in his own small ways—by being active at HCC and by working to keep the ownership structure in his own building affordable as a matter of principle and a model to others. But he didn't say that at all. It seemed like the big abstract idea of "gentrification" was just not something he could see himself engaging with or picture in the context of his life. For a long time this irritated me. If gentrification couldn't be fought here, where could it? How could Watty say that gentrification was inevitable and done with when he himself was clearly still playing a part in some the activities through which it takes place, as well as in tangible efforts to fight it? Did he not see that hegemonic force draws power from this kind of abstract obfuscation and from the pervasive feeling that it is outside of everyday life? I thought that this conversation showed how Watty was alienated and out of touch with the real-abstract processes that he himself helps to determine and instantiate. I thought I might write about all that—maybe even make it a general theme of analysis—but after I sat with it and put it in the context of all the other stories I decided it might be about something different.

Part of what I now think Watty was saying is that the "too broad" abstraction "gentrification" has no purchase in the context of his practical experiences living on West Forty-Sixth Street. Alienation? Sure. But of a different, more indeterminate, and messy kind. Perhaps his answer is incoherent and contradictory because gentrification is contradictory and is not lived and enacted in a coherent, universal way. Anti-displacement campaigns, rent control struggles, and zoning and housing code enforcement—for better or worse, are the things that Watty sees and is willing to organize around. Not the stuff of wholesale revolution, but the pinpricks, tears, and potentially vital openings in the fabric of hegemony and in the way gentrification is known and confronted, lived and encountered.

This story throws broader arguments into relief. I have already argued that urban space is essential to the way that collective human sociality is produced, and that this production is fraught. I have also suggested in numerous passages throughout this text that everyday practices in urban space need to be understood as a kind of social infrastructure for processes which far exceed them in space or time. I think I have now told enough stories to connect and complete these points.

The notion of social infrastructure is meant to suggest some of the connotations of physical infrastructure—the factories, transport structures, buildings, and other very specific fixed forms that have accumulated in space, particularly in cities, and which can be understood as products of specific histories, collective efforts, and geographies. Such infrastructures are necessary collective components of production and reproduction. They are variably made, maintained, and dismantled through collective investments that address changing social needs.

What I mean by social infrastructure mirrors what is implied by these physical forms, and extends concepts associated with the critique of everyday life. As I have strived to show, people make and interact with concrete social forms just as they make, circulate, and concretize ideas and abstractions. There is a complex dialectical relation between these forms of production. Urban space is part and parcel of this process, being produced concretely and embedded with particular abstractions at some moments, and concretely playing a role in the creation or mutation of relations and abstractions in others. This social-spatial dialectic is instantiated performatively over the course of daily routine, and is consequential to production and reproduction of the broader social relations, processes, and forms that define the current conjuncture. In this sense, the accumulated force of practical activities ceaselessly repeated in everyday life acts as a kind of social infrastructure for those ostensibly macro-processes, and this

understanding yields analytical and political points that differ from those arrived at via political-economy.

Take the so-called neoliberalization of urban space as an example. Echoing some of Lefebvre's arguments about the urban, many scholars have now argued that the privatization of public resources, financialization of urban development, real estate speculation, and gentrification of working class neighborhoods, have, over the last several decades become essential to the continued growth of the global economy (see Hackworth 2007, Harvey 2005; Peck and Tickell 2002; Smith 1996, 2002). As with the production of space and the urban, these processes have been examined extensively from the perspective of political economy. When these processes are evaluated from the perspective of everyday life, however, some underexplored and politically significant questions emerge. Real estate and finance are forms of capital that are fickle and vulnerable to all manner of depreciating or destabilizing forces. What, therefore, are the urban social relations that allow such fickle things to become the productive center of entire economies? What kinds of sustained creative activities and *social infrastructures* are necessary to the production, maintenance, and reproduction of these relations and to nurture and preserve the kinds of urban spaces in which these forms of capital can be profitable?

The stories from West Forty-Sixth Street provide a window onto these significant questions—a particular perspective on the hegemonic processes associated with neoliberal capitalism. The selective popular history that is curated there contains hints that things like business improvement districts, zero tolerance policing, and the privatization of public services may have initially emerged in chaotic and contingent ways from the practical activities and sensibilities that were already there in everyday life. During the time of my study, residents still routinely performed such practical activities—endless 311 calls, tag-teaming with the police,

cleaning up the park literally and symbolically, picking up litter from the sidewalk, maintaining trees, naturalizing inequality and private individualism in casual conversations and other discussions. While these actions are small-scale and seemingly banal, they play an integral and underappreciated part in cultivating and reproducing the business 'climate,' quality of life, and other urban conditions that are favorable to real estate and speculative financial capital. These kinds of social reproductive practices and the forms of common sense with which they are mutually imbricated are not derivative but essential. This is the reproduction of the social relations of production, the mode of existence without which the current cumulatively realized mode of production would not exist or function.

Much of the appeal of social infrastructure as a concept lies in its inherent indeterminacy—its ability to convey everyday creative activity as a condition of possibility at a more aggregate level.[108] As an ensemble, the stories that I have told about West Forty-Sixth Street point to an armature of enacted practices and ideas that takes a tremendous amount of creative activity to produce and sustain, and that is absolutely necessary to the continued production and reproduction of social life in both a material and social sense. The most obvious and troubling implication of this argument is that this infrastructure clearly plays a crucial role in the perpetuation of social violence. On the flip side, if everyday practices are part of the social infrastructure for the production of social violence, they might also be altered, redirected, or appropriated towards the transformation or dismantling of the processes that produce that

[108] There are some overlaps here with the argument made by Hardt and Negri (2009) in *Commonwealth*, the conclusion to their so-called Empire trilogy. Hardt and Negri call attention to what they call the common—accumulated social resources which are collectively owned, managed, and maintained, which they posit as being inherent to capitalism and always potentially available for revolutionary appropriation. They too point to the urban as a crucial space because they view it as a concentration of commons that are becoming "planetary" in scope. While Hardt and Negri are emphatic about the revolutionary potential of the urban common, I—in light of my observations on West Forty-Sixth—am more tempered, and primarily want to emphasize the contradictory character of everyday life and social infrastructure as a condition of possibility for all sorts of potential social relations—including those that could be made revolutionary through different social investments.

violence. This is both the challenge and the promise of everyday life in all of its contradictions, stubbornly necessary to both the best and the worst of what humanity is capable of.

Wiggle space

One last story of indetermination.

Reverend Billy, a performance character created by a man named Bill Talen, is something of a cross between a televangelist, a political comedian, and a militant situationist street performer. Since the late 1990s, Reverend Billy has traveled around the world with his choir[109] preaching what they call the 'Gospel of Life After Shopping' in stores, shopping malls, and public settings all over the world—often uninvited. He has been arrested doing this in Disneyland, Wal-Mart, Starbucks, and all sorts of other places. While the package is humorous and satirical, the message is deadly serious and political, and the Reverend has been a staunch activist for labor rights, anti-gentrification campaigns, environmental struggles, and other radical causes. The Rev, as he is sometimes known, has consistently tried to show that contemporary consumer culture is a vapid state of affairs that is as bad for human beings as it is for the planet.

When I met Bob Kalin, the housing organizer, he mentioned that Talen used to perform at St. Clement's Church back in the 1990s when he was just getting established. Bob said he once had his credit card demagnetized during an alter call when the Reverend convinced everyone in the audience to present their cards for a "blessing." Supposedly that one didn't go over very well with the audience, but the Reverend continued to refine his approach.

I looked into it, and as it turns out, Bill Talen didn't just perform on West Forty-Sixth, but actually *became* the Reverend Billy there. In his book, *What Should I Do if Reverend Billy is*

[109] Not just a group to preach to, but a full performing ensemble with a pretty impressive wheelhouse of original material. See http://www.revbilly.com/

in My Store?[110] Talen (2003) tells the story of how this transpired. He came to the Middle West Side of Manhattan from San Francisco in the early 1990s, expecting to find a vibrant arts scene. He writes:

> "I was another anonymous New Yorker, arrived from an immigrant's Oceania with a head full of New York foreshadowings in a mind that was trying too hard.
>
> And what was New York City showing me? I came to Broadway, what I thought was the center of any actor's world, and I was crushed to discover that theater no longer existed there. I had moved across the country with all the expectations that can be assigned to New York City. Okay, here I am—now where's the show? I've put my last $70 down on a great seat at a Broadway opening night. The curtain rises, and there, center stage, in hat and tails, tonight's celebrity host: MICKEY FUCKING MOUSE." (2003, 30)

Dejected by the state of Broadway, Talen took a job as the house manager of the theater at St. Clement's Church on West Forty-Sixth. He lived with his dog in a little room upstairs from the sanctuary-cum-theater. At night he would sit on the set of whatever play was being staged there and think about the world outside. Talen writes, and I quote at length[111]:

> "There was always a mysterious light that would shine in through the cracks of the church, like a cop with a flashlight in the window when you fell asleep in the backseat with your high school sweetheart.
>
> The source of the prying light would be the reified teeth of Mickey Mouse, enforced by the good clean violence of Mayor America. Even before Disney got its manifest destiny and tax breaks, Rudy Giuliani was pushing back the ghouls of a Broadway gone dark (in his dark view) with the superweapon of the rat's dental work. With relish he demonized the community, Forty-second Street, four-deuce. Claims of immoral civic embarrassment in Times Square were the cover used by Hizzoner and his phalanx of corporate boosters, who populated the neighborhood outside of our church doors with shadows, muggings, whores, knife-wielding homeless crazies, welfare addicts, and broke black males.
>
> When the sidewalks were cleansed of the "characters" who supposedly unnerved tourists, the big Broadway houses were cleansed as well. No one caught on that the theater indoors was related to the theater outdoors. They went vanilla together, and though "Broadway is dead!" had been screamed like Ethel Merman for many years, the real death, when it came, was sudden and unmistakable. By 1998, whichever direction

[110] A title taken from an actual memo that Starbucks sent to its franchise members with instructions about what employees should to do if the Reverend came to a store to preach. It basically instructed them to keep calm, call the police, pretend nothing is happening, ask him to leave in firm repeated tones, and prevent him from getting behind the counter and doing an exorcism.

[111] With permission from The New Press.

> you walked, from Drama Books south, or from Joe Allen's east, or the International Center of Photography west, or the Port Authority north, there wasn't a thing of substance to stop you and force a personal question. You could really work your tourist drift, your bovine browsing, your "nice time".
>
> The streets evolved into the hallways of a mall, overpoliced, oversullied, and bland with visitors from outer Paramus. This could be called Consumer Theater, whose leading actors perform on the shoulders of Diane Sawyer or Bryant Gumble, while those in the chorus jump up and down waving to their grandmothers in Dubuque. You couldn't have in that shot, for example, a middle aged black man monologuing to no particular audience. Arrest those characters before they get in the frame—that was the point.
>
> Now the lights of Broadway shine for shows that are nothing but long commercial breaks. They are movies adapted to the stage, mostly. These are merchandising vehicles that must never have the qualities of a well-told story because such a thing would compete with the selling of the products. A really powerful story is not easily controlled as it passes into the rapt audience. A real story must have in it, usually at about the two-thirds point in the narrative, *the Unknown*.
>
> We're all aware of the feeling of weightlessness that a great story floats us up onto. We can't know the ending, the fates of people onstage are at risk; they can mutate, suffer, fly away, even decisively change our lives as we sit there. This unknowable plot point has been stuffed with dazzling/distracting special effects in Disney films and plays—it certainly is in *The Lion King*. In New York's Times Square, the same can be said for the theater of the sidewalks—now there is nothing to fear, since any person with an unknowable quality in their "story" will soon lose their freedom and possibly their rights as a citizen.
>
> Once the writer Walter Benjamin described the obsolescence of the human experience after World War I, when the individual faced a no-man's-land, where everything was bombed and strafed and burned. Only the clouds above could be remembered as having originated from life on earth. Times Square after Giuliani sells the same apocalyptic idea—here is life's destruction cheerfully displayed, where cultural change is outlawed because the arts are powerless. Here is the international village common, where once two hundred original dramas opened each season, become a Vegas-like mall.
>
> Broadway is a single show now. It's called *Consumed!* The critics love it. Here's the plot: Life is dramatized as nothing but a commercial break between the unknown before you're born and the death after you've spent it all." (2003, 31-33. Emphasis in the original)

The Reverend's account is unflinchingly critical, zeroing in on the same sense of loss and coercively achieved erasure, which others, like Doug, also felt creeping in during this period of recent New York City history. And yet, it was precisely within and because of these bleak and increasingly sanitized conditions that the Reverend Billy and his commitment to the theater of political activism were born. Directly out of the experience of daily life in midtown at that time

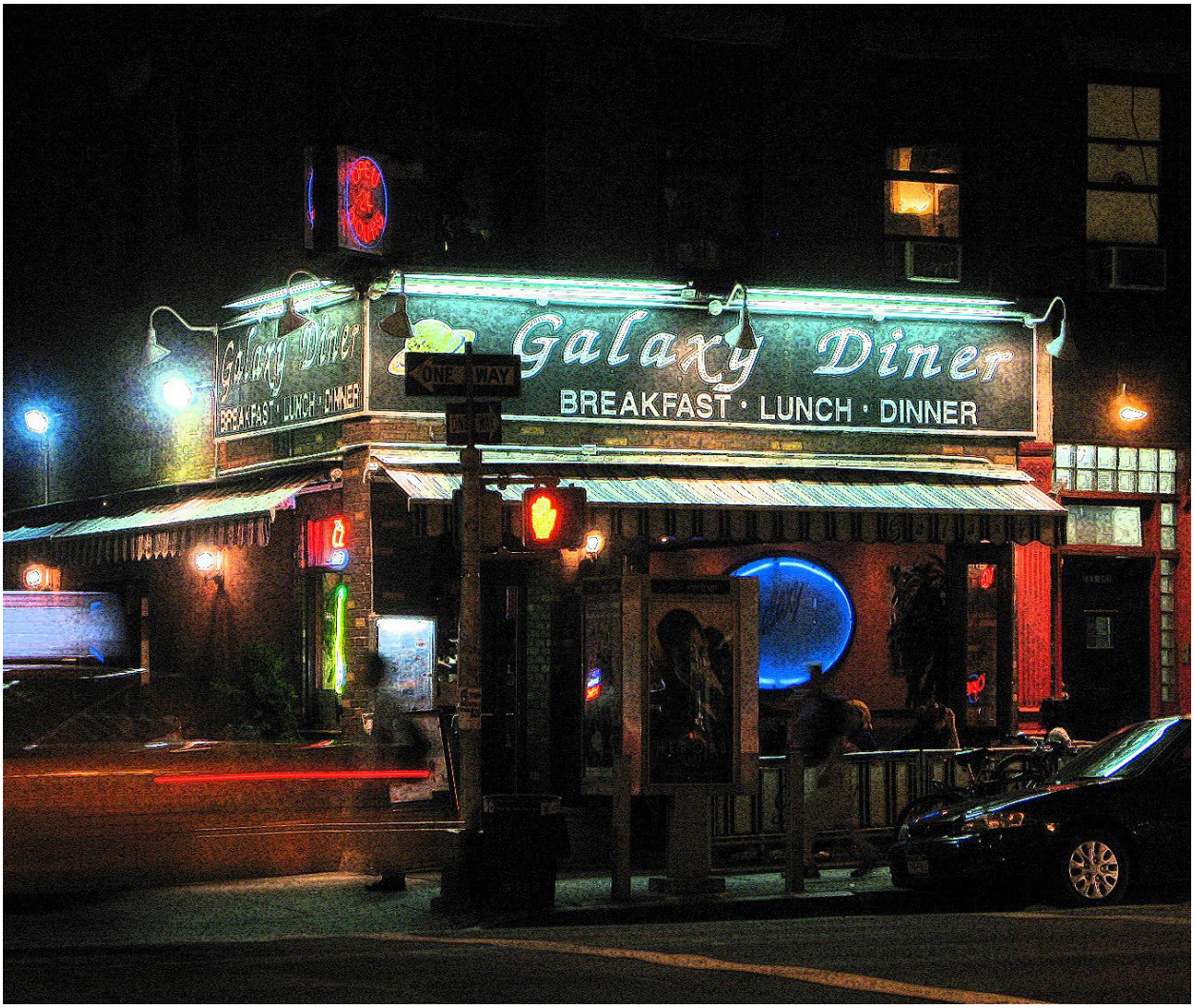
and as a direct response and a challenge to the social conditions that were taking hold there, Talen started to preach—at first to his dog in the empty church, then to crowds in Times Square and the people of the Middle West Side, and eventually to the world. Even in a space that some very powerful institutions had done their best to strip of the unknown, of difference and conflict, Talen still found it, worked it open, and expanded it into a life's work.

When I learned that the Rev had once lived on West Forty-Sixth, I wrote to him with a long series of questions. I wanted to know about the neighborhood in the 1990s and how the political sensibilities which he developed there emerged from his experiences in that space at that time. He wrote me back and said that there were indeed many tangential encounters—people that he talked to in used book stores or situations that he heard about while hanging around the neighborhood haunts that still persisted in the shadows of Times Square—which subsequently became foundational to his work. But more insistently, he wanted to redirect me to the present. The urgent question, he said, is not what things were like back then but what are like now and what they are going to be like in the future. Things are always changing, he said, and "in the narrowing wiggle space we still own, we find ways to ski against it, to huddle in the image-wind." It was not a prescription, but an observation stated as fact. Even and perhaps especially when things seem grim, it is crucial to keep an eye out for openings. "We have to break into that light," He said, "find new ways to talk to one another in the new flood."

In ways that can be infuriating, heartrending, illuminating, explosive, or all of these at once, indeterminacy and contradiction are and inextricable part of contemporary everyday life. They are sometimes obvious and dramatic, other times nuanced to the point of going unnoticed, getting displaced, or being forgotten. It is all too easy to treat them as if they are merely vestiges or side effects of something else when in fact they are central to the production of social space—

moments where the tension between getting by and changing something and the play between abstract and concrete is being negotiated in creative activity. Apparitions, traces, and abstractions can be released in these moments. Some social forms are becoming attached and concretized while others are dissolved. The accomplishment of hegemony is at risk. These moments of negotiation and the social forces that they yield are a condition of possibility that is necessary for collective social life, like the practical soil that nourishes broader social forms and allows them to grow. Moments of indeterminacy and social negotiation might also, therefore, be realized as points of connection to be skied against, huddled around, opened up, and catalyzed towards the transformation of already existing collective relations. This conflict is always unfolding, *there*, in the social space at the heart of contemporary everyday life, and it could go any way.

Conclusion: The Inexorable Politics of Everyday Life



Everyday life in a place like West Forty-Sixth Street is fluid—a bundle of enacted processes, complex moments that defy singular characterization, and spatial, temporal, and social relations that span the intimate and the global in scope. Practices that may seem individual and personal align within the production and reproduction of social formations which are decisively collective and which far exceed any individual or setting. Distinctions between self and other are misleading and blurred. All the while, things keep moving and changing in ways that are resistant neat plots or decisive conclusions. It is a lot to reckon with, but I want to conclude by underscoring some of the political and ethical demands that are implied by this situation and in response to the things I observed and learned about during the course of my study on these blocks.

Let's start by stating what should be fairly obvious. Some disquieting forms of social violence are evident in everyday life on West Forty-Sixth Street. Things like discriminatory policing, creeping privatization, tenant harassment, and profit-driven eviction seem to be naturalized to the point where they do not cause much of an outcry. Broader forms of exploitation, displacement, and social suffering are being realized here too. All of these outcomes have negative and disproportionate impacts on those who have little power and who are vulnerable, such as undocumented migrants, the elderly, poor people, people of color—in essence, on those who were already in precarious social and economic situations. Gentrification, neoliberalism, globalization, and uneven development—these ostensibly hegemonic processes are unfolding in tangible and empirically documentable ways on West Forty-Sixth Street. Some people's lives and acts of self-constitution are being valorized while others are squeezed out, left to struggle alone against powerful social forces, or seemingly erased. However, these facts are neither new nor the whole story, and to just leave it at this would not do justice to the truth.

These disquieting outcomes are evident on West Forty-Sixth Street, certainly, but evaluated from the standpoint of everyday life, the way that they happen appears to be a complicated, indeterminate affair. They are not simply imposed from outside by macro forces such as financial markets, real estate capital, or top-down state policy. I spent three years on West Forty-Sixth and I never observed anything as coherent, inexorable, or hulking as those forces are sometimes packaged in imagination or social theory. What I did observe was a slow but relentless jostle among practical activities, ideas, sensibilities, and concretized social relations in the everyday lives of ordinary people—a steady scrum of minor enactments upon which the perpetuation of broader structural processes seemed to be contingent. This is no doubt partly a trick of relative perspective, of the limited view that is possible in narrow space and time. But this is also precisely the point: Even the most violent, hegemonic, and sweeping of human abstractions are only ever partial and made real in the untidy and indeterminate throes of everyday life.

Lefebvre writes:

> "[P]eople in daily life still perceive the institutional edifice above their heads. Similarly, the crowd of believers perceive the cathedral, caress its pillars with their eyes and hands, feel the soil under their feet. In daily life, these believers do not realize that they *are* the soil on which the edifice rests and bears down. With all their gestures, words, and habits, the preserve and support the edifice. Neoliberal ideology has succeeded in maintaining this deceptive perspective, and has even reinforced it." (2005, 123)

That the edifice rests—in other words, that macro-social forces are contingent—upon the social infrastructure of everyday life and practical activity is in many ways an unsettled and morally complicated conclusion. On West Forty-Sixth, for example, it is unsettling that the actions of some residents have clearly served to lubricate, if not directly facilitate, many of the worst outcomes associated with gentrification and neoliberalization. Unsettling because names, faces, and lives are attached to processes that might otherwise remain anonymous, callous, and

impersonal. Also unsettling because it is not so easy to demonize or make straw arguments out of whole people who are, after all, just trying to go about their daily lives. Indeed, this situation is morally complicated because the whole people in question here are generally not acting malevolently, sadistically, or antisocially, but deeply human and more often than not out of well-intentioned common sense ideas about community, quality of life, and progress, which people assume are wholesome and not exclusionary. Morally complicated because these are stories about what happens at the point where abstractions meet practical activities in the social spaces of daily routine, clouded as they are with the silts of subjective social experience across space and time. People often do not know about the disquieting effects—the long tail of social violence, displacement, or exploitation—that their performances of self-constitution, enactments of common sense, and productions of space can have on others. This kind of ambiguity, which is frankly an unavoidable part of contemporary everyday life, is not a straight story of good against evil or greed or malice in which we can easily identify villains and make confident pronouncements.

Things that might seem obvious quickly become murky and indeterminate from the immersed perspective of everyday life. But as I have stressed throughout this text, contradiction and indeterminacy should be viewed as opening and opportunity rather than obstacle and cause for hopelessness.

The final point I want to make and the one I want to emphasize above all else concerns the unavoidably political character of everyday life in this context. What does it really mean that I was able to pick a spot, scratch at it for a while, and find the kinds of stories and situations that I did? What sense can be made of such confluences? Maybe I got lucky when I picked this location where it turned out that so many different intriguing things were happening. Then again,

maybe the events from West Forty-Sixth Street that I have now detailed should not be interpreted as the results of chance, method, or qualities that are singularly limited to the place itself. I believe my findings illustrate a deeper, more consequential overarching reality of contemporary social life—that everyday life in contemporary social space is always already political because it is already integral to and saturated with a sociality that is troubled and which demands to be addressed.

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler (2004) argues that certain social demands emerge when our lives are understood to depend on the actions of others. Writing in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the geopolitical violence that followed, Butler tries to make sense of what social vulnerability means and what happens in the moments where such precarity is evident. She writes:

> "It is about a mode of response that follows upon having been addressed, a comportment toward the Other only after the Other has made a demand upon me, accused me of a failing, or asked me to assume a responsibility. This is an exchange that cannot be assimilated into the schema in which the subject is over here as a topic to be reflexively interrogated, and the Other is over there, as a theme to be purveyed. The structure of address is important for understanding how moral authority is introduced and sustained if we accept not just that we address others when we speak, but that in some way we come to exist, is it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails. More emphatically, however, what binds us morally has to do with how we are addressed by others that we cannot avert or avoid; this impingement by the other's address constitutes us first and foremost against our will or, perhaps put more appropriately, prior to the formation of our will. So if we think that moral authority is about finding one's will and standing by it, stamping one's name upon one's will, it may be that we miss the very mode by which moral demands are relayed. That is, we miss the situation of being addressed, the demand that comes from elsewhere, sometimes a nameless elsewhere, by which our obligations are articulated and pressed upon us." (Butler 2004, 129-130)

A decade after 9/11, in the curiously proximate space of Occupy Wall Street, Butler reframed this argument about precarity and extended it to echo protests against rampant social and economic inequality. Precariousness, she writes, now characterizes every human being:

> "This is not simply an existential truth—each of us could be subject to deprivation, injury, debilitation or death by virtue of events or processes outside of our control. It is also, importantly, a feature of what we might call the social bond, the various relations that establish our interdependency. In other words, no one person suffers a lack of shelter without a social failure to organize shelter in such a way that it is accessible to each and every person. And no one person suffers unemployment without a system or a political economy that fails to safeguard against that possibility. This means that in some of our most vulnerable experiences of social and economic deprivation what is revealed is not only our precariousness as individual persons—though that is surely revealed as well—but also the failures and inequalities of socio-economic and political institutions. In our individual vulnerability to precarity, we find that we are social beings, implicated in a set of networks that either sustain us or fail to do so, or do so only intermittently, producing a constant specter of despair and destitution. Our individual wellbeing depends on whether the social and economic structures that support our mutual dependency can be put into place." (Butler 2011, 13)

Butler's arguments perform an unexpected redirection. In the moment of precarity, she finds not hopelessness, outrage, or empathy, but indetermination. A social truth presents itself, a demand is made, and an opening appears. Where the needs of the most precarious among us are not addressed, the failure is collective in a way that means we have also failed ourselves and our own ambitions for self-constitution. In our failure, social demands are evident and openings for a different, less precarious sociality persist.

The political sensibility—the politics of everyday life—that I think emerges from all of the arguments I have made shares something of Butler's account of precarity in that it is an unsettled and a morally complicated one. The practical activities that sustain contemporary life are always addressing and being addressed by others. The accumulated force of our own creativity can and does ripple out and alter the lives of others in sometimes violent and disturbing ways. By the same stroke, the social violence and suffering that is ultimately produced through practical activity may well be our own. Carmen's mother was right when she said, "from one egg, everybody eats." The countless acts of self-constitution that fill our everyday lives are always collective and social, as are the forms of violence and precarity that can precipitate out

from them. These truths of contemporary life demand of attention and action right there where we are, in the spaces of our everyday lives. This is not an ethic of individual responsibility, but a question of collective production of the lives we want to produce and enact when we address our own needs in relation to the lives of others.

These conclusions may be far cry from insurrectionary revolt, but they are also a far cry from hopelessness or defeat. In light of what I found in everyday life on West Forty-Sixth Street, I think this is an appropriately sober analysis that still allows wiggle room for oppositional practice and even a revolutionary future, albeit one that is clearly yet to be made. Hegemony, gentrification, the privatization of public space, and production of social suffering—it might sound obvious, but these things are not yet over or concluded. I say this not in a hopeless way, but to emphasize, first, that there are still many battles to be fought, and second, that these processes are still, and always will be, incomplete. On West Forty-Sixth Street these processes have reached a point of saturation where they may appear to be complete. The park has been 'reclaimed.' Gentrification already happened. People have already been—perhaps will inevitably be—displaced and their lives made more precarious. Social programs are losing funding because the Middle West Side is no longer a designated "area of need."[112] These sentiments clearly miss another truth that is evident there in everyday life. In fact, these things are not finished. The present is the moment where the stakes are highest, where the precarity of those who are still there is becoming amplified, and where the demands of social life are greatest. At the same time, this is the moment where some of the vulnerabilities, instabilities, and tensions within hegemony may also be the greatest—where new contradictions emerge and old ones become heightened. So what's it going to be?

[112] And also because budgets for social programs have been slashed everywhere in the wake of the financial crisis. There are multiple ways in which the availability of resources for social programs has declined at points where the necessity and value of such programs is arguably magnified.

In each effort to keep someone in their rent controlled apartment, to mitigate a bedbug infestation, to organize against wage theft and for the right to make a living wage, to question what the notions of quality of life and public space should really mean, to attend to the demands of the others who are embroiled in the extensive geographies of our modern existence, and to bring the necessity and radical potential of social contact with the indeterminate and the different to the light of day, there is a moment of social recovery and creation, that is also a moment of vulnerability for the material social practices of hegemony. These are moments of our collective social being that are still available to be recovered and made critical—points of connection to locate, organize, around and to transform through different social investments. I want to emphasize that the political sensibility that emerges here is not mutually exclusive with other forms of capital political activity such as mass movements or labor organizing. I see the politics of everyday life as convergent with these existing and vital fronts and as honing in on another which directs attention to the pernicious sticking points where social inertia may well hold those other struggles back.

Even when grim social forces seem dominant, there are openings. The challenge is to pry at them, to find and grow the outposts. Analysis from the perspective of everyday life offers a means to approach this challenge in a painstaking, intellectually rich, and politically potent way—necessitating that we get down and dirty in the proverbial soil, do the messy work of really understanding how hegemony and social violence take place from the ground up within our own social spaces, find the openings that might be creatively renovated there, and build modes of thought and praxis that live up to the best of human potential.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