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Bryant Park as a Site of Production: Revenue and Social Control

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Abstract

Bryant Park is New York City's only 100% privately funded and managed 'public' park, making it an oft looked-to model of public-private partnerships. This paper examines the everyday workings of the park using ethnographic and archival data, and criminological and urban theory. These details help us understand how Bryant produces a theme-park-like social order in its built environment, landscaping, management, and programming of the park. I suggest that social control functions through five governing principles: visibility, classification, predictability, vulnerability, and empowerment. Everything is neatly classified, from people to activities to trash. Vulnerable design elements like flowers are chosen to suggest the park is cared for. Park-goers are meant to feel not controlled, but in-control; safe, comfortable, and empowered.

This elaborate manipulation of semiotics and space serves to produce surplus value for multiple corporate interests involved in and around the park. I argue that the park operates as a site of production of revenue for these corporate interests. I explain how the park is created and marketed as a product itself, which park-goers have an unwitting share in producing. Thus New York's elite-business community benefits from this nominally public park.

Key words

Urban planning; public space; privatization; parks; governance; production; marxism; social control; criminology; public-private partnerships

Resumen

Bryant Park es el único parque "público" de la ciudad de Nueva York con una financiación y gestión 100% privada, lo que lo convierte a menudo en un ejemplo de partenariado público-privado. Este artículo analiza el funcionamiento cotidiano del parque, utilizando datos etnográficos y de archivo, así como teoría criminológica y urbana. Estos detalles nos ayudan a comprender cómo Bryant produce un orden social típico de un parque mediante el entorno que se ha construido, paisajismo, gestión y programación del parque. Se sugiere que el control social funciona a través de cinco principios de gobierno: visibilidad, clasificación, predicción, vulnerabilidad y empoderamiento. Todo está cuidadosamente clasificado, tanto las

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personas como las actividades o los cubos de basura. Se eligen elementos de diseño vulnerables, como flores, para sugerir que se cuida el parque. Se pretende que los visitantes del parque no se sientan controlados, pero bajo control; seguros, cómodos y con poder.

Esta elaborada manipulación de semiótica y espacio sirve para producir un valor añadido para numerosos intereses corporativos que están involucrados en el parque. Se defiende que el parque funciona como un lugar de producción de ingresos para esos intereses empresariales. Se explica de qué forma se crea y comercializa el parque como un producto en sí mismo, en el que los visitantes del parque participan de forma involuntaria. De esta forma, la comunidad de negocios de élite de Nueva York se beneficia de este parque que es "público" únicamente en su nombre.

Palabras clave

Planificación urbanística; espacio public; privatización; parques; gobernanza; producción; marxismo; control social; criminología; partenariados público-privados

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1. Introduction: "Bryant Park is a wonderland"

Transport yourself, for a moment, to the nine-acre Bryant Park, located at the heart of New York City's central business district, between 40th and 42nd streets, and 5th and 6th Avenues. The land the park sits on is public property, but unlike every other park under New York Parks and Recreation Department jurisdiction, Bryant is 100% privately funded and managed, by the Bryant Park Corporation (BPC) created in 1980. If you are like most of the dozens of park-goers I interviewed, you may not be aware that the park is privately run.

You sit on a folding chair with your notebook resting conveniently on an attached desk, espresso from the park's own kiosk in its mesh cup holder, gazing past the fountain at the newly rolled out lawn the size of a football field, which the park's website calls "an oasis—a refuge of peace and calm" (BPC 2015c). Over the sound of cascading water you hear a man say, "whoa, Bryant Park is a wonderland!" Three preppy mid-20s men of different races are amused to find a miniature golf green on which they join a group of children and practice their putts. Across from the green, men and women shake off their suit jackets to enjoy an after work drink at an outdoor bar. Both its easy jazz and soft light from strings of hanging bulbs drift down the surrounding allées. Raised several feet above street level and sheltered by an elegant ironwork fence and rows of London Plane trees planted amidst the perennial flower garden, the park does indeed seem like a wonderland. It has been described as European, cosmopolitan, and small-towny; as idyllic and as a paradise. Strolling under 80-year old trees past maintenance workers who are known for 'scooping up litter the minute it hits the ground' (BPC 2012, p. 22); past games of Petanque, golf, Kubb, and chess, to the burble of fountains, jazz, and a Carousel's tinkling cabaret, you find it elegant, pristine, and whimsical. You understand the tendency of those like architectural critic Paul Goldberger (1992) to describe the park as "the square of a small town—that makes the new Bryant Park feel as if it has been airlifted out of the West 40's and dropped into some idyllic landscape far, far away."

When the park reopened after its nearly $9 million restoration in 1992, Goldberger wrote that the park, which had been in many ways "the quintessential New York urban park, now feels like part of another city altogether." He concluded that with the friendly security guards and diligent maintenance workers, "This is not the New York I know" (Goldberger 1992). The common sentiment spurred one of my central research questions: "does Bryant Park represent an exception to the city it lies at the heart of?" More specifically, "how do Bryant's history and present design and management diverge from New York City's?" Ethnographic, archival, and other research led me to the opposite conclusion: Bryant Park epitomizes the *New* New York.

Part II, "The Production of Social Control," examines the everyday workings of the park using ethnographic and archival data, and criminological and urban theory. These details help us understand how Bryant produces a theme-park-like social order through design and management strategies that make the park visually transparent, inviting, and predictable. Everything is neatly classified, from people to activities to trash. Vulnerable design elements like flowers are chosen to suggest the park is cared for. Park-goers are meant to feel not controlled, but in-control; safe, comfortable, and empowered. This elaborate manipulation of semiotics and space serves to produce surplus value for multiple corporate interests involved in and around the park, as I argue in Part III, "Social Control at the Service of Revenue." Guided by a Marxian analytic framework, I explain how the park is created and marketed as a product itself, which park-goers have an unwitting share in producing. The park produces revenue for the corporation that runs it and a network of surrounding property owners, so that New York's elite-business community benefits from this nominally public park.

2. The production of social control

While order maintenance has been at stake throughout the park's history, since BPC's takeover, social control has become more nuanced and subtle, but ever-present. As I explain further in Part II, order is no longer an end in itself. Rather, the park must maintain a level of social control conducive to bringing high numbers into the park and inducing them to stay long enough to consume everything from a cup of coffee to a sponsor's message. Enjoyment is thus key to the generation of revenue, and a careful balance of control must facilitate this end, ensuring security without being heavy handed. Biederman calls guards "friendly but firm" in their enforcement of "high standards of behavior" (Biederman in Vitullo-Martin 2004, p. 8). In fact, the park runs very much like Disneyland, about which Shearing and Stenning (1984, p. 304) write, "control is embedded, preventative, subtle, cooperative and apparently non-coercive and consensual. It focuses on categories, requires no knowledge of the individual and employs pervasive surveillance… [and] it is extraordinarily effective" (Shearing and Stenning 1984, p. 304). While Disneyland is private property and Bryant Park is still nominally owned by the public, it boasts private funding, management, and distinctly private-sector techniques. All the same could be said about its maintenance of social order.

This pleasant, innocuous control can be found in the built environment, landscaping, management, and programming of the park. I suggest that social control functions through five governing principles: visibility, emplacement, predictability, vulnerability, and empowerment. I will address each in turn, explaining how it contributes to Disneyland-like social order in the park.

2.1. Visibility

Let us begin by examining a fundamental goal evident in the very design of the park: visibility. One of the main critiques of the 1934 redesign was that it walled off the park and created a haven for illicit activity. Thus the BPC redesign introduced visibility into its architecture, to achieve, I argue, surveillance, invitation, and interaction. These elements provide safety, which social order depends upon.

Crime being the greatest perceived obstacle to the park's success, BPC naturally looked to criminologists for design advice (Bryantpark.org/shop). While Wilson and Kelling's (1982) essay focused on behavioral 'disorder', like public drinking or panhandling, Kelling and Coles' (1996) book *Fixing Broken Windows* focuses on aesthetics as well: they argued that appearance affected order. Bryant Park's new visibility addresses behavioral and aesthetic order. The redesign creates a transparent physical environment that, according to BPC literature, "sends the messages that an area is watched" (BPC 2012, p. 46). The redesign provided four new entrances, widened existing ones, and lowered park walls. It knocked out sections of balustrade around the lawn, and removed the shrubbery circling both the lawn and park that blocked views in. Kelling and Coles (1996, p. 112) believe this facilitated "the operation of normal social control." BPC also uses bright white light, as opposed to the city's yellow street lamps, and a park-side office tower shines a high-powered spotlight into it at night to provide a day-like experience. The final element of surveillance BPC introduced were two private security guards, on duty 24-hours every day, which, to Kelling and Coles, provided not safety, but "a sense of security" (Kelling and Coles 1996, p. 112). According to PPS, who consulted on the redesign, these uniformed guards discourage crime through their presence alone, by "making it clear that the park is important and cared-for" (pps.org/greatpublispaces). Kelling and Coles (1996, p. 112) commend Bryant Park's use of these elements (design transparency, lighting, and policing) as "fundamental to maintaining orderly, safe, and amiable environments."

Whyte too, sees visibility as a means of crime-prevention, for it enables not only surveillance, but an inviting atmosphere. A visible park draws people in and this alone increases its safety. Of 1970s Bryant Park he wrote, "You can't see in. You can't see out. There are only a few entry points. This park will be used by people when it is opened up to them" (Whyte 1980, p. 58). He believed a more broadly inviting park would become less hospitable to illicit use. Interestingly, while Whyte's theories on making space inviting have been frequently cited in efforts to remove certain people from public space, Whyte himself only used the word "undesirables" in quotes, and specified that "they are not themselves much of a problem" (Whyte 1980, p. 60). His goal in making the place attractive was in making it safe, which was not synonymous with keeping out 'undesirables.' Rather, he argued that the safest places trust their users, even allowing "oddballs" to coexist with others and sleep in public space (Whyte 1980, p. 63). Whyte noted that the category most often targeted for removal are not truly dangerous but simply uncomfortable to see. In fact, Whyte claims that plazas' biggest problems are the measures taken to combat 'undesirables' (Whyte 1980, p. 60). Somewhat ironically, his design recommendations are used as instructions on doing just that. Zukin paraphrases what she believes is Whyte's argument: "The more normal users there are, the less space there will be for vagrants and criminals to maneuver" (Zukin 1995, p. 28). A New York Times article on the redesign called Whyte a theoretician on "how to keep the homeless away," paraphrasing him thus: "The proposition is if you want to bring a place back to life, if you want to get rid of the bad guys, then what you do is make it terribly attractive for the good people" (Ravo 1991). In fact, Whyte's idea of making a place inviting to *everyone* may have meant just that, oddballs included. But regardless of contrasting *intentions,* the result in Bryant Park is the same: it was redesigned as an open, transparent, and inviting space.

For Whyte, the best way to make the space inviting was to open it to the street, a public plaza's 'key amenity:' integration with the street is “far and away the critical design factor” (Whyte 1980, p. 54). For Whyte, the street corner “has a brisk social life of its own” (Whyte 1980, p. 54). The Bryant Park redesign carved off the previously sharp, walled corner at 42nd Street and Sixth Avenue, turning it into a plaza that spills out onto the street corner. It is a liminal zone that draws passersby up its low steps with the lure of two Victorian kiosks and a view straight into the heart of the park. This well-used entrance invites those who stop for a coffee to wander farther in to take a seat under the trees. The plaza also provides the park prime views of street corner liveliness, an attraction that may keep visitors in the park. Thus criminology and urban design both influenced Bryant’s multifaceted visibility, ensuring a safe and orderly space.

2.2. Classification

Another key to creating order is classification: everything must have its place. In Bryant, we see this in the clearly demarcated areas of the park: Reading-Room tables are reserved for “Reading-Room users only,” (people perusing Reading-Room books). You drink only in roped off sections and lie down only in the central lawn. When the lawn is closed for recovery you do not lie down. You play lawn games in their designated courts after checking in with an attendant, and you do not play them on the lawn, which forbids all sports. Chess boards are rented and games monitored in the chess-area by 42nd street, while the Games-Area, located in the “40th Street Plaza” are of the park, features different furniture from the 5,000 green Parisian chairs and tables. The classification reminds you that you do not take your board game to a non-Games-Area table, and at a game table, you do not eat. This way uses, and by proxy thousands of daily users, are neatly classified, a key to maintaining social order (Douglas 2002, p. xvii).

2.2.1. Emplacement

This universal need to classify (exaggerated in the park) is integral to Mary Douglas's theory of purity (2002); it is responsible for our conception of cleanliness or filth. For “there is no such thing as dirt: no single item is dirty apart from a particular system of classification in which it does not fit” (Douglas 2002, p. xvii). Douglas argues that fear of *disorder*, not disease, drives the elimination of 'dirt.' How then to eliminate dirt from the park? If dirt is a construction, one might start with constructing all that must be in the park as not-dirt. And if dirt is defined by being out-of-place, then to be not-dirt, it simply must be in-place. I refer to this process as 'emplacement.' In part, it is accomplished by *keeping* things in their place; soil can be in the gardens but if it is kicked onto the path it is instantly swept up. Park staff are instructed to treat “every square foot of the park with the same care that hotel managers treat their lobbies” (BPC 2012, p. 22). The park's 'hospitality crew,' as BPC literature calls them, are quick to bring debris to the correct receptacle.

Here BPC sets itself apart from other public spaces, most of whom try to hide their trash. Disneyworld[1] makes sure its many "picture spots" provides views free of trash bins "so as to ensure that the visual images…will properly capture Disney's order" (Shearing and Stenning 1984, p. 303). Again, a link is made between trash and (dis)order, and dealt with by hiding elements deemed 'out of place.' In the words too of BPC's director of design, Ciocchini "usually garbage cans are placed in a dark corner, they're not meant to be… looked at" (Ciocchini in Breskin 2010). But Bryant Park is different: it makes purity out of trash itself. Ciocchini designed attention-grabbing bright tulip-shaped bins to "show that their aesthetics and throwing out garbage are important" (Ciocchini in Breskin 2010). Not only was Ciocchini allegedly inspired by nature, but he claims the bin-color was chosen to match the park's own plantings. He aims for a balance of noticeable-enough to encourage orderly behavior, yet in-line with the park's aesthetics; in other words, *in-place*. Andrew Manshel, former BPC general counsel and current director of PPS, cemented the connection between emplacement and order, writing, "an attractive trash can sends a powerful message that public spaces are well maintained and under social control" (Manshel 2009).

BPC even marks the trash *within* the bins as being-where-it-should-be: trash bags are branded with BPC's logo. Occasionally homeless-looking people bring their own trash bags into the park; these seem yet more out of place in contrast with BPC's sturdy, branded bags. And when daily heaps of trash bags pile up five-feet-high on 40th Street waiting for collection, they are in-place, BPC bags on BPC turf, predictable, clear, orderly.

2.2.2. Ex-placement

For hygienic challenges that must be in the park, like garbage, marking them as in-place makes them seem clean. Conversely, some elements *not* hazards to hygiene

[1] A controlled privatized 'public space' with many parallels to Bryant Park

are labeled as unclean to mark them as *out-of-place.* Brash (2012) explains the efficacy of labeling people as pollution threats: this rhetoric was used to break up Occupy Wall Street encampments, because sanctioning the group on other grounds would have been more difficult. City government sent the message that occupiers were "not necessarily wrong or bad, but *are not where they should be*" (Brash 2012, p. 64). In Bryant Park, this pertains to a set of rules prohibiting behaviors most applicable to the homeless. They include no "bathing, shaving, or brushing teeth, loitering, laundering of personal belongings… shopping carts, bicycles, pets, or large bags/luggage." A framed sign in the restroom warns that the restroom is "attended by both a Bryant Park security officer and a member of the maintenance staff." (In fact, there are only two security officers patrolling the entire park, but diligent bathroom attendants can radio them if needed[2]). It seems clear to whom these rules and warnings are directed.

Many of these prohibitions target activities we all partake in daily, and thus they cannot be condemned as morally wrong. Nor is it politically expedient to condemn homeless people, at whom these rules are clearly directed, as violating moral codes or not having a right to the space. Yet a long history of park discourse and enforcement shows that some park-goers believe the homeless threaten social order, if only because they are a reminder of a social order that is violently disparate. In Whyte's words, many 'undesirables' are in fact "the most harmless of the city's marginal people," yet they remind us of "what one might become but for the grace of events" (Whyte 1980, p. 60).

Thus, in a situation of moral ambiguity, homeless use of the park is limited under the guise of concern for cleanliness. Of course, a person's inability to bathe poses more of a sanitation hazard than doing so. Furthermore, when we brush our teeth, bathe, or wash clothes in private space, these rituals are marked as good hygiene rather than as sanitation hazards. But this dichotomy makes clear the power of ex-placement— marking something, or someone, as out-of-place.

2.3. Predictability

As we have seen, Bryant Park is dedicated to keeping everything in its right place, which is crucial to ensuring that the park operates in predictable ways. And despite many urbanists' belief that the publicity of space hinges on its very *un*predictability, Bryant Park seems to be trying to shed its history as a place of struggle, a refuge for those who needed it the most, and a place that reflected the city's socioeconomic realities. For better or worse, the park is run like Disneyland. Of course, many urbanists who believe public space must contain spontaneity and struggle use the word "disneyfication' pejoratively; but Disneyland, like Bryant Park, is a well-used, much-loved place. It feels benevolently in-control, which makes park-goers feel safe (Shearing and Stenning 1984). Visitors, staff, and corporate overseers are all able to predict who will use the park, when, how many of them, what they will do, or what they will do if it rains. The park runs like clockwork, and clocks are nothing if not predictable.

2.3.1. Instructions

The first and most obvious cues on social order come from the park's signage. Much like in Disneyland, with its constant instructions designed to make the experience safely predictable, as BPC book proudly explains, "a sign system throughout the park details regulations and *guides park users* to amenities, events, and programs" (BPC 2012, p. 35). At each of the park's 11 entrances, large plaques lists the rules: there are seven things "you are welcome to" do, which are merely positive spins on prohibitions, such as "spread a blanket on the grass but not plastic material or tarpaulins" or "deposit waste in trash or recycling receptacles." Then there are 12 things you cannot do, which apparently belied positive phrasing. Among these are

[2] Personal interview with Jerome Barth, Vice President of Business Affairs at Bryant Park, July, 7, 2013.

drug use, alcohol outside designated areas that sell it, ball games, feeding pigeons, rummaging in waste receptacles, and performing without a permit. As mentioned, not all rules are equally enforced. At free summer movies, visitors openly drink wine. The guards stationed at every entrance to the lawn give a cursory glance into bags, making sure not to notice that chilled bottle of Pinot Gris. And while officers diligently sanction smokers, they largely turn a blind eye to trash and bottle collectors. In the words of Vice President of Business Affairs, who confirmed this observation, officers act "to prevent what the public finds offensive. If a person were removing cans in a rude and obnoxious manner, they would intervene"[3]. This discretion may seem at first glance unpredictable, but is precisely the *Broken Windows* mantra of effective order maintenance. It first requires an unspoken construction of who "the public" is (clearly perpetrators are excluded), and a nuanced observation of their preferences. This established, order maintenance requires consistency, which is aided through BPC's weekly all-staff meetings, in which no detail of park management is too small to be considered. It is furthermore crucial that a variety of staff attend these meetings, rather than isolating perceived security concerns to that department. In contrast to *Broken Windows'* policing-oriented dictates, Bryant Park has a plethora of maintenance workers, janitors, event organizers, and area attendants in the park at all times. Like in Disneyworld, every employee, "while visibly and primarily engaged in other functions, is also engaged in the maintenance of order" (Shearing and Stenning 1984, p. 302).

2.3.2. Daily measurements

At meetings, staff also analyzes park statistics. *Every day,* at 1:15 PM and 6:00 PM, BPC counts users. Sometimes they count restroom users, or traffic flows at particular exits, or overall sex-ratio. Sometimes electronic sensors do the work, and other times an employee traverses the park, clickers in hand. The gender counts are particularly important to Biederman, who believes the number of women indicate levels of order in the park. "Women pick up on visual cues of disorder better than men do," he mused, "they're your purest customers. And, if women don't see other women, they tend to leave" (in Paumgarten 2007, p. 42). Note that Biederman referred to users of this public space as *his customers* in keeping with the encroaching corporatizion of what was, and legally still is, a public space. His possessive rhetoric aside, Biederman claims women are more sensitive than men to homeless people, crumbs on tables, and foul odors. Therefore counting their numbers does more than ensure women feel welcome; it cues the corporation to other areas in need of social control.

The central lawn is monitored as frequently as park-goers, photographed from above twice daily. If it looks dry, it can be watered. If it is patchy, it can be closed off at a moment's notice, and frequently it is. Though marketed as "the jewel of Bryant Park," a "lush, green oasis hosting thousands of visitors each day" (BPC 2015b), on many days it hosts nothing but "Lawn Closed" signs, each informing the public that "the grass is recovering after a major event" or "see bryantpark.org for details."

Occasionally, re-openings are scheduled, such as 5:00 PM on movie-nights, when an employee shouts "the lawn is now open!" Hoards of visitors waiting around its perimeter rush in from all sides, jockeying for prime seating. Because the lawn is closed until 5:00, a ritual has formed and the young after-work crowd feels that they are part of something larger than themselves, something hip, youthful, and uniquely Bryant Park. As one white 20-something architect told me, "it's like some sort of weird cult—but fun"[4].The next day, staff close the lawn for recovery, a

[3] Personal interview with Jerome Barth, Vice President of Business Affairs at Bryant Park, July 7, 2013.
[4] Personal interview with anonymous park visitor, July 29,,2013.

sacrifice one stylish female movie-goer told me "is totally worth it"[5] Thus the very inaccessibility of the lawn is re-framed as enabling a festive ritual.

I debated including lawn-maintenance in this section, because access to the lawn is decidedly *un*predictable. Even the *scheduled* closings and openings are unpredictable to visitors without prior knowledge, who assume the lawn is a consistent amenity. After several weeks in the park, I found myself still surprised by these closures, planned or otherwise. And it is not only park-goers who cannot count on access to the heart of this public space; BPC even warns large-scale events paying vast sums to book the lawn to pick an alternate date in case it is "unavailable" (BPC 2015b).

Yet predictability is such a key to the park's order in every other element that I realized what BPC chooses to predict is that the grass's quality will take precedence over anything else. The predictability of the lawn's trademark greenness fits into a trend towards open-space rather than public-space. As Mitchell notes, open-space may increase even as public-space decreases: since World War II cities have increased the distance between buildings and provided greenery, often to maintain property values. Along with more space often comes more restrictions on "appropriate uses...These are highly regulated spaces" (Mitchell 2003, p. 143). Our traditionally public spaces too are becoming more circumscribed. For instance, it has become increasingly difficult to obtain a permit to protest in New York's parks (Mitchell 2003, Keller 2012). As Keller writes,

> It seems most curious that a royal park in London can accommodate three quarters of a million people, but in New York, the long-standing answer to the request that meetings be held in Central Park is that the park is for leisure and the grass would be damaged. New York City Parks Commissioner Adrian Benape reiterated a time-honored sentiment when he commented: "You can have unlimited, large-scale events, or you can have nice grass, but you can't have both." One wishes that lawn maintenance would take a backseat to free speech. (Keller 2012).

In Bryant Park, not only free speech, but even the sort of pleasant activities the park promotes all take a backseat to lawn maintenance. BPC laments that each

[5] Personal interview with anonymous park visitor, July 29, 2013.

event "causes wear and tear to the green jewel of midtown." At all costs, the lawn must be predictably green.

2.3.3. Programming

Daily measurements use surveillance to ensure predictability, but the park also heavily programs its space and time. As mentioned in "Emplacement," each area of the park specifically designates its use. But BPC goes farther in its programming by scheduling dozens of daily events in each area (and over 600 per year) to occupy visitors. Each event is described on the website, in free "Events" booklets at the 11 information plaques, on signs standing near the event locations, and in flyers event-planners distribute. An middle-aged white female audience member at an accordion event complained that she wished there was more notice of these events, a sentiment that spoke to Bryant Park visitors' need for predictability and order[6]. But as the organizer pointed out, information about the event was everywhere, and in my time in the park I have always felt well-informed of every planned activity, despite their overwhelming numbers.

In fact, the corporation has even organized the elements that tend to emerge organically in public. As Mitchell writes about such corporate spaces, they create "landscapes in which every interaction is carefully planned, right down to specifically planning the sorts of 'surprises' one is supposed to encounter in urban space" (Mitchell 2003, p. 140). While teenagers strumming guitars, music school students practicing, or bands playing with open cases to collect donations are mainstays of public parks, Bryant Park does not permit them. Instead, BPC hires artists who invoke street musicians, situating them sporadically throughout the park. Yet there is no spontaneity to coming upon an accordion player under a London plane tree when the event is scheduled and marked with a large sign that reads "Accordions in the Park: Thursdays 5:00-7:00."

One night I circled the park listening to the various accordion players; a few minutes after 7:00 I came upon one band around which a crowd was gathering. It had a Balkan/Latin flavor, and a Spanish-speaking contingent was dancing salsa. A diverse group watched from chairs pulled roughly into a circle around the band and dancers. It seemed the spontaneity of public space had conquered the tight scheduling that clearly stated "Accordions in the Park" ended at 7:00. The signs had not mentioned dancing, yet here, the energy of the public created a party. When the party continued past 8:00 PM, I marveled that it had not been broken up by staff. I checked my event book and sure enough, in a separate section on special events, there was the scheduled "dance party." These skilled salsa dancers had likely come just for this event. It imitated an organic staple of public space yet there was nothing spontaneous about it. BPC extends these predictable surprises to organized Tai Chi, juggling, and chess, all activities that are enjoyable and common to stumble upon

[6] Personal interview with anonymous park visitor, July 18, 2013.

in more public parks, where park-goers practice them on their own terms and times.

2.4. Vulnerability

There is something daring about making vulnerability a management mantra. But then, in contrast to his desire for predictability, Biederman ascribes to a book called *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Great Managers Do Differently.* And if other parks respond to threat of vandalism or burglary by nailing down their furniture or stripping spaces of anything fragile, Biederman pointedly does the opposite.

The park is full of things that could be stolen. Its Reading-Room displays carts of books and magazines visitors may simply pick up and read at any Reading-Room table, not all visible by the lone, awkward, teenage attendant. The Games-Area operates the same way. Ping Pong, Petanque, Kubb, and Mini-Golf also provide free equipment and while heavily staffed, require no registration and are neither fenced nor surveilled. Theft of equipment in any of these areas is possible, yet the park is allegedly crime-free (BPC 2012, p. 46).

The park's most valuable, ubiquitous, and un-monitored assets are its 4,120 park chairs, 800 tables, and 80 foot stools. The plastic chairs tested at the park's 1981 partial-opening were $8 a piece and some were stolen weekly. Yet in 1980, Whyte had observed that in nearby tiny Paley Park, moveable furniture fared well despite being "quite vulnerable to vandalism" (Whyte 1980, p. 63). Thus for the 1992 full-opening, BPC upgraded and increased its offerings. Each green chair, made by the French company Fermob, costs BPC $30, or $123,600 total, not counting replacing worn or missing pieces. Especially taking into account the park's former annual operating budget when still under city management, this is a remarkable investment.

In fact, the investment in chairs purportedly lies at the heart of BPC's management strategy[7]. BPC calls the chairs "an example of what Bryant Park is all about—invest in the community and the community will invest in you" (BPC 2012, p. 31). But BPC has not invested directly in "the community," a nebulous, constructed, and controversial concept; they have invested in the park, through the chair. In return they expect users will both leave the chairs alone, and use the park which, as I discuss in Part II, generates revenue. The investment in expensive furniture is a *gesture* of vulnerability that brings returns in the realms of social order and capital.

Besides elements that can be stolen, BPC is fond of displays that can break or wilt. Believing that 'making things that look fragile present' is important (Richardson 2011), BPC planted 20,000 bulbs and 100 perennial species (BPC 2012, p. 28). In

[7] While investing in the community is an appealing concept to advertise to the public, I suspect BPC's real management strategy has more to do with circulating and generating capital, control, and prediction.

some highly publicized pro-bono work they did for a struggling Brooklyn park, BPC used this same mantra, spending $100,000 on flower gardens at the park's entrances (Richardson 2011). In addition to sending a message of trust in visitors, the vulnerability of flowers shows that the space is looked after. There is an element of Broken Windows security in the flower beds, for Wilson and Kelling (1982) argued that well-maintained and cared-for spaces operate as social control: the space alerts the public that someone is watching and protecting this property, and will care if anyone threatens its order.

This floral security is at work in the restrooms as well. The first thing you see on your way in is a massive floral display. It looks not only expensive, but artistically designed, and always fresh. On one occasion I noticed the slightest wilt to a few flowers, and the next day, the display was new. Inside the bathroom there is an additional small vase, also always elegant and fresh. Since their $2 million renovation, the restrooms themselves are famously elegant and vulnerable to vandalism. Yet their marble counters, mosaic tiled walls, and cherry wood doors remain impeccable. Harvey Molotch, editor of *Toilet: The Public Restroom and the Politics of Sharing,* writes of Bryant's bathroom: "think of it as the opposite of the 'broken windows' theory in criminology: when people see that such care has been taken with something so perishable and lovely, they start to treat the place with care themselves." In fact, this is exactly broken-windows style security. As Molotch adds, "The cleanliness and the high standard of the maintenance signal that not only is something right about the restroom, but something is right about the park, and by extension the city" (Molotch in Kaminer 2010).

Indeed, the restrooms have achieved renown, loyalty, and respect from the thousands of users who pick up on the visual cues and accordingly respect the space. As Wilson and Kelling could have predicted, in such an environment, users do not carve initials into doors, graffiti the marble, steal the flowers, or break the glass. Instead, they write op-eds on "The Best Throne in the City" (Rueb 2010) or expound on the "grace, the elegance, the downright untoiletness of the public restroom in Bryant Park" (Kaminer 2010). Civic organizations award it for its "fresh flowers, spotless tile and fixtures and constant attendants" (BPC 2012, p. 32). I have sat outside the restroom listening to those who emerge exclaiming, "Kevin, that was the cleanest bathroom I've ever been in," or "just go in, honey, it's really not like park bathrooms usually are." Once, a girl dropped her sunglasses on the floor seconds after the attendant mopped. As she bent to retrieve them, her shirt fell too. The attendant, the girl, and some queue-ers shared a laugh, and one said, "at least it's clean!" "Ain't that so?" replied the attendant. "Cleanest restroom in the city," added another guest. As Manshel writes, "people in public spaces respond to thousands of subtle visual and aural cues, and successful places manipulate these cues" to assure "comfort and well-being." This sense of well-being is palpable. But below the surface, even more importantly, these "cues transmit a sense of order and social control" (Manshel 2009). After some thought, it is clear how vulnerability plays a role in ordering and controlling the park.

2.5. Empowerment

Vulnerability may be a desired trait of flowers and furniture, but park-goers are meant to feel, in contrast, empowered and in control of the space, (whether or not they truly are). After a lengthy correspondence with the Vice President of Business Affairs, I posited that "a high level of social order is necessary, which is achieved without being heavy handed; everything is under control, yet visitors do not feel controlled." In an interview with the author, Vice President of Business Affairs Jerome Barth replied that this "represents the management philosophy fairly well"[8]. BPC produces a slew of rhetoric on, and elements designed to induce, feelings of

[8] Personal interview with Jerome Barth, Vice President of Business Affairs at Bryant Park, November 1, 2013.

empowerment, and visitors absorb, reproduce, and even magnify this rhetoric. We can trace it to BPC's discourse of 'reclaiming the park' from the undesirables in the 1980s—reclamation is an empowering notion, and this dominant narrative has been widely reproduced.

Today, BPC offers users several ways to feel in control of the space. For one, BPC's design team develops several options for an item, from a water bottle sold on the website to the famous waste receptacles in the park, and asks website visitors to vote. BPC can then claim to base "design principles on the public's taste and use rather than on what an architect or designer thinks the public should like" (BPC 2012, p. 34). With in-house teams of graphic and urban designers and architects, as well as renowned outside consultants, this seems a stretch. And in the case of the water bottle and trash cans, BPC ignored voters. Nonetheless, I argue only that empowerment is an important *guise,* which BPC upholds through promotional rhetoric and symbolic votes.

By far the most lauded symbol of empowerment, though, is the BP chair. Whyte (1980, p. 35) wrote,

> "Chairs enlarge choice: to move into the sun, out of it, to make room for groups, move away from them. The *possibility* of choice is as important as the exercise of it. If you know you can move if you want to, you feel more comfortable staying put. This is why, perhaps, people so often move a chair a few inches this way and that before sitting in it, with the chair ending up about where it was in the first place. The moves…are a *declaration of autonomy,* to oneself, and rather satisfying" (Whyte 1980, p. 34 *italics added*).

Whyte's observation that users rarely make significant changes is key to the chair's *symbolic* rather than practical empowerment. They make people *feel* as if they have control over their space, quite apart from giving them control. Goldberger understood the importance of symbolism in his 1992 review of the park. He wrote that Whyte knew people "*feel* safer in the kind of public space they *think* they have some control over." He praised Whyte's belief that "people want a *sense* of empowerment over their public space extends to such details as seating."

Yet when park-goers laud the chair, they often replace words like *feel, possibility, sense,* and *declare to oneself*, with the notion that the chairs allow users to actually take control over public space and the public at large. The nearby office worker who wrote "In Praise of Bryant Park: The Joys of New York's Most Idyllic Public Space," feels that BPC allows her to place her chair wherever she likes out of great "respect" to her layout sensibilities (Race 2009). She adds that even when her office work shows few results, visiting the park allows her and other "peons" to "actively shape and participate in the life of a public space." Race calls the chairs "a gift of agency and empowerment to the thousands of people" who use the park, implying BPC has started a social movement (Race 2009). There is irony in her phrasing "gift of agency," for agency is self-possessed; claimed, perhaps, but never someone else's to give. More striking is her idea that the chairs enable actual empowerment—not merely the sense of empowerment, as

Whyte and Goldberger understood. Then Race extrapolates this empowerment beyond the realm of the park, as the chair reminds her that "my actions do have consequences, that I can tangibly affect my *world*–even if, for today, that is only in the orientation of a Bryant Park chair" (Race 2009). In writing about empowerment as a 'gift' to mere park-going 'peons' (a euphemism for slave or lowly laborer), Race circumscribes the notion of empowerment and obfuscates our collective ownership over this public property. I focus on this article because it is representative of the ways authors, interviewees, and BPC write about the power given by a folding chair.

In *my* observations of the chairs, they seem to have a will and power of their own. Latour's actor-network theory is helpful in understanding the power of the chairs; it is the claim that "no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for lack of a better term, we would call *non-humans"* (Latour 2005, p. 72). These non-humans have agency and do work in the world. When the park's entry chains are drawn open at 7:00 AM, the chairs are huddled together around the lawn. Gradually they are dragged onto the lawn by people wanting to place their chair who feel no obligation to put them back when they left. Somehow, visitors find it more satisfying to move a chair onto the grass than to sit in one already there. After lunch each day the park staff diligently clears the lawn of chairs and tables so that the next round of park-goers can move them right back to where they'd been, sit for a few minutes, and walk on. The chairs seem ever ready to ready to crawl across the lawn, disappointed by their backtracking. When I saw them loosely tied up at night by a soft thin rope, it struck me more as an attempt to contain the chair's colonizing instincts than to prevent theft or protect the lawn. In considering the relevance of this observation, I looked again to Latour, who praises "the resource of fiction" for its power to bring "the solid objects of today into fluid states where their connections with humans may make sense. Here, again, sociologists have a lot to learn from artists" (Latour 2005, p. 82). The chairs, after all, have real power: as an image, a symbol, a brand, and a tool to inspire a false sense of empowerment.

This section has explored the tactics the BPC employs to create order in the park. In explaining how these tactics work, I have been asked to pinpoint where they fall apart, where things slip out of control. When the skateboarders grind down railings, dogs defecate on the grass, chewing gum sticks to pavement and lovers sneak in after dark. It must seem that I am missing these infractions, naively taking BPC at its word that it is capable of creating order in the park. I will say, then, that in my month of fieldwork, months of webcam observation, I saw none of these things. It *is* true that some things slip out of control; the most common infraction I saw was smokers, but they were quickly chastised by guards. As I mentioned, homeless people often rummaged for cans and bottles, in violation of the rules, but BPC cast this infraction as 'in control,' for in their estimate, it did not offend 'the public'[9]. The grass looked worn and dry on a few visits, but was subsequently roped off for recovery; likewise the barely wilting restroom flowers were replaced. Sometimes there was a messiness to the restroom lines, confusion over where to stand, but like clockwork, the restroom attendant would emerge to rearrange us, always the same way. When it rained, tents were at the ready for some sections, while others events had pre-scheduled rain dates. Lovers may have snuck in after the park closed at midnight, but as Barth suggested, guards are stationed there all night, and the white spotlights ensure that the situation would remain under control; the guards' main goal is to prevent encampments, and respect the public's sensibilities[10]). The rule against dogs on the lawn enabled prevention of finding dog feces there, particularly as the lawn was central and visible from everywhere.

[9] Personal interview with Jerome Barth, Vice President of Business Affairs at Bryant Park, July 7, 2013.
[10] Personal interview with Jerome Barth, Vice President of Business Affairs at Bryant Park, July 7, 2013.

Guards often intervened when someone attempted to violate a lawn rule. Skateboarding, bicycling, bicycle parking, and rollerblading are banned in the entire park, and I never saw anyone attempt any of these things. It is heartening that many readers are astutely seeking holes, failures, slippages, and it has forced me to look more closely at the order in the park. For surely some things must slip out of control, and there is room for work that specifically seeks out these instances. However, I should clarify that the absence of instances of disorder in this article is not the result of oblivion, but of an inability to find instances of disorder that were not themselves predicted, expected, and kept under control.

3. Social control at the service of revenue

We have seen that the park is designed and managed to facilitate the precise kind of social control that makes visitors feel comfortable and safe; they are induced to linger. This lingering produces revenue. Lefebvre's concept of social space is helpful here, for it both describes Bryant Park and illuminates its hidden attributes. Social space is "produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 77). As demonstrated in Part I, social space is "*politically instrumental* in that it facilitates the control of society," while, as this section argues, it is simultaneously "a *means of production*" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 349 *italics original*). In fact, Lefebvre argues that all space is part of the capitalist mode of production, used to generate surplus-value (Lefebvre 1991, p. 347). Bryant Park epitomizes this process.

Yet Lefebvre alleges that the word 'production' has nearly lost its meaning: "we speak of production of knowledge, of ideologies… of discourses, of language…such is the extension of these concepts that their comprehension has been seriously eroded" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 69). Why, then, focus on the park as a site of *production*? Because Lefebvre implores us to "take up these concepts once more, to try and restore their value and to render them dialectical, while attempting to define with some degree of rigour the relationship between 'production' and 'product'" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 70). Thus, to restore rigor, I use a narrow, Marxian definition of production as specifically a process that makes products, which can be endlessly reproduced, and are made ultimately for revenue. Armed with this economic definition, I explore the dialectic relationships in the park, arguing that Bryant functions as a site of consumption, production, and as a product itself.

3.1. Consumption

I begin with the park as a site of consumption because this is most often how it is critiqued, as if consumption implied something inherently sinister. Zukin sees the "underlying assumption" of the park as "that of a paying public, a public that values public space as an object of visual consumption" (Zukin 1995, p. 28). But we must

be specific about what it is the public consumes. First, note that there is no entrance fee to the park, and almost all its offerings are free. Furthermore, unlike all other city parks, none of our taxes go to Bryant, as BPC often reminds us. As Zukin is aptly concerned with the public's loss of control over the park due to its private funding, she should realize that the problem is precisely that we are *not* a "paying public." We have lost our right to contribute our taxes toward this park. We must not write off paying for things in a knee-jerk reaction to the negative connotations of consumerism.

Second, what is the difference between "visual consumption" and seeing? Zukin provides no answer. Indeed, the word "consumption" has lost as much meaning as Lefebvre suggests "production" has. We are said to consume culture, images, ideas, etc. For clarity I will return the word to its economic meaning: to purchase a thing for money and use it up so that its value is gone. In this economic sense, the park, like many public spaces, is a site where consumption occurs.

There are eight areas of the park in which you can pay money for a commodity, be it a product or an experience. Four of these are Beaux-Arts vendor kiosks built for the 1992 redesign in areas formerly used by drug dealers. Three are run by celebrity chef Tom Colichio and serve gourmet soups, salads, sandwiches, pastries, and espresso drinks (a $4 latte or $9 pole-caught tuna with fennel, black olives & lemon on a baguette). One is a Magnum ice cream hut, newly built this summer. Then there is the Southwest Porch, donated by Southwest Airlines and marketed as a "public space" though it reads as an elite cafe. While the entryway porch, behind the kitchen building, sometimes hosts non-customers, the area facing the bar, patrolled by vigilant yellow-clad servers, is the sole purview of paying consumers of the Porch's $8 pints and Colichio menu. The BP Cafe on the upper terrace is a roped off bar/restaurant, and a rowdy after-work scene, complete with bouncers. The BP Grill is a glass and metal building proposed by BPC in 1980—but due to controversy over so much public land ceded to an exclusively private venue, it did not open until 1992. It serves branded dishes such as the $20 Bryant Park Chopped Chicken Cobb Salad, or Bryant Park Sea Grill, a $30 lobstery affair.

Besides this literal consumption, there are a few experiences to be consumed as well: chess and the carousel. How can an experience be "consumed" by my narrow economic definition? When you pay $2 for a carousel ride, you are buying the use value of time: you get to go around twice, consuming your share of the dead labor embodied in the plastic horses, and the living labor of the attendant, a slew of office workers coordinating the experience, the maintenance workers who keep it clean and the guards who keep you safe. Then the commodity you purchased, time, runs out and cannot be used again. You have literally paid for and consumed this experience.

3.2. Production

It is short-sighted to stop there, as many have, and condemn the park as a site of consumption. What else is going on in this process? The chance to ride the carousel draws some to the park and induces others to linger. While there, Zukin might suggest that you are "consuming" the advertising messages that abound. But you do not pay to read them, nor do you use up their value in doing so. Rather the advertisers pay for *you* to read them, and the more people there to see them, the more lucrative corporations find the space.

Thus, exposure to advertisements should not be labeled consumption. Rather, your consumption of a sponsor message leads to the production of revenue. You might not be directly influenced to open an HSBC bank account or sign up for HBO cable, but clearly advertisements work to increase revenue or companies would not spend the billions they do. In Bryant Park alone, the majority of the revenue—nearly $3 million in 2006—is generated by advertisements (BRV 2015, KPMG 2014). This is done through "sponsors" hosting events in the park at which they promote their brand. Rather than paying the park to show their ads, they pay an "event fee" and cover the costs of the event. For instance, HBO puts on the "HBO Summer Film Festival" *sponsored* by Bank of America, in which they show free movies that begin with a series of ads from *other* companies. Magnum gives away free ice cream, and ads plaster the tables around their hut, reading, "Magnum: even sweeter at the Bryant Park HBO Summer Film Festival." Some chair backs sport this message: "The HBO Bryant Park Summer Film Festival. Presented by Bank of America. Bryant Park Corporation," with the correct logo and font of each of the three brands. These events spur the flow of capital in many directions, not least of which goes to BPC.

One reason the corporations pay the park and each other so much for advertising space is that the park is known for bringing in thousands of diverse visitors. BPC *markets* this diversity to sponsors as "an excellent demographic." By bringing us to the park, BPC sells us to sponsors and our mere presence produces revenue. It is a concrete example of Lefebvre's (1991, p. 349) suggestion that social spaces play a part "among the forces of production," only here, the park not only plays a part, but is itself a site of production.

3.3. Productive consumption

We see that the park is a site of both consumption *and* production in the Marxian sense. In fact, Marx tells us that it must be, as production and consumption are inextricably linked. Visualize a machine in a factory that *consumes* raw material to make products to sell. That raw material, unless immediately derived from nature, is itself already a product. This process is called productive consumption by economists in general, or as Marx adds consumptive production: the machine consumes as it produces. Lefebvre even notes that in cities, social space can be "*productively consumed* (just as machines are, for example), as a productive apparatus of grand scale" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 349).

Within Bryant Park, we may see the consumers of goods and experience as producing revenue through their consumption. In the most obvious sense, the exchange of money for product directly creates revenue for BPC. But their main revenue comes from advertising, not coffee. The park lures in patrons with consumable experiences like lattes, and because the park is orderly, safe, and pleasant, visitors linger. In lingering, park-goers are exposed to ubiquitous ads.

Because BPC uses visitors as consumptive machines to produce surplus-value, we may be considered instruments of labor. Or we could be the labor, for our time spent in Bryant generates a value—a safe, orderly, and appealing park—and an exchange-value—in that our presence is sold to advertisers. Like workers, we create surplus-value as we expend resources (the means of production). To explain this, let us start with Marx's equation M→C→M', where M = the money spent to

produce a commodity. C=commodity. M' = the amount C is sold for. $M' = M + \Delta M$, where ΔM is the increment added to the original value; in other words, ΔM = surplus-value, and in this movement, the commodity is converted into capital. We have seen that BPC markets visitors to sponsors as a commodity. Thus C = park-goers, and M = the amount BPC spent on bringing us to movie night, encompassed in staff costs for the night and a percentage of overall park maintenance. M' = the amount BPC receives from its movie night sponsors, or the amount they sell us for. The difference, ΔM, is the surplus-value movie-goers generate by being there.

It may be a stretch to view park-goers as labor for they are not paid, nor does lounging in a park seem like work. Yet even the specific act of sitting on a park chair can be seen to add value to the park. Each chair costs BPC $30. Yet when they become worn out, BPC sells them as "Vintage" for $125. BPC even assures buyers that the chair has been used "for at least one year, and will bear distinctive wear patterns created by patron use" (bryantpark.org/shop). Here $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M'$ is $30→Chair→$125. $\Delta M = \$125 - \$30 = \$95$. The chair has generated a surplus-value of $95. The labor that went into this new value? Sitting. The laborers? Park-goers. Thus park-goers engage in consumptive production of revenue for BPC.[11]

Vintage Bryant Park Bistro Set $350.00 USD Add to Cart

The complete authentic Bryant Park bistro furniture set, from our park to your home.

Do you miss those days of working in the heart of New York? Are you infatuated with Manhattan's romantic charm? Maybe you are looking for furniture pieces that are a bit more interesting, with a story and some history behind them.

Look no further. This furniture set is bound to stir some conversation, and makes for a great gift as well. A complete set of two vintage bistro chairs and one bistro table, plucked from the park and delivered right to your home.

3.4. The park as a product

Having seen how park-goers produce surplus-value for the park, let us examine how the park itself produces revenue for outside interests. Though it generates capital for a variety of corporations, it does so in all cases through its role as a product, or commodity. Lefebvre explains the difference between a product and a work, the latter of which can be thought of as "unique, original, primordial," something no one conceives of, that can have "a touch of madness added for good measure" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 73). A product, in contrast, is contrived, each product created through repetitious processes, and itself repeated. Products are "destined to be exchanged, traded, and reproduced ad infinitum" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 74). He worries that "repetition has everywhere defeated uniqueness" and "driven all spontaneity and naturalness from the field, and in short, that products have vanquished works" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 75).[12] Spaces, too, can be products, and Bryant Park, as we saw particularly in the predictability section, is anything but "mad" or "primordial." Every element and interaction is planned and designed. BPC surviells and measures every detail, from user numbers to their gender to their restroom habits even, and of course, revenue and expenditures. Successful programs are then repeated, becoming cult-rituals like movie night. Some critics

[11] The cost for a vintage chair and table set is $350, while one chair is $125.
[12] Lefebvre believes that works and products are not mutually exclusive but rather dialectical: "works are in a sense inherent in products, while products do not press all creativity into the service of repetition" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 77). I play up the distinction between works and products for didactic purposes.

allege that "Bryant Park is heavily programmed, heavily managed. It kind of takes a little bit of the spontaneity out of it. It's a little controlling" (Kent cited in Lehrer 2007). These attributes give it the character of a product, not a work.

Such "repetitious spaces" are "homologous so that they can be exchanged, bought and sold" (Lefebvre 1991, p. 75). Bryant Park is reproduced and sold elsewhere, through three main channels. In the first realm, Biederman sent employees to Brooklyn's Maria Hernandez Park, to "see if the techniques used to reclaim Bryant Park would work there" (Richardson 2011). This assessment must have indicated BPC's techniques would reclaim Maria Hernandez, because the BPC replicated them, from programmed activities to the BPC trash-can to the moveable furniture. Granted, the furniture moved itself right out of Maria Hernandez Park, but the effects of the duplication do not diminish the fact that BPC's techniques are replicable and replicated.

Secondly, Biederman duplicates Bryant Park's successes in his other BIDs: the 34th Street Partnership (34SP) and the Chelsea Improvement Company (CIC). 34SP contains two public squares which, like Bryant, were once havens for "undesirables." Biederman used what worked in Bryant, including improved visibility and the iconic chairs, to make the square's well-used, safe, clean, orderly, and predictable places like Bryant. Recently Bryant Park's success caught the eye of Chelsea businesses, who asked him to bring his brand to their neighborhood.

Third, in addition to presiding over three NYC BIDs, Biederman runs a consulting company, Biederman Redevelopment Ventures (BRV), which dispenses advice to other cities on how to create parks like Bryant. Defying the requests of clients, Biederman insists on replicating his park (Biederman in Fried 2011). When clients caution him on what makes their situation unique, he complains, "that's not a very constructive position because all the tools in Bryant Park work anywhere, every one of them: movable chairs, private financing, programming in off hours, gorgeous restrooms. There is nothing that is New York-specific about that. So why would you lecture me about how this park needs different treatment" (Biederman in Fried 2011). In short, BRV replicates Bryant Park across the world, suggesting that the park is indeed a product. For Marx, these traits make it not simply a product, but a commodity, defined as a social use-value. A commodity has value (congelated labor), use-value (in that it serves a purpose), and exchange-value (it is bought and sold). Bryant Park has all of these things.

As a product or commodity, the park serves to generate surplus value for BPMC members and BRV (KPMG 2014, p. 2). BID members who own property on the park want to see their property-values go up. While properties overlooking parks generally have higher values than equivalent non-park properties, Bryant Park brought down property-values in its dangerous days (Vitullo-Martin 2004, p. 8). The Project for Public Spaces, self-identified as "the central hub of the global Placemaking movement," writes that the park's success "has spread to the rest of the neighborhood as well. In the two years after its renovation, rental activity around the park increased by 60 percent: A place once considered to be a deterrent to renters is now, according to some real estate agents, a marketing tool" (pps.org). Several new office buildings are incorporating the park brand into their address, for "Shrewd developers often name their buildings for their neighborhood's most attractive asset. In this tradition, the Durst Organization recently announced that it was conferring the address of One Bryant Park on its new Midtown tower, whose major tenant will be the Bank of America" (Vitullo-Martin 2004, p. 8). Not only is the park an attractive asset, but also, with its outlets, wi-fi, tables and desks, a functional extension of office space: Bank of America Senior Vice President expects "our employees will use the park for visitation, for reading, and *for a remote office* at lunch time" (Saclarides in Vitullo-Martin 2004, p. 8 *italics added*). While park-properties, on average, have rents 44 percent higher than comparable buildings located just one block away, Bryant Park's amenities have raised adjacent

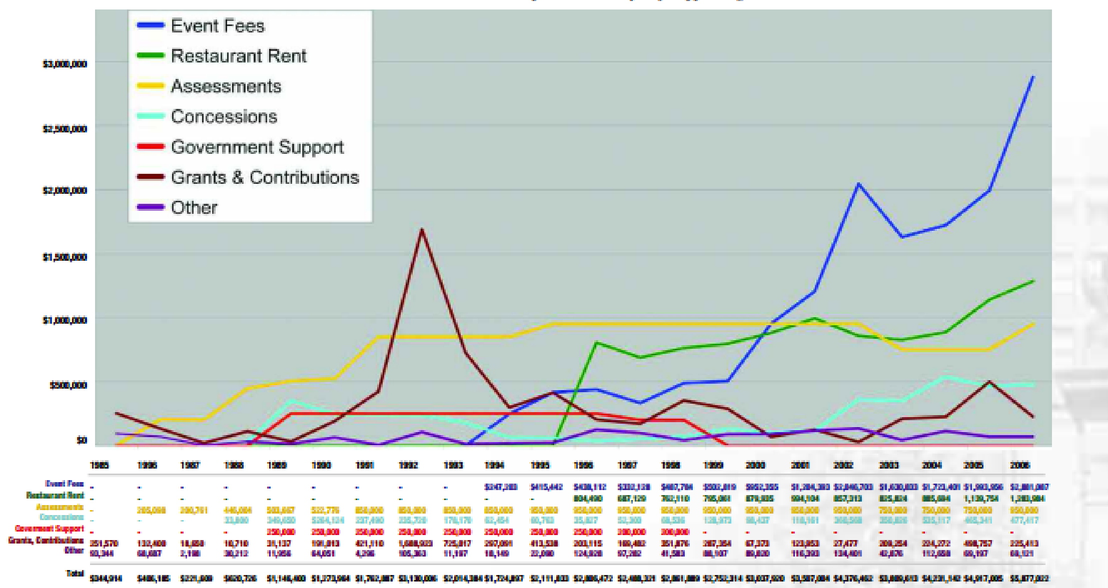
office rents to 63 percent higher, the biggest boost of any of the city's parks (Kusisto 2012). The CEO of CBRE, a commercial brokerage firm, calls Bryant Park "a hub of top-priced office space, and the park itself is the nucleus of this submarket" (Tighe in Gregor 2012).

As for BRV, Biederman claims that "the first comment anybody makes to me when I start consulting on a park in another city is, 'We adore Bryant Park. Were you involved in there? We think it's great, incredible what you did'" (Biederman in Fried 2011). The BRV website boasts this about Bryant Park:

> Crime in the critical nine-acre area managed by BPRC has been reduced by 100% since the Corporation's founding. Today's Bryant Park is favorably compared with the great parks of London and Paris, and was the 1996 winner of the Urban Land Institute Excellence Award for public projects, as well as many other awards from design, real estate, and redevelopment groups… Biederman applied the lessons of Bryant Park to the reconstruction of [two 34SP squares]. Once poorly maintained drug havens, the areas have been transformed into small parks that utilize *the same successful elements as Bryant Park* - from movable chairs and lavish gardens to diligent security and sanitation forces (BRV 2013a).

All of this adds to Biederman's advertised 25 years of experience redeveloping parks "across the world," and making BRV "the largest complex of private urban redevelopment projects in the United States" (BRV 2013a).

Bryant Park, as a marketable product, is also a site of consumption and production. We have seen that it produces meticulous maintenance of social order, and subsequent surplus value for BPC, BPMC, and BRV. Thus it produces values within and far beyond the borders of the nine-acre park.



Source: BRV (2013b).

4. Conclusion

My main argument has been that Bryant Park is a site of production: of a Disneyland-like social order first, upon which capital relies. Section 2 examined how social order is produced through elements in the conceptual categories of visibility, emplacement, predictability, vulnerability, and empowerment. This innovative combination ensures safety without militarization, and an overall pleasant stay. I argued in Section 3 that these elements of order were necessary to the production of revenue, for it is our presence in the park, both consuming and producing, that

generates surplus-value. The park is both a site of production and a product, and park-goers are part of this production.

4.1. Future directions

There is room for future scholarship on the comparisons between city-run parks and parks becoming increasingly like Bryant. Until this is done, we will move our chairs an inch and either expound on our newfound empowerment in shaping public life; or attack the chair as an element of social exclusion. Either way, while we are licensed to enjoy the safe, orderly, predictable, and truly pleasant Bryant Park, we must not let its attractions blind us to the powerful networks of social and economic oppression surrounding us. I imagine the forces behind these networks gazing down with satisfaction from their soaring glass towers, as we, the users, rest idly in Parisian chairs, sipping lattes, perusing a free magazine, and producing surplus-value.

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