
Review: Commercial Culture, Urban Modernism, and the Intellectual Flaneur

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Commercial Culture, Urban Modernism, and the Intellectual *Flaneur*

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In Pursuit of Gotham: Commerce and Culture in New York. By William R. Taylor. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. 212 pages. \$24.95.

A DOZEN YEARS AGO, WHEN I WAS PLANNING MY FIRST UNDERGRADUATE seminar on the history of New York City, someone gave me a bootleg syllabus of a similar course taught by William Taylor at SUNY–Stony Brook. I borrowed many ideas from that syllabus—and want to offer my thanks for them here and now—but I remember being stumped by one choice in particular. Why had Professor Taylor included a section on Broadway musicals and Busby Berkeley extravaganzas? My own classes on the 1920s and 1930s were loaded with materials on regional planning and Harlem; I wondered why Broadway spectacles seemed so important to him. I did not understand then the scholarly project that Taylor was exploring with his students: the investigation of commercial amusements, public display, and urban scenography as settings in which a new kind of urban history and a new kind of cultural history could intersect.

Much of the best Americanist work in “the new cultural history” has taken place at this crossroads of urbanism, commerce, and culture. As a topic of monographic research for innovative scholars such as Kathy Peiss, John Kasson, Peter Buckley, and Elaine Abelson and as a base camp for the wider investigations of urbanists such as Marshall Berman and Richard

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Sennett, New York has been central to such work.¹ *In Pursuit of Gotham* records William Taylor's influential explorations of the same terrain. Taylor's collection of essays on the history of New York, spanning fifteen years of study, exemplifies many of the strengths of this turn to urban commercial culture; moreover, it offers incisive studies of intellectual, literary, and artistic responses to the new world of commodified pleasure on Broadway and Times Square. The essays make clear New York's importance in the history of mass culture and modernism and chart new ground in the historiography of both developments. The result is a provocatively celebratory account of public, consumer, and aesthetic culture in the early twentieth-century metropolis.²

As his title suggests, Taylor is concerned with both less and more than New York City itself. The "Gotham" he pursues is a "village" within the larger metropolis (xvii): the cosmopolitan swath of Manhattan running from Greenwich Village to Times Square, a place peopled by journalists, performers, bohemians, theatergoers, shoppers, and street crowds. The book is chronologically limited as well; it is focused on the period from the city's Gilded Age boom to the Deco years of the 1930s. It was then that midtown Manhattan played host to the emergence of a new metropolitan landscape, a sophisticated culture of entertainment and display, and a range of new efforts to portray and analyze the city scene. Taylor's history of Gotham focuses on the connections among these three stories. He offers us readings of such public spaces as Grand Central Station and Times Square and of the urbanistic ideals that informed the midtown landscape. He provides ethnographies of the "cultural bazaars" (70)—nightclubs, theaters, Tin Pan Alley, sophisticated magazines—that thrived there. And he gives us biographical studies of intellectuals, writers, and artists—Walter Lippman, John Reed, Irving Berlin, Alfred Steiglitz, and others—whose critical, collusive, and conflicted relations with Manhattan's commercial culture shaped their work. In short, Taylor chronicles the life of New York as a marketplace of representations, a place where "cultural exchange and monetary exchange were for a time closely and generatively interrelated" (182).

In Pursuit of Gotham uses this local history to sketch two larger cultural transformations. First of all, it chronicles the effect of midtown's amusement, journalistic, and bohemian subcultures on the reconstitution of the national public sphere during the early twentieth century. The concluding essay, for instance, deftly traces Broadway's role as "a kind of linguistic funnel," through which the idioms of gossip journalism, popular music, the

commercial stage, and the sporting world flowed and mixed into “a new national slang with a pronouncedly New York accent” (172). Even more striking is Taylor’s reading of Manhattan as a staging area for modernity. Midtown was “the very embodiment of modern times” (21), he argues; its department stores, nightlife, theatrical amusements, and sleek magazines trained citizens in their up-to-date roles as consumers, spectators, and fantasists of the new. Moreover, like Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, Taylor interprets the rhythms, geometries, and everyday experiences of metropolitan life as templates for new modes of affect, perception, and representation. Subjected to such a re-education of the “human sensorium,” in Benjamin’s apt phrase, New York writers, artists, and designers fashioned an urbane modernism based on the values of energy, kinesis, spectacle, and pleasure—a kaleidoscopic aesthetic embodied in such disparate forms as Art Deco architecture and Baedaker guidebooks.³

Interpreting New York as a crucible of modernity engages Taylor with two of the most important historiographies of twentieth-century culture. In both cases, his work has a revisionist edge, joining other efforts to recast established scholarly paradigms. First of all, *In Pursuit of Gotham* offers a genealogy of consumerism and commodified leisure quite different from much scholarship on mass culture. Despite their disagreements, both the critical tradition of the Frankfurt School and the less dystopian response of contemporary cultural studies have tended to privilege the electronic, corporate, broadcast, and mass-marketed media of the later twentieth century as their definitive objects. Even studies of popular music and Hollywood cinema—the cases that have elicited more social-historical research—tend to reinforce accounts of a realm of delocalized audiences, standardized product, and attenuated contacts between corporate purveyors and mass-mediated consumers.⁴ *In Pursuit of Gotham* displaces this paradigm, or rather re-places it; it traces the larger history of mass culture back to the specific locale of midtown New York. For Taylor, “commercial culture” had broad, transformative effects precisely because it *was* local, because it emerged “at a moment . . . when cultural production still reflected . . . the interactions of the city as a community” (182). Only under such conditions—in New York, along Broadway, in the early twentieth century—could the energies and circuitries of so many different worlds (journalism, music, theater, sports, bohemia) amalgamate into a common cultural formation. The result was a nexus of institutions and commodities that registered the tempo and drama of metropolitan life and disseminated them to a mass public.

This shift in focus and chronology from “mass” to “commercial” culture echoes recent scholarship on the history of urban life—studies of amusement parks, vaudeville, dance halls, department stores, and other settings.⁵ Over the past decade, such work has coalesced into something of a new approach, and Taylor’s essays articulate its core themes. Like Jean-Christophe Agnew and William Leach, he foregrounds commodity circulation and market relations, rather than mass production and corporate centralism, as the salient economic context of the consumer and entertainment revolutions. His Gotham was not the headquarters for a Fordism of amusements. Rather, it was a complex market district that brought money, creative talent, brokers, and audiences into concatenation with one another, an emporium whose carnivalesque energies promoted an aesthetics of motion, velocity, performativity, and change. Moreover, like other students of commercial culture, Taylor links this centrality of the marketplace to a new regime of spectacle and display. Midtown represented the emergence of “the city designed as a showcase” (35), a landscape of scenography and visual seductions. Its stores and shows offered magical tableaux of gratification; its Art Deco facades theatricalized the streets; its nightlife and journalism produced ceremonies of notoriety and spectatorship. It embodied, in short, a new symbolic order in which visibility, celebrity, and display replaced moral legibility as the basis of cultural authority.⁶

Taylor’s other historiographical intervention deals with the intellectual and aesthetic responses to this commercial culture. His essays on New York’s literary, journalistic, bohemian, graphic, and design circles offer a revisionist account of urban modernism. Along with other recent work on art, literary, and intellectual history, *In Pursuit of Gotham* departs from the view of “the modern movement” as a form of cultural secessionism, a “high” revolt against bourgeois convention and mass-produced kitsch.⁷ To the contrary, Taylor’s intellectuals are always drawn to and creatively engaged by the commercial energies of Times Square. Sometimes the collusion between art and the marketplace is explicit and deliberate: figures such as H. L. Mencken and Damon Runyon are incisively interpreted as a “commercial avant-garde” whose language experiments matured in the sophisticated milieu, lucrative opportunities, and masculine camaraderie of midtown journalism (xxiv). Yet, even among the feminist and anticapitalist radicals of Greenwich Village, Taylor finds an “ambivalence toward commerce” that testified to the power of the cultural marketplace. Village intellectuals “drew heavily on [their] enemies’ methods,” he argues, and used the techniques of publicity and performance to

fashion a new politics of radical style in such journals as *The Masses* and such spectacles as the Paterson Strike pageant (124).

Such revisionist history implies an alternative set of aesthetic evaluations as well. *In Pursuit of Gotham* contests the canonical judgments of critics such as Siegfried Giedion, Clement Greenberg, and Beaumont Newhall, the great gatekeepers of high modernism, who equated modern art with formal autonomy, functional design, disciplined purity of composition, or critical withdrawal from commodity culture.⁸ In contrast, Taylor presents Manhattan as a laboratory of the outlandish, the eclectic, the electrified, the spectacular, and the commercial: the headquarters of an ecstatic modernism typified by Joseph Urban's fantastical Ziegfield Follies sets rather than by austere International Style towers.⁹ In the process, he puts forward some interesting aesthetic revaluations. He presses the claims of work often dismissed as too socially referential (Lewis Hine's photography), slickly marketable (glossy magazine fiction), or stylistically reactionary (Beaux Arts urban design) to belong in the modern canon. His arguments echo much of the postmodernist polemic against high-modern criticism: the call for "complexity and contradiction," the celebration of a hybridizing of "high" and "low" cultural forms, and the assertion of the aesthetic vitality of consumer culture.¹⁰ The difference is that *In Pursuit of Gotham* presents these as elements of a countermodernism—perhaps it should be called a "commodernism"—already present in early twentieth-century Manhattan.

It would be an exaggeration to say that Taylor unequivocally celebrates commercial culture; he has too strong a sense of its complexity for that. Yet, more than some of the other revisionist scholars whom he joins, he is drawn to the kaleidoscopic energies of midtown and is as beguiled by its vitality as the writers and artists he studies. His stress is always on the creativity of the cultural marketplace—on the capacity of the commodity form to stimulate innovative theater, music, writing, and social commentary rather than to foreclose or flatten imaginative possibilities. Moreover, his essays stress the *social* openness of midtown; they depict a boisterous commons whose very commercialism enabled a potentially democratic traffic among different groups: "In the era before the rise of mass media, New York's commercial culture operated not as the instrument of one class's dominance over another, but as an arena where all classes could find some genuine, if fragmentary, representation of their experiences" (91). In contrast to the segmentation and privatism of mass-mediated entertainments, Taylor depicts Gotham's commercial culture as a novel kind of

public sphere: a world of amassed bodies, spectacular displays, and sophisticated style in which the people could see themselves no longer as a polity of citizens with rights and duties but as a pleasure-taking collectivity. It was a public sphere exemplified in the undisciplined yet organized life of the commercial avenue.

The utopianism of this account recalls Fredric Jameson's celebrated theorization of mass culture, but Taylor's version of utopia is fundamentally different. For Jameson, the utopian moment within a mass cultural text is the mark of its inadequacy as a commodity: it can solicit its audience only by activating desires and solidarities that, Jameson argues, are never finally containable by the commodity form.¹¹ *In Pursuit of Gotham*, by contrast, depicts a metropolis whose cultural marketplace seems adequate to the fantasies it engages: a city of capitalist possibility in which mass circulation can be harnessed to human desire and energy tempered with elegance. It is a portrayal at some distance from the core projects of contemporary cultural studies—ideological unmasking and solidarity with cultural resistance—and it is not grounded in the neo-Marxist and poststructuralist thought that has underwritten these projects.

Rather Taylor situates himself intellectually and politically through two other affiliations; it is these that give his history of New York its particular utopian accent. On the one hand, his essays belong to what could be called the school of Baudelaire: a tradition of urban portraiture that combines (sometimes acerbic) social and aesthetic exploration of the metropolitan landscape with an ironic yet impassioned loyalism to city life. Beginning with the introductory account of research strolls from his Greenwich Village apartment up to the New York Public Library (xxi), Taylor identifies the narrator of *In Pursuit of Gotham* as a patriotic New Yorker and an intellectual *flaneur*. On the other hand, the book's populism, its instinctive delight in the cultural marketplace, seems to me to reflect the author's important place in the American studies tradition.¹² Taylor constructs Gotham in much the same way that the myth-and-symbol classics constructed "America": as the name for a contradictory social order *and* a set of utopian possibilities that the order embodied and betrayed. It was their insistence on the utopian moment inside America that has gotten such scholars as F. O. Matthiessen, Henry Nash Smith, and Leo Marx read as cold war nationalists and cultural gatekeepers (rather than as the progressives and cultural democrats they believed themselves to be). *In Pursuit of Gotham* risks being read in a similar way, as an uncritical paean to early consumer capitalism. Yet, in each case, the political project is meant as

something less complacent: the reconstruction of a broken promise. "Each day's walk was a visit to the city's dilapidated public past," Taylor writes of his strolls to the library, "and a reminder of the high expectations this vision of modernity once evoked" (xxi).

In the end, this stance of urbane populism may impose some important limitations on Taylor's approach. Certainly, it does not help him to investigate the role of commercial culture in larger structures of capitalist development or the experience of the workers who produced its pleasures—issues that are largely ignored in the book. Yet I do think that it is worth bracketing (not forgetting) such concerns, for the essays themselves are provocative, richly observed, and often quite wonderful. Precisely because his aims are not oppositional or demystificatory, Taylor brings to his analysis the sort of pattern-making imagination that typifies the best of both urban commentary and early American studies. He has a gift for making visible the underlying homologies and elective affinities that link apparently disparate parts of a social world together. Thus he connects guidebooks, vaudeville, and amusement parks in a "developing culture of pastiche" that was itself a reflection of "the city's physical variety" (79). Similarly, he embeds a brilliant reading of Damon Runyon's guys-and-dolls stories within a reconstruction of the nationalization of Broadway slang through gossip columns, Tin Pan Alley, and theater performance circuits. Such studies make a powerful case not only for the centrality of New York to the development of mass culture and modernism but also for the city's nourishing of creative and communal energies that are often slighted in histories of those developments.

Yet *In Pursuit of Gotham* also has some interesting blind spots and problems that are bound up with the very strengths of its argument. I would raise three issues in particular. First, African-American New York and the thematics of race are nowhere to be found. This Gotham is a white metropolis; or rather (and again early American studies serves as a parallel) its social palette is limited to the differences among WASPs, Jews, and other "off-white" ethnics. What makes this troubling is not only the general need for racial inclusion. It is that a book about commercial and aesthetic transformation in early twentieth-century New York City, about the links between popular amusements and urban modernism, cannot tell its story without going uptown. Studying Harlem nightlife, Harlem jazz, and the Harlem Renaissance—as well as white intellectuals and consumers for whom Harlem was a "slumming" spot—would have disrupted and transformed Taylor's argument, making clear both the racial diversity and

racialized ideologies of commercial culture and ecstatic modernism. We may well entertain his claim that New York's amusement, consumer, and aesthetic practices modeled a new kind of public sphere; yet it was a public circumscribed by Jim Crow and the eroticizing and exoticizing of racial hierarchy. Moreover, studies of the black metropolis would have enriched Taylor's account of the ethnic history of commercial amusements. There is a wonderful book to be written about the complex links between the Jewish musical and linguistic influences sketched in these essays and the traditions of racial appropriation, African-American crossover, and blackface described by such scholars as Eric Lott and Andrew Ross.¹³ Both the insights of *In Pursuit of Gotham* and its inattention to race call out for such explorations.

The book would also have been enriched by a look at urban politics. Political institutions were deeply implicated in the transformations that preoccupy Taylor—and nowhere more so than in New York. Midtown cultural entrepreneurs, for instance, had to contend alternately with “protection” by the Tammany regime—many of whose leaders were investors in leisure resorts—and “vice” regulation by the reform administrations that periodically displaced it.¹⁴ Similarly, during and after World War I, bohemian radicals and activists were subjected to police violence, censorship, and repression from local and national authorities; this led, in some cases, to their legal expulsion or self-exile abroad.¹⁵ At the same time, New York politics was increasingly dependent on the institutions and symbolizing practices of the cultural marketplace. During the 1920s and 1930s, Mayors Jimmie Walker and Fiorella LaGuardia and Governors Al Smith and Franklin Roosevelt used a variety of commercial amusements—nightlife, Tin Pan Alley hits, the Sunday comics, and radio—to stake out competing styles of political “personality.” We still lack a full treatment of the interconnections among commodity culture, mass spectacle, and twentieth-century politics. Taylor's history of midtown New York, so enormously suggestive for such an analysis, would have been even stronger had it explored them.

Finally, deep and interesting issues are raised by the narrative stance of *In Pursuit of Gotham*. As I have noted, Taylor situates himself as a scholar-flaneur within the Manhattan landscape; the introduction goes out of its way to mark his subjective, physical presence as a resident Gothamite and a walker in the city. The logic of the book is the logic of *flanerie*: it enacts not an unfolding historical process but an act of consciousness—the drama of a solitary, peripatetic analyst moving through the cityscape and making

sense of it. "These adventures of the critical spirit were such mild walks and talks as I almost blush to offer . . . as matter of history," reads the book's epigram, from Henry James's *American Scene*. "But . . . history is never . . . the immediate crudity of what 'happens,' but the much finer complexity of what we read into it. . . ." This presentation of historical narrative as a *flaneur's* interpretive adventures in urban space defines the book's structure. The essays are organized not chronologically or as moments in a developing argument but in order of composition; they trace the evolution of Taylor's response to New York, not the city's transformations. Not surprisingly, the book has an (implicitly) autobiographical trajectory. It moves from studies of the city's public and commercial landscape toward biographies of the artists, writers, and journalists who explored it in their work. It moves, in other words, toward refigurations of Taylor himself: intellectuals who are beguiled by Manhattan's streets and spectacles, who privilege eclecticism over formalist discipline, and who use local exploration to depict wide-ranging cultural transformation.

What makes the narrative logic of *In Pursuit of Gotham* especially interesting—but also, for me, a bit troubling—is its link to a thematic of loss.¹⁶ This linkage has long been seen as central to the meaning of *flanerie*; according to Walter Benjamin, the great revelation of the stroller, the experience to which he was privy, was the loss of "aura" that constituted the condition of modernity. Similarly, the traces of personal exploration in Taylor's book work to present Gotham as a world-we-have-lost; his utopian account of the city's commercial and aesthetic history is thrown into relief by the assumption that this history is over: "The coming of mass culture appears to have brought this creativity to an end," he laments on the book's last page. "The very circuitry of press, radio, and film that delivered Broadway slang . . . to the nation at the same time deprived us of the vital communal impulses that made Broadway itself possible" (182). Ironically, mass culture inherited the creative vitality of the early twentieth-century midtown only to evacuate it and to disperse the local energies of commercial culture into corporate cyberspace: "What at one time required a tight neighborhood of related activities," Taylor argues, can "now take place out of sight, fiber-optically. . . . The shouts of appreciation or the hail of rotten fruit that once registered theatrical success or failure have given way to telemetered ratings. The hum of computers has largely replaced the jingle of coins" (xxvii–xxviii). The specter that haunts *In Pursuit of Gotham* is thus not just the decline of Broadway but also the loss of place itself: the exile of the urbane body into

a virtual landscape of electronic superhighways and globalized finance. This threat of displacement, I think, is what Taylor's personal presence—in the streets, in the text—at once registers and resists. That is why he so lovingly reconstructs the specificity of midtown, why he uses the strangely pastoral metaphor of the village to describe it. A village is the most condensed and sturdy form of place.

Such tensions between place and displacement seem central to the utopian impulse. Utopian narratives depict an otherworld imagined with great specificity and cartographic precision, a “nowhere” that is the antipodes of the confining here-and-now. The perfection of this world, its adequacy to desire, lies in its capacity to dis/place escape fantasies with dense, visible, local form. *In Pursuit of Gotham* enacts the paradox temporally; it portrays midtown Manhattan as a pre-postmodern place, the scene of a lost urbanity where the circulation of money and pleasure was not only accommodatable to local, embodied public life but was also interdependent with it. The book constitutes New York, in other words, as an object of nostalgia—a nostalgia for the modern.¹⁷

To say this is not to diminish the achievement of *In Pursuit of Gotham*. Nostalgia has a bad reputation, but it is a powerful optic, effective at producing highly clarified representations of the past. It enables Taylor to reopen and re-evaluate important aspects of the history of twentieth-century urban culture, commodity exchange, and intellectual and aesthetic practice. Yet the optic also produces its own distortions. It tends not only to overvalue the past—as the book's inattention to racial matters suggests—but also to undervalue the possibilities of the present. For there is good reason to think that current rumors about the death of place have been greatly exaggerated. What strikes me about the “postmodern metropolis” is something quite different: how much locally situated cultural work takes place there, work that is every bit as cross-circuited, communal, and generative as the products of Broadway and Greenwich Village. Some of the sites of this work seem like insurgent, in-your-face versions of Taylor's midtown world. Hip-hop's consumable 'hood of gangster tales and insider slang, for instance, bears fascinating comparison with the more comic stories of Runyonland. Similarly, queer culture—with its tactics of sexual, aesthetic, and institutional disruption; its politics of style; and its conflicted engagement with commodity culture—both recalls and critiques the sex radicalism of Greenwich Village bohemia. Other subcultural sites less reminiscent of Taylor's Gotham but equally marked by the juncture of commerce, culture, and urban locality include youth scenes such as grunge

and skinhead culture, enclaves of religious mobilization such as orthodox Jewish and Islamic communities, and even computer-cafe districts where hackers gather together to plug into cyberspace. Like Times Square, these are all specifically metropolitan formations whose local energies circulate to national and transnational publics. They deserve their own explorers to chart their institutional circuits, aesthetic creativity, and politics as seriously as Taylor takes Irving Berlin tunes and Runyon stories.¹⁸

I suspect that such ethnographies will challenge the tone of utopian nostalgia that frames *In Pursuit of Gotham*. They may well point toward a history of urban commercial and public culture more diverse and contentious, but also more resilient and renewable, than the one William Taylor stresses here. Given the book's intellectual generosity, I also suspect that Taylor will welcome such challenges and revisions. In the meantime, he has offered a wonderfully suggestive guidebook to an older modernity.

NOTES

1. Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986); John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York, 1978); Peter Buckley, *To the Opera House: Culture and Society in Antebellum New York* (New York, forthcoming); Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York, 1989); Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982); Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York, 1990).

2. Taylor has edited a second volume, effectively a companion to his own book of essays, on the history of Times Square (*Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World* [New York, 1991]). It includes work by many of the urban cultural historians cited in this review and explores many of the themes of *In Pursuit of Gotham*.

3. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald Levine (Chicago, 1971), 324–39; Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), 157–202. The quotation is from Benjamin, "Motifs in Baudelaire," 177.

4. I am oversimplifying a vast and contentious literature here. For foundational or influential examples of the tendency being described, see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York, 1993), 120–67; Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York, 1990); John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston, 1989); and Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York, 1992). For an example of an alternative tendency in cultural studies that stresses the local specificity of cultural forms and the thickness of relationships between producers and publics, see Janice A. Radway,

Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984).

5. In addition to the works cited in notes one and two, see Robert Snyder, *Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York, 1989); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York, 1993); and Lew Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930* (Westport, Conn., 1981).

6. For important explorations of this thematics of market exchange and spectacle, see Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought* (New York, 1986); Leach, *Land of Desire*; Taylor, *Inventing Times Square*; Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago, 1990); and Simon Bronner, ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880–1920* (New York, 1989).

7. For other revisionist accounts of modernism, see Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina (New York, 1985), 233–66; and Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (New York, 1989).

8. See especially Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952); Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6 (fall 1939): 34–49; and "Towards a Newer Laocoön," *Partisan Review* 7 (July–Aug. 1940): 296–310; and Beaumont Newhall, *Photography: A Short Critical History* (New York, 1938). Within music criticism, Theodor Adorno's influential critique of jazz, "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," reprinted in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (1938; New York, 1978), 270–99, could be added to this list. Significantly, all of these canon-building classics of modernist criticism and mass culture critique were written within a few years of one another during the late 1930s. (Giedion's book was first delivered as a lecture series at Harvard University in 1938–39.) Although they reflect diverse ideological and intellectual trajectories, all were written in the intensely politicized context of fascist insurgency and Popular Front cultural organizing; the relation between this context and these critics' common privileging of the ideals of autonomy, formal technique, and artistic "difficulty" deserves more investigation.

9. For other studies of Urban's design work in New York, see Gregory F. Gilmartin, "Joseph Urban," in Taylor, *Inventing Times Square*, 271–83; and William Leach, "Strategists of Display and the Production of Desire," in Bronner, *Consuming Visions*, esp. 122–27.

10. See Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York, 1966); and Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972).

11. See Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia In Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (1979): 130–48, and *The Political Unconscious: Narrative As a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981).

12. See William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York, 1961).

13. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, 1993); Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York, 1989), 65–101. For aspects of the links among commercial amusements, modernism, and early twentieth-century African-American urban culture, see Houston Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago, 1987); Nathan Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York, 1971); Kathy Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties*

America and the Meaning of Jazz (New York, 1989); Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait, 1900–1950* (New York, 1982); and Hazel Carby, “‘It Just Be’s That Way Sometime’: The Sexual Politics of Women’s Blues,” in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, ed. Ellen Carol Dubois and Vicki L. Ruiz (New York, 1990), 238–49.

14. For an incisive analysis of the links between machine politics and the culture of amusements in turn-of-the-century New York, see Daniel Czitrom, “Underworlds and Underdogs: Big Tim Sullivan and Metropolitan Politics in New York, 1889–1913,” *Journal of American History* 78 (Sept. 1991): 536–58.

15. For the history of antiradical repression in New York, see Julian F. Jaffe, *Crusade against Radicalism: New York during the Red Scare, 1914–1924* (Port Washington, N.Y., 1972); and Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia: The Radicals of The Masses, 1911–1917* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982).

16. It is striking that we find similar narrative and thematic logics in other important studies of metropolitan history, politics, and culture; see, for example, Berman, *All That Is Solid*; Sennett, *Conscience of the Eye*; and Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York, 1990). Each of these books invests particular cities with emblematic meaning for the history of modernity and presents that history as the narrative of a critical consciousness exploring urban space. Each presents its author as an explorer whose personal history in the cityspace exerts a tacit pressure on the shape of the text. And finally, as with Taylor, each in different ways portrays the city as a site of historic defeats that are also (but never only) experienced as personal losses for the narrator. These texts, in short, seem to mark off a distinctive genre whose formal elements, ideology, and historical preconditions deserve further study.

17. This is, it seems to me, a relatively new structure of feeling; nostalgia has usually been seen as a revolt *against* the modern, a longing for the organic, the familial, the traditional. Yet we find examples of “nostalgia for the modern” in much contemporary culture: in advertising campaigns such as that featuring the IBM-PC Tramp, for instance, or the recent spate of cartoonish films (*Batman*, *Dick Tracy*, and the like) based on mid-century comic strips and television. The symptomatic significance of this new mode of nostalgia calls for more exploration.

18. For important new work on the politics of hip-hop and queer culture, see Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, N.H., 1994); and Michael Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis, 1993).