

<**TAG**> Scripting Presence

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## [ **ABSTRACT** ]

The recent success in Times Square's redevelopment has revitalized tourism and business while establishing a strong corporate presence. As a result, its public culture as defined by its inhabitants has been reduced to a space primarily outlined by commercial interests and expression. Although Times Square's pedestrian street life has not lost its momentum, the individual's connection and belonging to this public space has been minimized as a participant while emphasized as a consumer and a spectator. Therefore, in choosing Times Square as my project site, I am interested in reclaiming its physical landscape particularly to the individuals who roam within by creating a street-level activity.

This project intends to construct a momentary place along the path of a pedestrian's navigation along her/his public route. Utilizing a mobile phone's text messaging capability, individuals will participate with one other as they TAG designated areas, "nodes", by inputting and publicly displaying their personal inscription. Promoting a game-like spirit, players can challenge each other's node supremacy by competing in a TXT BATTLE. The emerging victor will either successfully defend her/his TAG or overwrite the existing TAG with her/his own. The final reward in tagging all the nodes is the universal display of the individual's inscription. Simultaneously, the site activities will be mapped online in a corresponding virtual site, which enables an administrative overview.

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## [ 1 ] INTRODUCTION

### [ 1.1 ] MOTIVATION

This thesis project began through the contemplation of a graffiti tag.<sup>1</sup> A physical trace left by a writer to be discovered by another person sharing the same path. This moment can be especially intriguing when that tag is recognized in identifying with a specific person. A mental connection is made in the visualization of writer previously occupying the same space. In a city as large and hectic as New York City, these spontaneous sightings and relationships can create a more intimate arena in an individual's daily experience. As an interruption in the course of our rushed navigation and personal thoughts, the tag refocuses our attention to our surrounding public environment. In noticing the tag, we also become more aware of the surface and structure that holds it and the adjoining physical landscape that informs it and in which it modifies. A second inspiration was the project "Writing Memory"<sup>2</sup> by architect Pierre Thibault installed at the exhibition "Laboratories" at the Centre Canadien d'Architecture in Montréal in August 2002. A circular frame was built in which wires were strung horizontally at different heights. Sitting on the bench encircling the interior of the installation were several pads of tracing paper and markers. Museum visitors were encouraged to fill the paper on the theme of shelter and then clip it onto the wires. Thus, the walls of the structures were constructed through the accumulation of writing. The attached sheets of paper were layered upon each other visible through their translucent quality. Interestingly, there were no instructions for the participants who were immediately prompted by noticing the collaborative efforts of others.

In further exploring both projects, I drew an even deeper understanding of their significance. As discovered in their elements what was overall important to me was the opportunity they presented for anyone to take part in a public activity. So often do we traverse in our daily routines unnoticed by others, unengaged by our surroundings, and uninvited to participate in a wider experience. As vital parts of our city life, public spaces have shifted in purpose and character as issues of crime, economy, maintenance, security, and globalization take hold. Hence, the increase in privatization of our public spaces has raised the question of whom it is for. In their effort to redevelop these spaces, investors, planners, and designers have further defined their intended users and activities and, consequently, the public's experience. What is feared is the loss of our ability to create our own experience within these spaces. The decline of individual contributions will affect the transformative process of a public space in becoming a place of personal experience.

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1 Refer to Appendix A.1.1 for image.

2 Refer to Appendix A.1.2 for project image.

## [ 1.2 ] THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis documentation paper is organized into three main sections, “Theory and Background,” “Design and Implementation,” and “Evaluation and Conclusion”. Chapter Two, “Theory and Background,” is dedicated to the theoretical background of this thesis project in which the general approaches of urban design are briefly discussed followed by a presentation on public space, the process of place-making, and its need for personal contributions. The next subchapter is focused on the internationally recognized public space, Times Square, NYC. Its recent redevelopment and reinvigoration in business, tourism, and commercialization are researched along with how the latest phase of place-making has affected its public life culture. Chapter Two concludes with the analysis of four project precedents, graffiti, “Speaker’s Corner”, “Hello Mr. President”, and “Concerto in Black and Blue.” Next, Chapter Three, “Design and Implementation,” documents the process of <TAG>’s three current prototypes. Prototype v.0.1 constructs the overall structure of this thesis project in creating virtual and physical applications. Prototype v.0.2 streamlines the previous iteration while reframing <TAG>’s goals. Prototype v.0.3 progresses the implementation in finalizing a technical solution for the project’s usage of SMS messaging. The following subchapters describe the installation of <TAG> in the Arnold and Sheila Aronson Galleries at Parsons School of Design and the project’s future directions. Lastly, Chapter Four, “Evaluation and Conclusion,” summarizes the project’s goals and evaluates its successes and failures. The ending subchapters discuss the results and analysis of <TAG>’s user testing and its areas of improvements, closing with the documentation conclusion.

## [ 2 ] THEORY + BACKGROUND

### [ 2.1 ] URBAN DESIGN + PUBLIC SPACE

In analyzing urban public space, studies have often been initially guided by one of two contrasting approaches: either macro-scale considerations in the physical shaping of an urban space, or micro-scale explorations of the social and mental construction of urban place-making, “the part of planning concerned with the physical form of the city” as initiated by Jose Luis Sert in 1956.<sup>3</sup> In the first approach, the design of the environment is more directly concerned with its overall built form. The composition of buildings, objects, and the subsequent spaces they create is emphasized through its visual and serviceable organization. This direction unified the architect, city planner, and landscape architect in addressing the needs and concerns in the design of future American cities. While the latter approach foregrounds increasing understanding of an environment by observing the people that move within its space, “to revive the reality of the outside as a dimension of human experience.”<sup>4</sup> An urban space is qualified as a place by pinpointing its identity and associated meanings conveyed through the types and levels of activity engaged in by its inhabitants and visitors. Culturally based, this structure is less focused on the physical organization of the city and based its methodology on the social sciences.<sup>5</sup>

“We must ‘let in’ the user, not as a hapless occupant filling a chair in the ‘living room,’ or ‘giving scale’ to the elevation, but as an active participant. He is the person who really defines what’s ‘in’, the person who uses the architect’s clues to establish a world for himself.”—Donlyn Lyndon<sup>6</sup>

Public space has transformed from the model set forth by the Greek “agora”, as a community-designed place for social congregation, civic communication, and goods and services exchange, to the present day commercial-zoned districts promoting consumer-related culture and activities. The escalating costs in providing, maintaining, and securing streets, sidewalks, parks, and city squares along with the need to revitalize business have warranted the solicitation of investors in offsetting expenditures and generating economic profit for urban development. As commercial retailers and corporations increasingly build our urban centers, privatization of public spaces incurs in the establishment of semi-private property such as malls and entertainment complexes. Moreover, although corporate organizations may not explicitly own the paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks<sup>7</sup> of our cities, their neighboring presence emanates a strong influence and determination of how these spaces are used, accessed, formed, and remembered. Consequently,

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3 Andrea Kahn, “Urban Design Pedagogy: Testing Premises for Practice”, opening comments delivered at the conference, “Urban Design: Practices, Pedagogies, Premises” at the Van Alen Organization, April 5, 2002.

4 Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, New York, 1990, p.xiii.

5 Andrea Kahn, “Urban Design Pedagogy: Testing Premises for Practice”, opening comments delivered at the conference, “Urban Design: Practices, Pedagogies, Premises” at the Van Alen Organization, April 5, 2002.

6 Charles Moore, Donlyn Lyndon, Patrick Quinn, and Sim Van der Ryn, “Toward Making Places”, *You Have to Pay for the Public Life*, edited by Kevin Keim, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p.97.

7 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, p.46.

the individual's connection and belonging to public space has been minimized as a participant and simultaneously emphasized as a consumer and a spectator.

In addition, the overwhelming commercial expression evidenced in street advertisements, retail spaces, and corporate buildings has dominated the formation of a place's identity, structure, and meaning; the elements that combine to make its environmental image.<sup>8</sup> This commercial definition of our city spaces resists "allowing the individual to continue to investigate and organize reality" in which "there should be blank spaces where he can extend the drawing for himself."<sup>9</sup> As much as people need to have legibility of form, access, and purpose pre-determined in their public space by urban planners, architects, civic government, and real estate developers, it is also necessary to allow a place to accept contributions from its inhabitants in further developing its function and character. The ability to append to a seemingly controlled environment transmits a mental connection of belonging, possession, and responsibility to the individual with her/his public space as "perception is a creative act, not a passive reception."<sup>10</sup> Thus, the declining representation of the individual within her/his built environment along with a gaining corporate interpretation of public spaces further distances the individual from making a personal relationship to her/his external surroundings. "Part subjective projection, part internalization of an external reality,"<sup>11</sup> place composites the active experience of the individual navigating through and utilizing a space with her/his personal memory recalled from that experience.

"Moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves a part of it, on the stage with the other participants. Most often, our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns. Nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is the composite of them all." -Kevin Lynch<sup>12</sup>

A place is most often remembered through its usage as a setting for activities that are personally significant, its location measured by the visibility and accessibility to its site, and its aesthetics expressed through its visual form. An individual constructs a mental image of a place through compositing her/his experience with personal meanings gathered from the events, objects, and appearances within that environment. More than a conclusion, this cognitive map reciprocates by influencing the individual in her/his consequent interpretation, action, and movement within the space. How a person perceives a particular place will vary dependent on the individual's experience, culture, status, personality, purpose, and sense of spatial form and quality, as different places will create different perceptions within an individual. Therefore, the

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8 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, p.8.

9 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, p.9.

10 Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981, p.131.

11 Barry Curtis, "That Place Where: Some Thoughts on Memory and the City", *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, Iain Borden, editor, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p.55.

12 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, p.2.

recollection and recognition of a place is closely linked to the individual's personal identity, as "I am here" supports "I am."<sup>13</sup>

"It is desirable that an environment evoke rich, vivid images, it is also desirable that these images be communicable and adaptable to changing practical needs, and that there can develop new groupings, new meanings, new poetry. The objective might be an imageable environment which is at the same time open-ended."—Kevin Lynch<sup>14</sup>

As the mental and physical construction of place often lends itself to the construction of self, the "inside is partly a function of the participant's attitude."<sup>15</sup> As Donlyn Lyndon states, "Inside doesn't necessarily mean 'indoors'. It is not dominated by where the fresh air is; it is dominated by where the participant thinks he is."<sup>16</sup> By establishing an inside condition for a space, an outside condition becomes demarcated as well enforcing a sense of place within its interior. In Lyndon's essay, "Toward Making Places", written with architects Charles Moore, Patrick Quinn, and Sim Van der Ryn, they advocate for the "creation of place" as the basic function in the act of architecture as it communicates to its users the "essential meaning of a particular environment." This environment performs as a screen and "sifts the world into comprehensible experiences, a screen lodged partly in each person's brain and partly in the specific spinning of circumstances."<sup>17</sup> Thus, our actions and response within our physical environment becomes a "projection of that screen" and, in turn, affects our experience and that of others.

Also, influencing the degree of quality in a place is the individual's ease in comprehension of her/his surroundings. This legibility, the ability to understand "where you are" and "when you are there," will allow the user to take possession of a place. The act of possession in this sense is the feeling of inhabiting "something" in "someplace" as "somebody"<sup>18</sup>. The use of architectural ordering devices have often been employed to intensify this feeling of "being there."<sup>19</sup> Traditional elements such as the processional axis, landmarks, and boundaries establish a temporal and spatial narrative in the individual's journey as she/he understands where she/he was and where she/he is going in her/his navigation. As they organize and "coalesce space", these approaches essentially draw a division between the inside and the outside of a space in the creation of a place.

"The forms which the famous 'form givers' give, and even the spaces which some of those forms enclose, become far less important than the places which we establish and of which we establish possession."—Charles Moore<sup>20</sup>

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13 Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981, p. 132.

14 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, p.139.

15 Donlyn Lyndon, "Toward Making Places", *You Have To Pay For The Public Life*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 93.

16 Donlyn Lyndon, p. 93.

17 Donlyn Lyndon, p. 95.

18 Charles Moore, *You Have To Pay For The Public Life*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. xxiv.

19 Charles Moore, "Toward Making Places", *You Have To Pay For The Public Life*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 92.

20 Charles Moore, "Toward Making Places", *You Have To Pay For The Public Life*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 90.

The ability to construct an image of a place speaks to its “legibility”. Developing a clear visual and mental understanding of an environment’s order will affect the individual’s behavior in participating within it. The communication between a place’s form, access, and function with its inhabitants will determine their perceived degree of security, desired duration of stay, and possible development of activity. For instance, the public image of New York City’s Times Square in its past compared to its current identity, structure, and meaning elicits polar behavioral responses and patterns from its inhabitants. Always a place of attraction, Times Square in the 1970s was “a place where the laws of conventional society are suspended, people come to seek adventures, to take risks in dealing in the fast life...to con and to be conned,” wrote sociologists William Kornblum and Vernon Boggs.<sup>21</sup> This image, continuously recycled, reinforced the perception of an unsafe, seedy place perpetuating the activities of drugs, sex, crime, and loitering. While the recent physical and cultural transformation of Times Square, beginning in the 1990s, has brought a different set of people, professionals, middle-class consumers, and tourists, involved in a different set of activities. A safer environment, the present Times Square emanates the image of “an exotic object of tourism increasingly mediated through the entertainment industry.”<sup>22</sup> The development of Times Square is a tangible narrative in witnessing the mutual relationship between the people who make the place and the physical form and structure that define the types of people and behavior it will hold, “Times Square had grown ugly and squalid and uninviting, but it was never dead. And though new life is being brought to it, as the developers are fond of saying, it bears repeating that what is being replaced, covered, up or eased out is also life.”<sup>23</sup>

In The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Jane Jacobs observes and documents the everyday activity and interactions within the public life of neighborhoods. Jacobs was an early proponent of the importance of street life in the making of a city. A place’s evolution relied heavily on its ability to generate social connections in developing “a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, as the issue of privacy becomes even more valuable to us in the public life, a balance is sought after between an individual’s determination to privacy and their “simultaneous wishes for differing degrees of contact.”<sup>25</sup> In William Whyte’s study of the public life particularly in small city spaces such as parks, playgrounds, plazas, and streets, he quickly assesses that a “successful urban place” is configured by not its amount of space, but its amount of people. In fact, “sites for social interaction” border on or overlap “the traffic lines” with few people choosing to form “gatherings away from the spaces used for navigation.” There is a human instinct to gravitate to the center of the crowd, moving

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21 Lynne Sagalyn, Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p. 16.

22 Lynne Sagalyn, p. 456.

23 Lynne Sagalyn, p. 457.

24 Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Random House, Inc., New York, 1993, p.73.

25 Jane Jacobs, p.77.

within the main pedestrian flow where “conversations are incident to pedestrian journeys.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, it offers the maximum amount of choice and opportunity to the individual to make, break, or continue contact with the crowd. The pedestrian is not treated merely as a transitive object, but as a public lodger pausing along her/his route in participation with her/his surroundings.

“The most celebrated urban spaces, places that have contributed to creative metropolises, are those that combine large-scale operations and small-scale experiences, major infrastructure with recreation and culture, and grand civic events with intimate daily interactions.” –Van Alen Institute, New Design Directions, exhibition statement.<sup>27</sup>

The livelihood of the public space is dependent on the degree of its accessibility and openness in allowing its inhabitants some determination of its use and, thus, meaning. In suburban and rural areas, residences are more self-contained in distant, but spacious units decreasing their reliance on public space. Whereas, in urban areas where space is particularly limited and the individual's domestic residence is constricted in perimeter and functionality, public spaces are even more vital as they perform as an extension of our homes providing a place for recreational, domestic, and occupational tasks. Consequently, the identity of a public space becomes constructed individually and collectively in its integration in our daily routine as a place that is of necessity and, thus, meaningful to us.

Although often considered “free”, public space is a controlled environment dependent on its interior life and motives and exterior conditions and influences. Safety measures, such as surveillance cameras and security guards, have been increasingly positioned in our paths where they have come to detect and affect our behavior. The act of being watched by anonymous eyes and/or being confronted with a potential violence in the daily movements of our city experience has become engrained in our minds as a norm. As time passes, we question these intervening gestures less and have come to accept them as necessary methods for our own protection in public space. However, even the universal practice of sitting in public space is increasingly prohibited within the design of a place. Handrails are installed uncomfortably high, planters are sloped, and metal barbs are welded into any flat surface. Therefore, reinforcing the perception of public spaces as only transitory paths for movement from one destination point to another. While, removing individuals from inhabiting these places for activity and interaction amongst each other. The potential problem of these patterns is the resistance they hold for a place to establish its “inside” as “secure against the hostile, uncontrolled outside,” and more importantly, “knowing where you are” since its inhabitants will forever feel they are on the “outside.”<sup>28</sup>

“We must look at the functional problem—not how the building works, but how people work—and derive our notion of economy from the occupation of space rather than its cubic-foot cost. The

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26 William Whyte, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces, The Conservation Foundation, Washington, D.C., 1980, p.21.

27 Van Alen Institute, “New Design Directions”, exhibition statement, 2003.

28 Donlyn Lyndon, p. 94.

motivations of human activity and the dynamic movements ensuing must be accommodated, must be anticipated, so people must be regarded as the generators and not just the unfortunate recipients of our brainstorm.”—Patrick J. Quinn<sup>29</sup>

Conversely, a confused or even ambiguous perception of an environment will result in a loss in personal experience. In Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, Marc Augé discusses the importance of place in contrasting it with the nature of “non-places” which are recognized by their vacuous culture as well as “instructions on how to live.”<sup>30</sup> Non-places are signified as spaces created specifically for a function such as transport, transit, commerce, or leisure; for example, the supermarket, highway, and airport. They are characterized by their use of generalized words, ideograms, or text to communicate with their inhabitants. Although this form of automated mediation is used to inform the individual it also removes the interaction between the environment and its inhabitants denying a place to socially generate. In fact, Augé states that a “solitary contractuality”<sup>31</sup> punctuates one’s experience within the non-place concurrently avoiding the communal experience. In focusing on their existing functions, these environments come prepared to enact predefined scenarios with its users, such as their acquisition of access or disclosure of identification in order to enter a building or purchase a ticket. Thus, the environment directs the individuals in its use. As a result, the non-place negates the individual identities of its users producing a shared identity as they become “no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer, or driver.”<sup>32</sup>

“The passenger through non-places retrieves his identity only at Customs, at the tollbooth, at the check-out counter. Meanwhile, he obeys the same code as others, receives the same messages, responds to the same entreaties. The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude.”—Marc Augé<sup>33</sup>

The non-place is primarily concerned with access to and from its function. In addressing its inhabitants as “customers, passengers, users, listeners,” they are identified by “name, occupation, place of birth, address” upon “entering or leaving.”<sup>34</sup> In compartmentalizing individuals, their experiences, and a place’s service and functions, Augé critiques the non-place as never assembling these parts into a whole. The emphasis on a place’s quantified return rather than concentrating on its inhabitants’ qualitative understanding creates a space designed around the lines of transactions, monetary, informational, or functional. There is no synthesis of all the elements that are contained within its perimeters not to mention, openings to unplanned uses and purposes. Thus, the individual’s experience within these spaces can be incomplete, unsatisfied, and wanting. Lastly, Augé asserts that the non-place contains only the present moment as it positions the past as a spectacle for the present.

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29 Patrick J. Quinn, “Toward Making Places”, You Have To Pay For The Public Life, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 103.

30 Sim Van der Ryn, “Toward Making Places”, You Have To Pay For The Public Life, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 99.

31 Marc Augé, Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, Verso, New York, 1995, p. 94.

32 Marc Augé, p. 103.

33 Marc Augé, p. 103.

34 Marc Augé, p. 111.

“Everything proceeds as if space has been trapped by time, as if there was no history other than the last forty-eight hours of news, as if each individual history were drawing its motives, its words and images, from the inexhaustible stock of an unending history in the present.”—Marc Augé<sup>35</sup>

In review of urban design and its approaches to designing public spaces, an intermingling of the physical and social methodologies is desirable. A space is rendered more strongly as a place when its visual form and function complements its social interaction. In examining the construction of the image of a place along with the image of a non-place, this dichotomy offers a path of where we are in the building of our urban places and where we would like to be. As outlined above, the need for the public to have connection with their public spaces through an act of inhabitation, inclusion, and experience supports the extension of the individual into her/his public life. Moreover, as privatization incurs more frequently not only through commercial and institutional presence and directives, but also through the individual adoption of mobile technology such as mobile phones, personal desktop assistants (PDAs), and MP3 players, further separation occurs between an individual's interior environment from that of her/his exterior surroundings. Lastly, the next section will focus on a selected public space, Times Square, New York City, in which the elements of identity, structure, and meaning can be further studied. Moreover, Times Square offers an interesting testimony in straddling the non-place and the place in embodying characteristics of commerce and tourism in the former and the undeniably, historically popular street life culture of the latter.

“The unanswered issue that looms over these projects [proposals for the former WTC site] is whether they can create a truly public sphere. This has been largely absent from New York. Ours has been a capital of commerce and finance, lacking a public architecture for everyday life.” —Saskia Sassen<sup>36</sup>

## [ 2.2 ] **TIMES SQUARE, NYC**

“Times Square is the heart of the world's most dynamic city, a mecca for entertainment and excitement, It's the place where people come to see Broadway shows and supersigns, watch the ball drop on New Year's Eve or experience the spectacle of 'Broadway on Broadway' every summer.” —Times Square Business Improvement District brochure, “Times Square Restaurant Guide”, 2001<sup>37</sup>

42nd Street officially opened in 1837 first earning its moniker as a crossroad of New York City's developing street grid system. However, it was not until 1904 with the construction of the 42nd Street and Broadway subway station that 42nd Street truly became a hub of the metropolis providing city residents, suburbanites, and visitors access to its 16-acre grounds known as “Longacre Square”. Quickly attracting the entrepreneurial eyes of many including Adolph S. Ochs, the owner and publisher of *The New York Times*, the area was quickly settled by entertainment, real estate, and commercial businesses. In honor of Ochs's Times Tower, the city's second tallest building, the area was coined, “Times Square” in 1904. Filling with commercial activity from hotels, restaurants, and theaters with crowds of pedestrians to complement

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<sup>35</sup> Marc Augé, p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> Saskia Sassen, “How Downtown Can Stand Tall and Step Lively Again”, *The New York Times*, January 29, 2003, Section 2, p.36.

<sup>37</sup> “Times Square Restaurant Guide”, Times Square Business Improvement District, 2001, p.2.

the bustling street life, 42nd Street quickly gained the rights to the title, “the street that never sleeps”. But, as other entertainment districts such as Lincoln Center began to emerge and seek the city’s middle-class audience, Times Square crept slowly into the shadows and lights of the garish marquees of converted subculture movie houses and sex shops along with open prostitution and drug trading.

The 1960s and 1970s Times Square is often characterized as “vice city” with its rampant male, female, and child prostitution, peep shows, massage parlors, porn bookstores, strip clubs/bars, single rate occupancy hotels (a.k.a. “pross” hotels), rapes, muggings, murders, and general civic neglect punctuated by the lack of any major new construction since 1937. Yet, a grandly chaotic and some say “therapeutic” street life took place.<sup>38</sup> In 1969, 42nd Street’s “ten grinder (reruns of action/violence movies) movie houses drew nine million customers”<sup>39</sup>, the porn industry attracted tourists and provided jobs, and the area’s 49,000 office workers together with the 24-hour theaters generated a pedestrian flow at all times of the day seducing mostly men from all types of economic levels and sexual persuasions.<sup>40</sup> Even as Times Square transformed from “The Great White Way” showcasing “spectaculars” to becoming “ostentatious flesh-peddling in an open-air meat rack”<sup>41</sup>, it maintained its stature as symbolic of New York City itself. Unique to the city, country, and world, Times Square was an “experience of place” in its physical construction of lights, signage, and small-scale buildings, and in its public space culture which lent to its metamorphic identity. Times Square’s significance came not only in its vital positioning as the “crossroads of the world”, but also in its emotional impact on New Yorkers and others as a place of nostalgia, disgrace, excitement, history, fear, and amusement.

“At present time there is a battle going on between the middle class of the city, and particularly its cultural innovators (architects, businessmen, planners, local residents, and clergymen), and the street culture class over who will control the street and gather its gold...Presently the street people are extracting a small-time “nickel-and-dime” profit while the owners of theaters and peep shows are claiming the larger stakes. Would an even larger staking out of the territory by big business eliminate the penny ante dealer and street hustlers...probably not likely.” – CUNY Researchers<sup>42</sup>

From 1969-1971, Times Square experienced a short development boom with the construction of five major towers that reinvigorated the area with its “golden potential” and resulted in a “dramatic acceleration in the shift from Times Square’s principal role as a nighttime world of entertainment to its hitherto secondary daytime role as an office district.”<sup>43</sup> Due to its coveted location in business and transportation, real estate and commercial developers steadily focused their sights and

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38 Lynne Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p.57.

39 Lynne Sagalyn, p.47.

40 Lynne Sagalyn, p.47.

41 Lynne Sagalyn, p.31.

42 Lynne Sagalyn, p.57.

43 David Dunlap, “Signs Signal Both Profit and Controversy,” *The New York Times*, February 6, 1994, 10:1.

proposals in Times Square with “reasonable expectation of success and profit.”<sup>44</sup> Supporting a 42nd Street cleanup, residents and small businesses in the nearby Clinton (Hell’s Kitchen) area became increasingly concerned of the threatening street conditions in Times Square, but also wary its offending activities would relocate to their own neighborhood. During the period, the city government and local citizen interest groups also attempted, once again, to find solutions to ameliorate the conditions in Times Square with an unveiling of schemes and blueprints offering a future vision of Times Square that would recapture its past glory.

Finally in 1984, the State and City of New York presented “one of the largest urban renewal programs launched in the United States”<sup>45</sup>, the *42nd Street Development Project*. Reiterating previous proposals, the objective was to replace the “bad” street activities with “good” street activities in revitalizing middle class pedestrian activity, employment, restaurant trade, and retail sales. Limited city resources focused the plan on attracting commercially operated development capable of generating its own revenues. Thus, the plan proposed to build four skyscrapers to be occupied with corporate offices all situated around the intersection of Broadway and 42nd Street, in company with a supporting program to restore Times Square’s theaters through commercial sponsorship. However, the plan and subsequent designs of the towers by Philip Johnson and John Burgee drew such an emotional, citywide rejection that the *42nd Street Development Project* was stalled indefinitely. Criticism erupted towards the displacement of the area’s social problems with a corporate environment, consequently, sterilizing the cultural symbolism and physical character of Times Square. Almost a decade later, even after numerous design revisions, an approved plan had still not emerged. But, the urgency to revitalize Times Square, and thus, New York City, had never deflated.

“The light, the energy, the sense of contained chaos that have long characterized Times Square are essentially incompatible with high-rise office buildings, or with stark and harsh modern hotel towers like the Marriott. It has been clear since the first of these towers went up in this part of town more than 15 years ago: these buildings do not fit. They do not reflect the character of Times Square and the theater district; they squash it, as firmly as a shoe might flatten an ant.” –Paul Goldberger, “Will Times Square Become a Grand Canyon”<sup>46</sup>

Hence, the 1993 interim plan, *42nd Street Now!*, materialized taking its cue from the vehement feedback of the *42nd Street Development Project* and creating a new script to provide “a good-time place that belongs to everybody: democratic, freewheeling, hedonistic. A mix of high and low culture, theater, popular entertainment. An experience for consumers, tourists, families. An aesthetic cacophony of style, scales, and materials, honky-tonk diversity. Brash bold signage and glitz, unabashedly commercial.”<sup>47</sup> The focus now was on the theaters and its related entertainment and

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44 Lynne Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p.56.

45 Kees Gajentaan, “Times<sup>2</sup>: Recreation at the Crossroads of the World,” 1995-6, URL: <http://home.luna.nl/~xino/times2/ts07.html>

46 Paul Goldberger, “Will Times Square Become A Grand Canyon,” *The New York Times*, October 6, 1985, H31.

47 Lynne Sagalyn, p.240.

tourist establishments with the long-term sights on office development bringing New York's publishing, communications, and advertising industries back to Times Square.

As a result, the preservation and amplification of Times Square as a "chaotic commercial gathering place" is realized that is symbolic of New York City and marketed as the "crossroads of the world"<sup>48</sup>. The *42nd Street Now!* blueprint delineated a cosmetic re-application of lights, signs, and video monitors—"an aesthetic plan that would really become a tourist attraction in itself"<sup>49</sup>—in keeping with the area's cultural history as a high-tech showplace competing for the attention of pedestrians numbering one and a half million a day.<sup>50</sup> In reconstructing Times Square as a kind of Disney-like "urban theme park"<sup>51</sup>, the goal was to attract tourists and "establish entertainment-related shops and other lively late-night venues"<sup>52</sup> quickly revitalizing business, real estate, and middle-class consumer-interest. Yet, the visible extension of corporate and commercial presence into this public space draws criticism for its privatization of Times Square and the proliferation of homogenous mass-culture. Moreover, the experience of the inhabitant has increasingly shifted to spectator of the 24-hour digital spectacle. The decline of the inhabitant as a participant contributing to Times Square's identity and life has led to nostalgia for its gritty past.

"The tourist presence flattered New York as a world center, and demonstrated the knowledge-ability and sophistication of the natives. But the tourist was also the whipping boy for aspects of commercial culture that residents were not proud of, and which excited occasional envy, contempt, and indignation. Fame brought inconvenience (and traffic jams). And spectatorship meant playing for the crowd. New York was on stage and Times Square had become the centerpiece. One's attitude to tourist was, in short, a touchstone of one's attitude to the new commercial culture generally." —Neil Harris, social historian<sup>53</sup>

Central to the critiques of the new Times Square is the influence of the "Disneyfication" process in making this place "acceptable for middle America"<sup>54</sup> once again. As suburban values are brought into the cities in environments such as malls, entertainment multiplexes, and recreational facilities, the cultures between suburban and urban places become less distinct. The debate around Times Square's development often surrounds the question of whom it is for. The need to bring in corporate investment to finance the cosmetic and cultural overhaul has also lead to the privatization of a public realm. With advertising and entertainment as its focus and the increasing substitution of shopping as a form of entertainment, Times Square positions itself to speak to a certain audience—an audience of consumers with prosperity and mainstream interests. What is feared is the loss of "a public space of genuine diversity that served a wide range of

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48 Dan Bischoff, "Signs of the Times", *Metropolis*, February/March 1998, URL: [www.metropolismag.com/html/content\\_0298/fe98vc.htm](http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content_0298/fe98vc.htm)

49 Lynne Sagalyn, p.303.

50 Dan Bischoff, "Signs of the Times", *Metropolis*, February/March 1998, URL: [www.metropolismag.com/html/content\\_0298/fe98vc.htm](http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content_0298/fe98vc.htm)

51 Lynne Sagalyn, p.455.

52 Lynne Sagalyn, p.292.

53 Lynne Sagalyn, p.455.

54 Susan S. Fainstein and Robert Stokes, "Spaces for Play: The Impacts of Entertainment Development on New York City," Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Working Paper no.123, 1997, p.17.

racial, ethnic and income groups."<sup>55</sup> Opinion-makers often gather along either end of the mass culture spectrum supporting the mainstream life versus the marginal life. Yet, as noted by writer Andreas Huyssen, "Both views are narrow, and it is not clear why Times Square should be shaped in accord with either."<sup>56</sup> As parts of its past glory have been rejuvenated, how will the rest of Times Square's inherent characteristics fare? For instance, will this public space retain its past reputation for social tolerance and remain a creative, trend-setting force in cultural innovations despite welcoming branded entertainment?

"Maintenance of its position of dominance in the world of popular culture is essential to the future of New York. Disneyfication and multimedia production represent the leading edge of mass entertainment...despite the scorn of high-brow critics, New York cannot afford to opt out of this trend...The scale and concentration of activity, which will put it in a class by itself rather than making it a mere replication of other entertainment districts." –Susan Fainstein and Robert Stokes, "Spaces for Play: The Impacts of Entertainment Development on New York City"<sup>57</sup>

The underlying intentions of the *42nd Street Now!* interim plan were to rebuild political support and heal the controversy surrounding the *42nd Street Development Project*. Its design guidelines needed to convince the decision-makers in government, business, and civics that Times Square's symbolic legacy as an entertainment and commercial capital would be the goal. It relied heavily on visual aesthetics with eye-catching imagery, but also considered safe to reinvigorate the district's nostalgic heyday. The absence of a content-driven program within the redevelopment plan becomes visible in Times Square's quest to move beyond its overall façade renovation and commercial culture. As a tourist destination point and city icon, Times Square's challenge has been to set itself apart from every other multimedia, entertainment complex emerging on the globe. Thus, the originality in Times Square's intrinsic nature and the city that it represents needs to emerge and be reinforced within its public space culture as it has in its physical makeover.

### [ 2.3 ] PRECEDENTS

The elements of motivation, culture, access, identity, and form will be discussed in reviewing New York City's graffiti activity, The Media Centre's "Speaker's Corner", Johannes Gees' "Hello Mr. President", and David Hammons' "Concerto in Black and Blue". The common thread between these projects is their ability to engage the audience with a public site whether it is the streets and subways of New York City or the interior footprint of the Ace Gallery. Each site is considered not only as a physical site, but also as a social site. Their similarity also lies in their provision of a structure to allow content to be generated by any individual in sight or even remotely in some cases. Therefore, what is imperative in all of these projects is the participation of outside individuals who are equipped with the tools to play the role of the creator.

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55 Alexander J. Reichl, *Re-Constructing Times Square: Politics and Culture in Urban Development*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 1999, p.177.

56 Andreas Huyssen, "Fear of Mice: The Transformations of Times Square," *Harvard Design Magazine*, Number 4, Winter/Spring 1998, p.2.

57 Susan S. Fainstein and Robert Stokes, p.25.

The contribute process in which the participants engage is the essence of the projects' experience delegating the typical role of the viewer as secondary. Moreover, these projects provide a medium enabling the individual to influence her/his physical environment in its existing form and structure, its predetermined identity, or intended functionality through the act of self-expression. Written and physical expression received in a common space often have the potential to reveal a part of the participant's personal identity and become a system of communication supported by a community as they react and respond to each other. Thus, the projects discussed will also reflect their ability to affect a public space as a social network. Finally, the individuals involved and sometimes, the artists themselves, tend to embody the edges of certain political, economic, social, and artistic spheres. Perhaps, a common trait that contributes to the motivation of the artists and their project participants is the sense of feeling neither included nor represented within their mainstream spheres, thus, negating their presence.

### **[2.3.1] GRAFFITI**

An individual's need for public self-expression is often motivated by her/his desire to be seen, heard, noticed, and remembered within her/his community and surrounding environment. This need is supported by the desire to establish an identity in the mind of oneself and others. The construction of this identity is reinforced through her/his chosen method of communication and receiving audience. After selecting the identity that an individual wishes to disclose, communication is achieved when the meaning of the signs created by the sender is comprehended by the recipient<sup>58</sup>. In addition, public self-expression is an act of empowerment enabling the individual to affect the physical form and identity of her/his public space and its subsequent meaning and perception by other people. It is a gesture that seizes control of an otherwise seemingly untouchable realm that typically determines the individual's purpose, activity, and accessibility.

“When an individual appears before others, he knowingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part.”—Erving Goffman<sup>59</sup>

In the culture of graffiti, specifically in the period of the 1970s and early 1980s in New York City, urban youths announced their existence and asserted their importance to an unwelcoming physical environment in creating and applying a self-determined identity onto private and public property. Through the use of an alias or “tag”, graffiti allowed for a segment of the city's population that lacked political, social, and economic power to acquire the access and ability to identify with their surroundings.<sup>60</sup> Influenced by the political radicalism of the preceding decade, graffiti was used as a public forum for social criticism with the invested impact to make “visible that which most would rather remain invisible that our

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58 Erving Goffman, *Strategic Interaction*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1969, p.4.

59 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Doubleday Anchor Books, Garden City, New York, 1959, p.242.

60 Sarah Giller, “Graffiti: Inscribing Transgression on the Urban Landscape,” 1997, URL: <http://www.graffiti.org/faq/giller.html>.

relationship to space and to structure is never controlled.”<sup>61</sup> In comparison to corporate advertising legitimately placed on billboards, urban ware, transportation, and buildings, “tags” usurp space outside of a system of procedure and permission asserting their visual expressiveness to the public’s attention.<sup>62</sup> Its presence alters the intended physical form of the property or space and the corresponding meaning that it conveys. Moreover, it disrupts the process of commercial exchange in which the gains and losses received by both parties have not been contractually negotiated. In the giving and receiving of that which is considered of equal value “as the tagger takes something (space) from someone while giving back something unwanted (the tag) to the owner.”<sup>63</sup> By claiming ownership of a space, tagging is a personal declaration of an individual’s presence. It is a representation of her/his existence to an external audience while also acting as a form of communication presenting the writer’s identity, skills, location, and intention to her/his internal audience of graffiti writers.

“Back then, there was a lot going on that had a backlash on us kids. So I wanted to say fuck you to them, and that’s why I wrote on the trains. I don’t think we realized what we were doing in the beginning, but when the city started fighting back, we realized we were touching a nerve. So that’s why we kept going. It was the streets talking back.”—TRACY 168 <sup>64</sup>

The tag takes on special significance as it is chosen by the writer based on how she/he wants to be perceived by whom she/he most respects and demands respect. In its visibility and reproducibility, the tag becomes a symbol of status and pride in representing the writer, an otherwise anonymous individual. Tags were often created to produce a specific image of the writer such as, Zephyr<sup>65</sup> and Futura 2000<sup>66</sup>, or derived from their ethnic heritage such as TAKI 183 and TRACY 168<sup>67</sup>. The numbers integrated into the names often referred to the street location of places the writers found personally significant to them; for example, where they lived or went to school, indicating an identity connected to the physical urban environment. Moreover, it may have evolved as a solution to differentiating individuals living in a dense city setting where one name could be identified with a number of individuals. At times, multiple tags were acquired to construct separate identities in which writers could speak to a specific audience such as their neighborhood, ethnic community, peers, or the general public.

Part of the allure of this medium is not only the physical trace that one can leave behind, but also the mental connection that follows in the acknowledgement and response one imparts when discovering it. By appropriating the New York City subways as a platform for communicating their graffiti, writers created a network across the five boroughs diminishing

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61 Anon., “Writing On”, URL: <http://www.emory.edu/ALTJNL/Articles/Graffiti/graf1.html>

62 Anon., “Writing On”, URL: <http://www.emory.edu/ALTJNL/Articles/Graffiti/graf1.html>

63 Anon., “Writing On”, URL: <http://www.emory.edu/ALTJNL/Articles/Graffiti/graf1.html>

64 Michael Walsh, *Graffiti*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California, 1996, p.46.

65 Refer to Appendix A.2.1 for image.

66 Refer to Appendix A.2.2 for image.

67 Refer to Appendix A.2.3. for image.

boundaries, "Guys from the Bronx became great friends with guys from Brooklyn, Queens; it was the greatest thing for generating friendships."<sup>68</sup> Writers had particular lines they preferred, depending on the surface of the train and its route with the greatest preference and prestige going to the Number 2 and 5 trains because they traveled from the end of the Bronx through Manhattan to the farthest edge of Brooklyn. The subways provided "high visibility, the huge potential audience and the link with other like-minded kids throughout the city."<sup>69</sup> Likewise certain neighborhoods held higher value than others as places to "bomb." Manhattan was the most sought after borough for writers because of its high profile status and commercial value as a global, national, and local destination point. Thus, tags here would receive the most attention and remembrance. As the choice in location for displaying a writer's tag reflected upon her/his skill in taking risks, knowing the streets, and expressing creativity, so did the tag begin to symbolize a place, "when you hear COPE, you think of the Bronx...COST, SET, and JD make me think of Queens."<sup>70</sup>

"We really didn't realize what we were doing until we started doing trains. I found a lot of that stuff was reaching people and I started getting back answers from Brooklyn. I was like, wow. We had a line of communication and the media played no role. It was the first time I could actually hear what Brooklyn was saying without hearing it on TV. It was through the trains that Queens would say, we're doing all right over here, how are you doing over there? Eventually it became a competition thing with us, but it still united us." –TRACY 168 <sup>71</sup>

In operating through a prestige economy, graffiti defined its own cultural rules for status to be achieved, lost, promoted, created, and circulated among a group's cultural rules.<sup>72</sup> Status is equivalent to "respect" in a community of familiar individuals such as in a neighborhood setting. However, respect had difficulty in being valued for exchange in a larger public arena such as New York City where familiarity is overwhelmed by anonymity. Thus, "fame" replaces "respect" in its more mediated and distributed form now associated with the framework of mass media and culture. "Fame" is the renown attached to the commodified personality of a "star" or "celebrity". Graffiti appropriates this social concept of "fame", by reinterpreting the convention of having one's "name in lights" associated with a symbol. Thus, writers had a well-known written name, but an unknown face; a type of recognition usually not available or desirable to stars and celebrities.

"Getting Fame", was accomplished through either a writer's saturation or style. The first approach was based on the quantity of tags a writer was able to produce. While the latter approach was determined by the quality of the tag's aesthetic and the writer's originality and creativity. In reinventing a language system based on the English alphabet,

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68 Chris "Daze" Ellis, "Photo Synthesis", *Mass Appeal*, Issue 18, 2002, p.42.

69 Henry Chalfant & James Prigoff, *Spraycan Art*, Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1987, p. 8.

70 GIZ ONE MTA, FTR, XTC, "All City Now", *Stress*, Issue No. 13, 1998, p.49.

71 Chino/BYI, p.54.

72 Joe Austin, *Taking the Train*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2001, p.47.

graffiti was expressed through a variety of styles and techniques. Although hundreds of typography designs surfaced, the three main lettering forms practiced were “Bubble”<sup>73</sup>, “Blockbuster”<sup>74</sup>, and “ Wildstyle”<sup>75</sup> a.k.a. “Mechanical”. “Bubble” and “Blockbuster” were both relatively legible with the first being rounded and inflated in design and the second being squarish and sharp-edged. Meanwhile, “Wildstyle” was nearly or completely illegible composed of interlocking letters that were twisted, fractured, or crumbling and interpenetrated with bar and arrow extensions signifying a flow of movement.<sup>76</sup> Some writers worked to distort the letters as much as possible to ensure those unfamiliar to the graffiti culture and signage system would not understand their internal code. Known as “narrowcast”, abstract lettering styles and special languages were created primarily for the appreciation of other writers with “broadcast” for the general city audience. The writer, Dondi, explained “when he writes for other writers, he uses Wildstyle, and when he writes for the public, he uses straight letters.”<sup>77</sup> The reduction in the tag’s readability and its conventional textual meaning created a graphic sign/symbol. Thus, a tag can evolve into a “piece” with intermediary levels of composition that incorporate various colors, homilies, imagery, pop culture characters, and thematic landscapes. In this sense, the “mark beginning as a competitive declaration of self could become a sign explored for its own sake.”<sup>78</sup> Finally, the style in which the tag was expressed could also indicate from which borough the writer belonged. Writers from Brooklyn were identified by their larger use of swirls and arrows, the Bronx had “more hearts and cool characters” and Manhattan writers used the Philadelphia-born Broadway Elegance Style introduced to New York City by TOPCAT<sup>126</sup>.

“Graffiti artists are like modern day calligraphers. They can really twist the letters, make the letter form the image, meld image and text, until it’s just one thing. Graffiti has a lot to do with language and people taking back the language because the media has co-opted the language to such an extent that people don’t have their own language any more. They just have the media newspeak and that’s how they relate to each other, and themselves. It’s the way they think. Like Chomsky said, ‘If you don’t have a word for something in a culture, you have no way to express it.’ In some languages you can express deeper meanings than in English because you have the words. Graffiti artists are caught not being able to express their deep feelings, so they have to make their own.”—ESKAE<sup>79</sup>

### [ 2.3.2 ] SPEAKER’S CORNER

Bridging the gap between current technology and a traditional public self-expression, the 2001 project, “Speaker’s Corner” by Matt Locke and Jaap de Jonge provides a digital forum for broadcasting the public’s opinions, messages, and responses of the people in the town of Huddersfield, United Kingdom.<sup>80</sup> On the corner of an intersection, a one-line

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73 Refer to Appendix A.2.4 for image.

74 Refer to Appendix A.2.5 for image.

75 Refer to Appendix A.2.6 for image.

76 Joe Austin, p.122.

77 Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper, *Subway Art*, Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1984, p.70-71.

78 Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1990, p.211.

79 Chino/BYI, “Profiles: Michael Tracy”, *Stress*, Issue No. 13, 1998, p.54.

80 Refer to Appendix A.2.7 for project image.

LED screen wraps around the façade of a building attached to the frieze displaying scrolling red text across a 15 meter expanse. The appropriation of a standard advertising, transportation, and financial signage system for non-commercial, public use and gain proves effective here since the project's site does not compete with the commercial expression and monumental structures found in places such as Times Square. Messages are inputted through the project's Internet site, "www.speakerscorner.org.uk" or Short Message Service (SMS) capability found in mobile phones to the following telephone number (07870 679048). In addition, a telephone booth across the street is equipped with a technology for translating voice recognition to text.

The project concept originates from the historical practice of a speaker's corner that was and is still inherent within communities across the UK symbolizing free speech. It is a place for public speaking that is accessible to anyone who desires to partake in political criticism, public discussion and debate, and general articulations. Perhaps the most well known instance is in London's Hyde Park which dates back to 1872 when an Act of Parliament designated this area for public free speech. Speaking from a makeshift platform known as a soapbox, individuals or representatives of various organizations deliver their speeches to a lively crowd who are free to respond, make comments on the speech, or even heckle the speaker. Although the existence of this speaker's corner may not lead directly to the formation of community, it does offer the potential for interaction and connection between participants.

In sponsoring Speaker's Corner, the Media Centre organization prompts new discussion and moderates for language abuse. Censorship is exercised by excluding a list of 2000 words noted as swear words or variations that can be displayed. In addition, vocabulary from Urdu and Caribbean patois has been included to properly integrate and reflect Huddersfield's community. Provided by the news agency Ananova, the inclusion of externally generated content "is a way of helping people formulate what they have to say."<sup>81</sup> Specific groups of people inhabiting the intersection at different times of the day are targeted with related information; for example, commuters at the train station on weekday mornings and people waiting outside the post office for their pensions. Headlines appearing on the screen will invite users to send an SMS to get more information on their mobile device and eventually onto the screen itself. Other content will derive from artists such as Forced Entertainment, an experimental theatre group, in which their project will display questions and various SMS poetry competition with local schools in the region.<sup>82</sup>

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81 Sean Dodson, "Speak Your Mind," *The Guardian*, June 28m 2001, URL: [www.guardian.co.uk/internetnews/story/0,7369,513437,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/internetnews/story/0,7369,513437,00.html).

82 Sean Dodson, "Speak Your Mind," *The Guardian*, June 28m 2001, URL: [www.guardian.co.uk/internetnews/story/0,7369,513437,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/internetnews/story/0,7369,513437,00.html).

Thus, the Speaker's Corner project holds the intention to develop a network of public communication by promoting dialogue between community members. In establishing on location, mobile, and remote accessible points, users are provided tangible means to participate in this forum for public self-expression. Yet, in one sense, the medium of self-expression is less dynamic here than in the original oratory speaker's corner because the projection of free speech is through an anonymous inscription. Recipients cannot directly link a person's identity and physical appearance with the words being expressed. Also, the variations in expressiveness that occur in speechmaking such as the speaker's gestures, movement, and voice, are not captured here. All inputted messages are treated and displayed in the same visual manner intrinsic to the LED signage form. On the other hand, this project can provide a more accessible platform for less oratory, extroverted people to participate as it gives a shield to their privacy. Moreover, it delivers a safeguard for the "speaker" in having to be not as careful and hopefully more creative and emotional with her/his thought deliverance.

Speaker's Corner is reminiscent of the public intervention projects created by conceptual artist Jenny Holzer in her signature medium, the LED sign. Holzer desired to reclaim a part of "the public space" of urban signage that had been consumed relentlessly by corporate advertisers. She broadcasted personal expressions of identity and political consciousness such as "PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT", "PRIVATE PROPERTY CREATES CRIME", and "YOU MUST HAVE ONE GRAND PASSION" into places such as Times Square, New York City on the Spectracolor Board. In structuring a language to elicit and provoke public discourse, Holzer intended to reinvigorate the space of public signage with public sentiment.

Similarly, Speaker's Corner engages the public but with the voice of the public community or news and information that are specifically relevant to certain groups in the community depending on their ethnicity, associations, profession, time scheduling, and organizational membership. Rather than act as a single conduit for an individual, this project provides a medium for communication for the entire cross-section of Huddersfield and even the community beyond. Moreover, Speaker's Corner maps another layer of identity to this place on Northumberland Street in a project that was and is conceived for the public and can be designed by the public in its content. By creating an opportunity for individuals to broadcast to the public with the result of eliciting reactions and responses, a social network in a public space is achieved.

### [ 2.3.3 ] HELLO MR. PRESIDENT

In the 2001 project, “Hello Mr. President” by Swiss artist Johannes Gees, a public platform was installed to address the 3,200 world political and business leaders who attended the 2001 World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland from January 25-30, 2001.<sup>83</sup> Beginning on January 16, 2001, the public was invited to participate in the summit meeting by inputting their messages through the online site “www.hellomrpresident.com” or through SMS text messaging to the phone number (+41 78 640 60 00). A total of 7,200 messages from 81 countries were collected in the following languages of English, Italian, German, French, and Spanish. 2,500 messages were pre-selected with the intent to broadcast a wide range of political viewpoints excluding messages with racist or profane language. Messages were only accepted between a specific time period each day setting a parameter to ensure that interesting and meaningful thoughts were constructed, as Gees states, “I want people to think about what they are going to say, and not just sit at their computer and send something and then forget about it.”<sup>84</sup> During the WEF, each message was beamed by laser at a character size of 15 x 15 meters in an area of 250 x 15 meters upon the snowy slopes of the Bolgen Mountain located 400 meters outside the conference center. Amongst Gees’ favorite postings are “The silence of the dispossessed can be deafening storm” and “Bill Gates, if earth crashes, I only hit Ctrl+Alt+Del to reboot?”<sup>85</sup> WEF participants were encouraged to respond to projected messages immediately through their mobile phones. All messages beamed became part of the online archive along with a thread on the message board for online users to continue the dialogue. Also important, the beamed messages were broadcasted back to online users through a web cam allowing them to see the product of their effort.

Typical in the history of the WEF, each annual event attracts flocks of anti-globalization protestors voicing their dissent to the top-heavy policies and decision-making by the forum’s attendants. In the previous year, street clashes erupted as shops and cars were attacked in the town of Davos hosting the conference. The potential of violent outbreaks and acts had even deterred Americans from visiting this ski resort until the world meeting concluded. Working with local organizations and authorities outside of the WEF organization, Hello Mr. President created a new approach in providing the public with an opportunity to impact this world event in a “less antagonistic channel of communication between protestors and world leaders” by “demonstrating in remote mode.”<sup>86</sup> Thus, in creating its own access, “Hello Mr. President” welcomed interested individuals to participate in some form with the typically inaccessible leaders attending

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83 Refer to Appendix A.2.8 for project image.

84 Lisa Guernsey, Lisa Guernsey, “If Protestors Can’t Take to the Streets, They Can Go to the Mountain”, The New York Times, January 25, 2001, Section G: Page 4: Column 4: Circuits.

85 Anonymous, “Calling Mr. Big Wigs...”, URL: <http://www.adbusters.org/creativeresistance/35/2.html>

86 Lisa Guernsey, “If Protestors Can’t Take to the Streets, They Can Go to the Mountain”, The New York Times, January 25, 2001, Section G: Page 4: Column 4: Circuits.

the forum.

However, the project's shortfalls are also centered in the nature of the messages relayed and in the lack of response from online users and especially its direct recipient, the state and corporate leaders. Participants may be communicating under the illusion that their messages have vital import to these world leaders and that they have been effectively equipped with direct communication in speaking to the WEF delegates. Moreover, although the online site provides users with visual feedback of their message being beamed on the mountain, there is no evidence that the intended recipient whether it be Bill Gates or Yassir Arafat, received it. It seems very easy for the people in the forum to choose to ignore the activity outside, since after all, they are inside and removed at a good distance.

Yet, "Hello Mr. President's" motivation is not necessarily to achieve communication between the project's participants and the conference attendants, but to create the opportunity for the public to voice their opinions on conference topics within the environment of this event. The continual necessity of the local police to implement tear-gas grenades and water cannons in defense of potential violent confrontations with protestors has initiated this project's direction to take a remote approach, hence, a peaceful and non-confrontational exchange. Therefore, at an event where security is a prominent issue, and authorities spend \$10 million to protect the 2,000 participants attending the event, "Hello Mr. President" becomes a welcomed platform for public self-expression and perhaps more effective than an aggressive approach that may be immediately shutdown physically by conference security and mentally by WEF delegates. Moreover, it resolves the primary goal for the public to vocalize their opinions in regards to the WEF's global policy decision-making making secondary the need to create a sustainable dialogue with the delegates.

"Officially, demonstrators have been given permission to protest here. But hundreds of police officers, backed by 300 soldiers, blocked off streets to prevent the protestors from approaching the forum's venue..." –by Alan Cowell, "Clashes Begin Near Forum As Security Clamps Down"<sup>87</sup>

One of the project's strength is in engaging the local site as a platform for the entire electronically connected western world to transmit through to a highly gated and exclusive community of world leaders. Integrating itself well into the existing site, the message display takes advantage of the smooth, white surface of the snow-capped mountainside in utilizing the conference's surrounding natural landscape. Even as an indirect venue, the use of the laser beaming technology seems well-fit in attempting to seize the hard-to-grasp attention of a powerful CEO or statesman.

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<sup>87</sup> Alan Cowell, "Clashes Begin Near Forum as Security Clamps Down," [The New York Times](#), January 29, 2003, Section 1, p.24.

#### [ 2.3.4 ] CONCERTO IN BLACK AND BLUE

"I do my street art mainly to keep rooted in that "Who I Am." Because the only thing that's really going on is in the street; that's where something is really happening. It isn't happening in these galleries."  
–David Hammons, 1986<sup>88</sup>

Ironically, David Hammons' latest installation, "Concerto in Black and Blue" is not only located in the Ace Gallery in New York City, but the gallery itself becomes an essential component in experiencing the piece.<sup>89</sup> Empty spaces, linearly grouped to match the length of a city block are immersed in total darkness. Viewers are equipped with a small blue LED light that is encased in plastic the size of a thumbprint at the gallery entrance. With their beaming light source, the viewer enters into a deep, long, black hallway leading to a number of rooms from its path. Along the journey, the viewer may stumble upon other blue emissions demarcating the shadows and silhouettes of neighboring viewers as they make their way up and down the hall coming in and out of the spatial offshoots. The title of the installation delivers its first intended meaning as it highlights the interaction between the viewer(s) as they move through the extensive blackness of the gallery space traced through their play with the illuminating blue lights. Secondly, it underlines the need of tolerant and careful navigation between viewers to prevent the "black and blue" from bruising.<sup>90</sup>

The viewer's entry into this installation is the immediate instance of being engulfed by the surrounding blackness of the gallery space. The feeling is at once chilling and foreign due to the invisibility of the viewer's environment which is reinforced with the viewer's own invisibility to herself. Concurrently, the viewer senses an unexpected intimacy and heightened awareness in the presence of her body and her mind. Since her comprehension of her external environment has suddenly become limited, she can only depend on her interior consciousness and extending armatures. Next, the insertion of the blue light to one's encircled vicinity and vision offers both an internal relief and security and an external discovery and beauty. The continued exploration of the installation surfaces the understanding that there will be no object(s) to view as each room is confronted with only emptiness and each door is permanently unmovable. Thus, the artwork becomes the movement of the viewer in the gallery space alone or amongst others. It can easily become either a lonely, cavernous exploration or a muted, meditative, and decelerated rave-like experience. The rhythm of the blue lights turning on and off, oriented every which way disclosing the outlines of people and spaces is composed by the viewers. In fact, the artwork is in constant transformation contingent on the number, quality, and energy of its participants.

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<sup>88</sup> David Hammons, "From an Interview with David Hammons," URL: [www.modcult.brown.edu/people/cokes/Hammons.html](http://www.modcult.brown.edu/people/cokes/Hammons.html)

<sup>89</sup> Refer to Appendix A.2.9 for project image.

<sup>90</sup> Roberta Smith, "Transforming the Cube of a Gallery," [The New York Times](#), November 22, 2002.

Hammons' artwork traditionally draws on various motives in delivering messages to the viewing public. He is well known in the art world for being very conscious and specific in his decisions of where he shows and, "what and when he shows. Because the people aren't really looking at art, they're looking at each other and each other's clothes and each other's haircuts."<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, Hammons' provides an environment in which he eliminates his discomfort with the superficial ogling people partake in public spaces or in viewing art. In fact, the viewers cannot even look at art in this installation nor is there any "art" to be viewed. Instead, the viewers become the "art" in determining its visual expressiveness. Moreover, Hammons' history of supporting artwork to be presented on the street rather than in the galleries, "because the art becomes just one of the objects that's in the path of your everyday existence. It's what you move through, and it doesn't have any seniority over anything else,"<sup>92</sup> is partially abandoned in "Concerto in Black and Blue." However, what is unique in this gallery experience is the appropriation of an accessible, universal, and everyday experience, pedestrian navigation, within the unfamiliar terrain of the Ace Gallery. In addition, as all the spaces are treated equally, the journey becomes exactly that, rather than a journey with a destination. Thus, the viewers are often in constant meandering mode within this space without any hierarchy or goals in their motivations and subsequent progressions.

As a black artist, Hammons often addresses the black experience in the United States, confronting the issues of power, economy, accessibility, traditions, and perspectives within this overall context. He is concerned with negotiating a difficult balance between the established language and structure of the western art world and his assemblage of self-representation drawn from a personal and cultural experience conveyed in an altogether different system of language, aesthetics, and meanings. There is a motivation for him to visualize and articulate his own identity, an identity that is heavily determined and shaped by race and cultural experience. Being a "minority" and existing non-inclusively in a dominant "majority" society enforces Hammons' need to issue an interpretation of who he is, who he is representing, and even to whom he wants to speak. In "Concerto in Black and Blue," the blue light in hand provides the tool for the viewer as she produces imprints of silhouettes, shadows, and momentary glimpses of the installation's bare components of space and viewers, not to mention, even herself. Furthermore, Hammons uses the encompassing invisibility of this installation as reference to the black experience in the United States. Impossible to ignore or to look away, the viewer is finally confronted face to face with the blackness in the room. Eventually, she/he adjusts to the spatial darkness, unexpected displacement, and limited visibility. Perhaps, Hammons is echoing the everyday experience of how he and black people in general are seen or not seen.

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<sup>91</sup> David Hammons, "From an Interview with David Hammons," URL: [www.modcult.brown.edu/people/cokes/Hammons.html](http://www.modcult.brown.edu/people/cokes/Hammons.html)

<sup>92</sup> David Hammons, "From an Interview with David Hammons," URL: [www.modcult.brown.edu/people/cokes/Hammons.html](http://www.modcult.brown.edu/people/cokes/Hammons.html)

Hammons' installation refers to Ralph Ellison's novel, "The Invisible Man," in which the hero, a black man, is rendered invisible to his surroundings giving him no identity.<sup>93</sup> Ellison's story is the search for the invisible man's identity and his feeling of imprisonment due to the lack or denial of an identity. In "Concerto in Black and Blue", visibility is equated with identity. Since, the viewer is not visible, she loses her identity within the space of the project site, the one she has acquired and is most familiar with. Moreover, she is unable to construct a sense of an identity based on identifying with a group of like and unlike people considering nobody can be seen. By creating a playing field that erases all existing identities from entering the installation environment, and consequently, a place in which no one belongs to since it does not identify with anyone, Hammons builds a common identity. Through the flashing blue lights outlining the meandering shadows and silhouettes of others, the viewers have become identified solely based on their physical presence rather than on conventional means of age, sex, race, social status, profession, etc. The irony continues as Hammons has been vocally critical of gallery spaces being full of an art audience who is "the worst audience in the world" due to their abundant education, eagerness to criticize, and inability to have fun.<sup>94</sup> Thus, in this installation, Hammons evens out the audience by redefining them equally on his terms and not theirs and giving them a free place to "play".

David Hammons' piece, "Concerto in Black and Blue", is an installation that on the most fundamental level works to incorporate its viewers in participating in an experience that is both personal, collective, and beautiful. Yet, this installation also evolves to confront the issue of the black experience through the use of an index of physical space. Moreover, Hammons recreates an environment in which the participants become equal in their externally acquired masks and must mutually interact in order to create a shared experience. As the narrator of The Invisible Man writes in the prologue, since he is invisible, he writes down his life so he can have evidence that he actually exists, writing is an exercise in his affirmation. Likewise, the viewers' existence within Hammons' installation is reaffirmed with the dancing blue lights, otherwise, they, too, are invisible.

#### **[ 2.4 ] SUMMARY**

By developing an understanding of urban public space through its relationship with the people who inhabit it, the process of place-making will emerge. Concentrating on the issues of human perception, behavior, and activity within a public space will inform the motivation and approach of this thesis project, <TAG> Scripting Presence. This project will introduce the possibility of interaction amongst its users and give them the ability to affect their physical surroundings

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<sup>93</sup> Roberta Smith, "Transforming the Cube of a Gallery," The New York Times, November 22, 2002.

<sup>94</sup> Steve Cannon, David Hammons: Rousing the Rubble, The Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S. 1 Museum and the MIT Press, New York City, 1991, p.28.

through the communication and contribution of aspects of their identity. In engaging the users to participate actively in her/his public space, the user is committed to not only a personal or communal experience with her/his environment, but also to the development of a memory of this experience that is attached to a location. Thus, a space then reemerges as a place in the user's mind.

With a cultural past steeped in showmanship, advertising, and pedestrian traffic, Times Square, NYC has always benefited and been characterized by its commercial expression. Its recent redevelopment plan, *42nd Street Now!*, exploited this inherent feature through its cosmetic reapplication of the area's existing buildings, signage, and streets returning the district to either its historic condition or amplifying its existing condition. Times Square's facelift agreed with a program to lure commercial and corporate investors to establish their presence and business. Utilizing consumer culture as the area's main draw proved a successful plan as it coincided with the ubiquitous influence of shopping in our urban and national cultures. Although significant in drawing 27 million visitors annually to Times Square, this consumerism activity deters people from independently participating in their environment as it positions them in the role of passive recipients. Thus, the popular spectatorship inherent in any lively public space is shifted here as people are neither looking at people, but at the spectacle of promotional displays with the effect to brand, sell, or influence the spectator.

"The city used to be something that you get for free. It's been a public space, and it enables the citizens to assemble in a kind of collective sense, but basically through the process, effects of the market economy and through the withdrawal public sector and the kind of complimentary invasion of the private sector, which is expressed through shopping, the nature of the city has changed from something that is fundamentally free, to something that you have to pay for, so that even in educational establishments, even in religious establishments and certainly in cultural establishments there is always this kind of commercial presence...Each different sphere has this pressure to buy."—Rem Koolhaas<sup>95</sup>

While Times Square's previous image as "vice city" was not beneficial for everyone, it held meaning to the people who frequented, avoided, or passed quickly through the area. Conversely, the present image of Times Square lacks this emotional response as the public is not fully involved in creating its identity, structure, and meaning. Public participation can be simply encouraged by providing seating within the site. Thus, it locates people at the level of its chaotic street life in direct view of other people. In comparison to its "vice city" phase, the present Times Square is in lack of this human interactive activity. Whether it was advantageous or disadvantageous before it was still a constant in one's experience within the environment.

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<sup>95</sup> Rem Koolhaas, "How We Live: Shopping", Online NewsHour, Interview by Ray Suarez, June 25, 2002, <[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/jan-june02/koolhaas\\_transcript.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/jan-june02/koolhaas_transcript.html)>

In response to the current condition of Times Square, this thesis project is interested in reinforcing its sense of place as a pedestrian enclave in creating a street-level activity drawing participation from its inhabitants in experiencing their public space. The memories and image construction of a place that we harbor is partially sculpted from our individual and collaborative experience within it. Although the pedestrian is engaged by the place, it is primarily as a spectator to the ever streaming, scrolling digital display. However, the need for pedestrian-focused interaction has been noted with new developments such as the widening of sidewalks to the winning design of the *tkts booth* competition featuring a grand staircase upon the roof that would provide visitors a view of the public activity in Times Square. Moreover, the possibility of a “Broadway Walk of Fame” has been in discussion along with the re-examination of the potential for a pedestrian mall.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, <TAG>’s intent is to create an opportunity for the individual to partake in the public culture and form of Times Square while also providing possibilities for interaction.

Finally, the use of the graffiti culture as a metaphor shaped <TAG>’s language and positioned its core ideas of ownership, identity, and presence in a public context. Also important is graffiti’s representation of text as a graphic. The aesthetic quality of a tag imparts content that difficult to be expressed in a word, character, or phrase. Speaker’s Corner significance was its focus on community and access. Its ability to provide three modes of entry to engage online, remote, in site, mobile, and non-technical participants welcomes a wider audience. In addition, as a public forum for the town of Huddersfield, this project specifically generated content to speak to its diverse community members. Thus, a sense of belonging, possession, and responsibility can evolve when the inhabitants grow attached to its site. Hello Mr. President’s strength lied in its consideration of the historical nature of the WEF event with finding a clear channel for the public to vocalize their sentiments. The project developed a remote access and passive approach to transmit the public’s messages to the heavily secured WEF attendants. Hello Mr. President takes full advantage of the natural topography in Davos unmasking the snowy mountainside as a compelling display surface. In all of these projects, the message content is influenced by the limitations of technology, form, and aesthetics. The nature of their content is affected by the restraints placed on its length, input time, and user movement. As a result, they range from glib remarks to impacting statements in their brevity. Lastly, Concerto in Black and Blue interprets inscription has non-textual and completely physically gestural. This project’s emphasis on movement as the underlying structure of its aesthetic and form are effective and refreshing. The experience can be performed either individually or communally, each with its own character. Reiterating graffiti’s use of the tag as a public alias, Concerto in Black and Blue evens the playing field in the Ace Gallery as its participants/viewers are here to recreate a new public identity.

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96 Lynne Sagalyn, p. 489.

### [ 3 ] DESIGN + IMPLEMENTATION

<TAG> Scripting Presence will be implemented using a mobile phone's SMS messaging capability through which users will interact with each other and the node, a designated physical place. The node will be comprised of a floor projection from a Macromedia Flash MX interface and located in a public area receiving plenty of pedestrian traffic.

#### [ 3.1 ] PROTOTYPE v.0.1 ONLINE COMPONENT + SIMULATED IN SITE INTERACTION

In the project's first prototype, the overall structure of the project and the interactive online component were developed. Sited in Times Square, NYC, the project consists of a system of multiple nodes covering the area between 42nd Street and 47th Street along the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue.<sup>97</sup> Drawing from its site, these nodes were located on the sidewalks in high profile areas; for example, in front of the Nasdaq MarketSite, Toys 'R Us, and the tkts Booth, and referenced as such. Each node composed of an LED screen embedded within a sidewalk square that measured approximately 4 feet in width by 3 feet in height and 5 inches in depth.<sup>98</sup> This form of display was chosen to cohere with the site's existing architectural language. Furthermore, the LED display exudes strong visibility at all times of the day and at different angles of view making it a robust screen source. It can also produce a luminous red glow that would emanate from the sidewalk providing another visual sign for the passing pedestrian. An LCD screen was discussed, but this technology proved less reliable in its limited viewing angles and was less industrial than the LED screen built to withstand outdoor conditions.

The choice of the LED screen on the ground plane was determined by several factors. The first reason was that it would create a momentary stopping point along the path of the pedestrian's navigation in Times Square upon the city sidewalk. It is a place that one stumbles upon as they visit Virgin Megastore, pass by Sephora, or pause at the corner of Reuters waiting for the light to change to cross the street. Secondly, the vertical planes in Times Square are inundated with electrical signage and billboards. With each new signage becoming even more extravagant than the last, the node screen would have difficulty in competing for the user's attention. Moreover, the ground plane has been underutilized as a surface for communication. Thus, any signage intervention would be well noticed here. Thirdly, by placing the screen on the ground, the user's experience is at once personal and also public. The amount of people that can view the sidewalk-applied screen at one time is more limiting than if it was placed vertically above their heads. Thus, creating a smaller group of participants in one instance with a greater chance in spontaneous interaction amongst them. Fourthly,

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<sup>97</sup> Refer to Appendix A.3.1 for project image.

<sup>98</sup> Refer to Appendix A.3.2 for project image.

after researching the potential for a Broadway Stars Walk of Fame to be implemented in Times Square, it gave <TAG> more impetus to create a public Walk of Fame. After all, Times Square is as much defined by pedestrian density and culture as it is by its theater density and culture. Finally, this project was interested in allowing the public to reclaim ownership of their public spaces through inscription. The feeling of occupied space is often translated through the ground that we stand on. By affecting that ground plane, it transmits to us that we have control of that space and momentary possession. Thus, in juxtaposing each node with a commercial or corporate organization building structure, <TAG> directs its participants to modify the commercial landmarks with their own identity and presence.

One of the goals of <TAG> is to engage the participant to express a personal message in a public space. In referencing photographer Gillian Wearing's work, "Signs that say what you want them to say and not what someone else wants you to say"<sup>99</sup>, she provided a strong contrast between a person's private thoughts and her/his public physical appearance. The viewer's first impression of the subjects was often altered after reading their instant, internal message scrawled on a white board that they held in front as they took their portrait. However, in general, people prefer to remain anonymous or to shield their privacy from others while in public space. Whereas, Wearing approached and asked her subjects for their personal disclosure, <TAG> would be relying on its participants' own initiative. Therefore, a challenge in this project was to direct the individual in communicating a self-expression beyond stating her/his name and that "she/he was there." The goal was to not control the outcome of the message, but to influence its quality and quantity of expressed information.

Thus, a system of questions was devised to elicit stronger responses from the users. In order to access the node to claim it, a personal question had to be answered. There were four levels of questions based on the types of responses. The first level was a question that could be responded with a Yes/No. The second level question addressed the individual's preference in a one-word answer. The third level was a question that requires an explanation to a response. The fourth level question addressed the individual's desires/needs. Each node would have its own questions determined by the theme of the node. For instance, the MTV node represented the theme of entertainment and would have questions drawing from the language of the MTV/entertainment culture. Likewise, the Nasdaq node would have questions using terminology from its specific theme of financial trading, but it would be redirected as a personal inquiry to the individual. Each participant's responses to these access questions were collected online at the administrative site allowing for online users to gain further knowledge of their fellow participants. Users were able to leave messages for each other or expand their own user file.

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<sup>99</sup> Refer to Appendix A.2.1 for project image.

After answering a level one question and successfully displaying her/his message, the individual would have a certain amount of time, fifteen minutes, before her/his claim of this node expired. In order to preserve the claim for an additional time period, the individual must answer a question from the next level to renew her/his message for another fifteen minutes, and so on. Therefore, the longest duration a user could claim a node at one time would be an hour. If a second user came across a node that had been claimed, she/he had the option of challenging the current node owner and taking possession of the node. If the owner was challenged three times within her/his ownership period, she/he would lose the node possession to the third challenger. This feature was developed with the idea of a mob mentality in which a group of people could overtake one individual.

The final reward in claiming all the nodes in Times Square was the universal display of the individual's inscription simultaneously signifying her/his triumph. Meanwhile, the in site activities were mapped online at a corresponding virtual site.<sup>100</sup> For instance, if the WWF (World Wide Federation) node was claimed, the node would light up on the Times Square map at the <TAG> online site. Moreover, users online could discover who claimed the node, the displayed message, the access questions and responses, the challengers, the user's playing history, and the nodal popularity and history. The virtual site was created to provide an overview to all the nodes and <TAG> activities within Times Square. It was also a sedentary place for reflection and further message posting or community connection with other participants.

For this prototype, the focus was spent on building the virtual online component with Flash MX, PHP, and MySQL database. This experiment allowed me to gain knowledge in database building together with connecting it to a visual interface. The in-site components of the mobile phone and LED screen were prototyped in Flash MX simulating the in site activities.<sup>101</sup> The formal critique of this prototype seemed mostly focused on the conceptual structure of the project, such as the idea of gaining ownership of public space. Moreover, despite the project's intention to separate itself from corporate identity, the issue was brought up that the nodes would appear to be an extension of the corporate organization due to their immediate location in front of their buildings. In addition, the issue of how this project was any different than the inundation of signage in Times Square was raised. Questions were asked on the placement of the LED screen on the sidewalk rather than on a vertical plane. The argument was made that people walk looking forward and not looking down. Also, some critics felt that there was a disconnection between the user and her/his mobile phone input

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<sup>100</sup> Refer to Appendix A.3.4 for project image.

<sup>101</sup> Refer to Appendix A.3.3 for project image.

device and the LED screen output. Lastly, there was a unanimous agreement on the access questions being too complicated for a user and, perhaps, operating as a gate to this public forum.

My final assessment for this prototype was that the language being used to convey the interaction was impeding the project's understanding by its users. It was suggested that a generative language be developed that could more simply convey the ideas of the project while also engaging its users. There was a strong need to give the project a personality within the structure that was created, perhaps, by drawing a closer association with graffiti. Another idea was to rely less on the content of the message and to treat the text more as a graphic such as in the graffiti medium. Also, the content generating questions were too complicated creating a hindrance to the user's access and the project's intended energy and movement. I concluded that my next step was to concentrate solely on the in site activities between the users and delegate the administrative site as a supporting component. Thus, I needed to simplify and refine my user interaction.

### [ 3.2 ] **PROTOTYPE v.0.2** PLAYER INTERACTION WITH MOBILE PHONE + ONE NODE

Prototype v.0.2 began with a new direction in framing this thesis in which the project would undergo a two-fold process. In restructuring the project goals, the initial direction taken for this thesis project would be addressed as its proposal version sited. This approach would be an exercise in the procedure of grant writing to public art organizations for funding. Moreover, it would work inform my thesis project's theory and background and the user interaction development. It was important to theoretically site my project in Times Square, NYC addressing the issues occurring in such a diverse and vibrant public space. Its public culture and pedestrian life also offered a setting for potentially interesting interactions to be developed for <TAG>.

However, the immediate project goal was to take form in the exhibition version of this thesis. <TAG>'s site would be reconsidered and located within the Parsons School of Design Arnold and Sheila Aronson Galleries for the annual MFA in Design and Technology Thesis Show occurring from May 28, 2003 to June 3, 2003.<sup>102</sup> This version would aim to build three nodes within and around the perimeters of the gallery spaces including its adjoining public sidewalk. It was important to communicate the physicality emphasized in this project by encouraging users to move from one node to the next to the next. In addition, there was a strong correlation between Times Square's natural chaos and congestion and a

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<sup>102</sup> Refer to Appendix A.3.5 for project image.

gallery show's first day opening. Thus, the exhibition show may prove to be an interesting testing environment for <TAG> in which users with SMS messaging experience would be able to participate.

In reexamining the display interface, the possibility of using an LCD screen returned due to its versatile display and thinness in structural depth. Yet, it was also costly, and too delicate to place on a ground plane where people may be walking on top of it. Although there would be ways to protectively coat the screen such as an industrial resin, there were other issues such as its legibility at different viewing angles. Another idea was to use a wall-mounted plasma screen and/or take advantage of the plasma screens located in each lobby at The New School University campus and create them into nodes for a time period during the thesis show. Unfortunately, these were only speculations and none of the equipment could be guaranteed. Moreover, it was still important for this project to place the node on the ground in designating that area as a place for the project and the user to occupy. Therefore, the node would be reconfigured and consist of a floor projection through a Flash MX interface.<sup>103</sup> In utilizing this software, it allowed each node to take on a more distinct presence in its aesthetics. Each message could be displayed in different fonts, colors, and sizes and include animating text.

Next, the simplification process for the project interaction was undertaken. Foremost, the access questions were abandoned and also the need for the project to promote a certain kind of message board activity. Secondly, the most interesting aspect of the last iteration was the ability for one user to challenge another user in their claim. However, by overtaking the node owner through the quantity of challenges placed was unsatisfying to the idea of a "challenge". A challenge is "a test of one's abilities or resources in a demanding but stimulating undertaking"<sup>104</sup> as defined by The American Heritage Dictionary, Fourth Edition. In short, something needed to happen; the node owner and the challenger need to be engaged in a confrontation. In developing an interaction that would be innate to the project's technology usage of SMS messaging and imply a competitiveness and degree of difficulty, the TXT BATTLE emerged. Along with this concept, the generative language the project needed followed in drawing a closer parallel to the cultural language of graffiti. When a player challenges the Tagger (formerly known as the "node owner") of her/his "Tag" (previously called a "claim"), the TXT BATTLE is introduced. If the Tagger rises to the defense of her/his tag, both players will enter a TXT BATTLE in which a five-character combination would be sent to both players, i.e. "%7tH1". The first player to text back the combination most accurately will win the battle and the tag. This interactive development incorporates the differences

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<sup>103</sup> Refer to Appendix A.3.6 for project image.

<sup>104</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA, 2000.

found between every mobile phone's text messaging interface and every user's ability in navigating through that interface. Moreover, it also addresses the issue of the lack of text messaging usage in American culture as compared to European and Asian countries where text messaging is prevalent and can be even more popular in usage than telephone calls. Hence, the TXT BATTLE will hopefully introduce and enforce the user to learn how to text message becoming a stronger player at <TAG>.

The technical research in this prototype was challenging. Originally, <TAG>'s implementation was to follow the strategy outlined by Igor Pusenjak in his collaboration studio, "SMS Pop Sustainability" at Parsons School of Design. SMS messages would be sent through each phone's email address and collected to an email address that would then be stored in a database. However, the games developed in this studio were never implemented. Also, upon further investigation, it would be overly difficult and cumbersome for users to text messages to an email address. Therefore, other strategies were investigated that would offer a smoother connection between the user and access to the node. For instance, it would be much easier for the user to text a telephone number that is directly connected to the node than a lengthy email address. Some options researched were SMS auto-forwarding, ICQ, Simplewire Developer Kit (SDK), and setting up a SMS server. T-Mobile service provided auto-forwarding of SMS messages received the mobile phone to be copied to an email address but only if they were sent from an email address. Although ICQ software offered SMS features, they were not available in the United States at the time. Many of the SMS software found online such as SDK were only able to send SMS and not receive. Lastly, the ultimate solution would be to set up a SMS server and operate <TAG> through this. But, technically and financially it would be very difficult at this stage in this thesis project.

A possibility that often reentered the conversation for technical implementation was using WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) instead of SMS as it relied less on the user's effort to input text. It also allowed data to be transferred more easily to a database through predetermined selections through which the user could scroll. However, it was important for <TAG> to position the project to reach the largest demographic. The mobile phone is currently one of the most popular personal technology devices presenting immediate access to people and information. Although text messaging may not be an intuitive activity in the American culture, more people have the SMS messaging capability on their mobile phone than WAP. In addition, SMS could offer a stronger two-way communication whereas WAP emphasizes a one-way communication.

However, the idea of collecting the SMS messages into an email address was advantageous to <TAG> because of its technical simplicity. Thus, an alternative was eventually found in using UPOC's (www.upoc.com) service as a conduit for players to send their SMS messages that would also be copied to an email address identified by each sender's handle name. Then, a PHP script would check for new emails sent to the "node" which was the group number created at UPOC. Specific actions were taken dependent on the message content read by the PHP script. Utilizing two predetermined players, the following scenarios were implemented, tagging the node, challenging the tagger, entering the text battle, and awarding the winner. One difficult issue that emerged was a necessary online log in step to the www.upoc.com site in order to participate in <TAG>. After accessing UPOC, users would receive a validation code to verify their membership and then sign up for the created <TAG> group. One advantage to this addition is that the players could also log into <TAG> with their name, telephone number, and carrier service. Nevertheless, it is an impediment to the project idea if users must first go to a computer station to enter the game rather than immediately participate as they come across a tagged node along their path. After a conversation with UPOC's Vice-President of Product Development, Harris Wulfson, the possibility of beta testing a new text-messaging log in feature launching May 1, 2003 arose. This opportunity would negate the need for an online log in site to www.upoc.com, and also, to <TAG>.

While progressing with Prototype v.0.2, the details of the user interaction scenarios needed to be developed. For instance, trigger texts had to be defined to initiate the activities of tagging, challenging, and battling. Moreover, the importance in creating responses from <TAG> to the players was discovered. As SMS messaging operates virtually and messages are sent to telephone number without physical confirmation of reception, feedback to the players was imperative. Therefore, <TAG>'s SMS responses would provide visual and audio verification for receipt of the players' input while communicating to them that they are actively participating within the project. In devising the message content for the responses another opportunity to imbue <TAG> with a personality materialized. In keeping with the spirit and essence of a "battle" where competitors would instigate each other through braggadocio and condescension, trash talking elements were incorporated into the message responses. The trash talking would be coming directly from <TAG> to impel players to participate, to incite competition, and to acknowledge a player's strength or weakness in skill or effort.

### **[ 3.3 ] PROTOTYPE v.0.3 MOBILE INTERACTION TECHNICAL IMPLEMENTATION**

Prototype v.0.3 maintained much of the development progressed in the previous prototype, but was primarily concentrating on finding a better technical implementation for the project. The discovery of the beta software SMS Maker allowed a mobile phone with a GSM modem to be directly connected to a PC through either a serial data cable or

infrared port. SMS messages could be sent or received through the phone and archived on the PC hard drive. Moreover, SMS Maker V.0.8 allowed for job control in which dependent on the content of the messages received a job could be activated such as, querying to a database, forwarding the message, and executing an application. SMS Maker was well integrated with Microsoft applications such as Access, Visual Basic, and ASP allowing for these programs to control SMS Maker's functionality. In pursuing this technical approach, it allowed a node to be associated directly with a phone number for the user to access. Also, the software was able to extract the phone number from the player that could be used to identify who sent which message.

However, as this software is currently undergoing beta testing before its commercial release in June 2003, it was not seamless in its operation. Initially, the most challenging issue was finding the most capable mobile phone to connect with the software. After multiple trials with an Ericsson 380 and T28 on the Windows 98 and NT platform, the connection still could not be made in receiving the mobile phone's SMS messages. Connection tests were also made with a Nokia 3390, but with no success. Although a serial data cable was attained, this Nokia model has its own proprietary driver to communicate from the phone to the PC that could not be acquired. Therefore, the virtual com port could not be installed onto the PC for this phone to work with SMS Maker. Finally, after receiving a loaner phone, 6310i, from Nokia's Developer's program, a connection was made with SMS Maker in which sending and receiving SMS messages was achieved.

Next, the software's functionality was tested in how well it could be integrated with <TAG>'s implementation. The most useful feature was the software's ability to insert message content to a database. But, it was important to minimize the amount of characters the players would have to input to decrease their effort. Thus, succinct input texts were created for the players to communicate clearly with <TAG>. Based on the message's trigger text, data variables could be gathered along with the sender's phone number and stored. Unfortunately, the ability to send pre-composed responses to players with changing variables based on their incoming text could not be implemented through SMS Maker at this time. However, if knowledge of ASP or Visual Basic (Windows Scripting Host) was attained then SMS messages could be composed and sent through SMS Maker and the mobile phone. This prototype implementation would have to rely on PHP both to query databases and to send response messages to the players' mobile phones through their phone's email address. The disadvantages of this decision is that each mobile phone's service carrier information would be needed and the response messages could not be directly replied to by the player since it is being sent from a server and not a phone number.

Yet, the node interface could be increasingly utilized to convey instructions for players to participate. The interface could also include the current status of activities, such as if a battle was in process or its outcome. Most importantly, the tag needed to be displayed interestingly. Experiments with animating text need to be pursued along with a seamless and consistent connection between Flash MX and PHP as specific data variables would be changing. In addition, each node needed a branding identity to indicate its location within the site. The size of the projection would need to be determined for readability and a color palette selected for high contrast visuals. Testing of projection surfaces need to be made on a concrete sidewalk or a paper covered floor.

#### **[ 3.4 ] INSTALLATION**

To be determined.

#### **[ 3.5 ] FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

For the next prototype, the concentration will be on visual studies of type and design in developing a node interface. Some factors to consider are the location of the interface and the surface material of the display. Since the node is positioned in a public space, the interface design must be able to communicate clearly and effectively to moving people in an outdoor setting. Furthermore, the shade, texture, and cleanliness of a sidewalk square will determine the interface's scale, color palette, and delivery. For subsequent interaction development, players may have the option to modify each other's tag when they overtake the node. Also, in addressing the latency factor of SMS messaging and <TAG>'s technical system, a parallel activity would be implemented. An initial idea called, "tracking," was discussed in which another opportunity to overtake the TAGGER would be presented. Any active player who physically finds the player through a trail of clues within the site would win the TAG. There would be a face-to-face exchange in which the TAGGER would secede her/his title to the TRACKER. Another development to enrich the project would be to incorporate player statistics into the game, such as logging each person's skill set in tagging, battling, challenging, etc. Character titles would be further created to reflect these skill and action dependent characteristics. Thus, when a player is engaged in or returns to <TAG>, she/he could be addressed by her/his earned title. Finally, the online site could better reflect the game-spirit of <TAG> in an interface redesign that would incorporate player statistics and the site mapping visualization.

For a future technical direction, the ultimate solution for <TAG> would be to establish an SMS gateway. The gateway would enable text messages to be sent and received more efficiently over GSM (Global System for Mobile

Communications) networks. Moreover, it is a two-way device that mediates between a mobile phone and an HTTP server. The gateway could also provide additional information about the mobile device such as the subscriber's number, and even location information. A possible resource is Kannel ([www.kannel.org](http://www.kannel.org)), an open source WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) gateway that can be used as an SMS gateway.

## **[ 4 ] EVALUATION + CONCLUSION**

### **[ 4.1 ] GOALS**

The main goal for <TAG> Scripting Presence was to create an experience in which its users would connect to a site and each other through their personal contributions. The initial vision was to engage the pedestrian along her/his path to pause in a momentary activity. It was important that the project could exist as an individual experience as well as a communal experience. Thereby, setting no minimum or maximum amount of participants for "something to happen". In choosing to be accessible to many users within a public space environment, the mobile phone and its text messaging capability was employed as the project's input and output components. This also allowed for users to roam and to encourage their movement within a site. In addition, <TAG> intended to address the communication of one's identity in public space specifically through the act of self-expression. In receiving these efforts to an existing structure, a network would form between fellow participants as they connect and participate. Finally, through creating an experience attached to a site, it would evolve as a place of personal significance in the memory of its users.

#### **[ 4.1.1 ] SUCCESSES**

The success in this thesis project lies in its ability to connect one user to another (most likely strangers) within a public setting. Through the disguise of a battle, individuals unfamiliar and perhaps, unseen, to each other interact in pursuit of a goal, tagging the node. By placing the node in the most public spaces of all, the city sidewalk, this project intercepts the user's everyday path. Thus, the initial vision of this project has been reached. The generative language developed has helped to communicate the idea, spirit, and activity of the project. The personality of <TAG> is conveyed to its users through appropriating elements derived from graffiti culture, skill contests, and competition. Likewise, it draws from the culture of New York City where aggression, confrontation, stimulation, and individuality thrive. Therefore, as an activity located in Times Square, <TAG>'s interactive development is reflective of its site and introduces tourists to its urban cultural experience. Lastly, this project can exist with one or more user along with one or more node. Thus, it decreases its dependence on the number of participants or components within its system.

In addition, the discovery of the application, SMS Maker, along with the process of working with its developer, Oliver Witte, through beta testing, technical debugging, and software development has been valuable. First, it has allowed for a simpler, and more economic technical solution towards implementing this project. Secondly, it has provided technical support and opportunities for customization in my project realization. The difficulties in finding simple technical solutions and grappling with the lack of usability and popularity of text messaging in the United States were strong concerns. Yet, the recent commercial campaigns from T-Mobile and AT&T promoting text messaging usage have been advantageous along with the television show, "American Idol", in which audience participation is received through text messaging their votes. Therefore, the decision to pursue this project using SMS messaging and mobile technology has at last been favorable.

#### **[4.1.2] FAILURES**

The failures in this thesis project exist within the output of the individual's message in its content and form. From the start of this process, the content of the message had been an issue, especially, since people are often reticent in public settings. Moreover, the challenge of text messaging on one's mobile phone is cumbersome and unwieldy to use. The more one contributes the more exertion one puts forth. In Prototype v.0.1, an attempt was made to guide the users' content in eliciting a more personal response that ultimately proved unsuccessful. Therefore, in the subsequent prototypes, the content was neither generated nor directed in an effort to preserve an open forum for the participants. Furthermore, in keeping with the culture of graffiti and the language of text messaging, I was interested in how the participants would evolve the text messaging language form in this project. For example, would they incorporate or invent slang, acronyms, or appropriate words? Yet, in relieving some of the pressure of the messages being the focal point for the user's motivation in <TAG>, the interaction between the users was strengthened to become the core of the project. Thus, the impetus for the user to interact with this project would be not only to tag the node, but to also battle the tagger.

In addition, the form of the message output and the interface of the node are lacking in development. In changing the node display from an LED screen to a projection onto the sidewalk, it became less dynamic to potential users. Hence, it was important to design the interface for the node to entice people to interact with good color and font choices along with graphic and text animation. Another intention was to treat the text displayed as a graphic giving the message a visual aesthetic. Next, the network interaction between multiple nodes was not well developed since the focus in the prototypes was on the construction of one node. This hinders the goal of an individual experiencing a site through an

interactive journey as she/he does not move from one node to the next. Lastly, the intent to increase the user motivation to engage with this project through witnessing the collaborative efforts of others was not thoroughly implemented.

#### [ 4.2 ]    **USER TESTING**

To be conducted.

##### [ 4.2.1 ]    **RESULTS + ANALYSIS**

To be conducted.

##### [ 4.2.2 ]    **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

To be conducted.

#### [ 4.3 ]    **CONCLUSION**

As we move about the city, spatial relations are built through the perception of what we see, hear, touch, and smell and in how we interact with each other. The speed of movement, the goal of escape, the passivity of interactions amongst strangers, and “a divide between inner, subjective experience and outer, physical life”<sup>105</sup> have reduced our contact with the urban fabric and widened the gaps and fragmentations between individuals. However, as much as technology, such as the personal computer and mobile phones, is blamed for the declining interaction and activity amongst people in public spaces, a shift has occurred with the rising implementation of wireless access in urban nodes found on city blocks, parks, and coffee shops. The objective is to “create new connections between people, instead of isolating them”<sup>106</sup> within the arena of public space. The possibilities of providing a new medium of interaction in the urban environment could support community growth and networks.

“People assume that a flock of birds or school of fish must necessarily have a leader, when the group’s behavior is actually determined by a far more complex evolutionary process largely determined by the many interactions of individual neighbors over time.”—Anthony Townsend<sup>107</sup>

Reappointing the individual as the entry of intervention for mobile technology may strengthen the individual’s position in place-making within her/his physical environment. Activities normally bound to internal, private locations are being carried out in external public spaces remapping the activities and character originally associated with a particular place. In fact, mobile technology reinforces the notion of the urban home extending its boundaries to its “outside”, and recreating the

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105 Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, Faber & Faber, London, 1993.

106 Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs*, Perseus Publishing, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002, p. 140.

107 Anthony Townsend, “Life in the Real-Time City: Mobile Telephones and Urban Metabolism”, *Journal of Urban Technology*, (7) 2:85-104, 2000, p. 13.

“outside” as a personalized space. Concurrently, mobile devices improve the individual’s ability to micromanage “space as a result of the micromanagement of time and the always-accessible individual.”<sup>108</sup> Thus, the individual determines a flexible function and meaning of her/his public spaces.

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<sup>108</sup> Anthony Townsend, p. 15.

[ **APPENDIX A** ] IMAGES







## **[ APPENDIX B ] TECHNICAL**

### **[ B.1 ] PROTOTYPE v.0.1 TECHNICAL FLOW DIAGRAM**

Work in progress.

### **[ B.2 ] PROTOTYPE v.0.2 TECHNICAL FLOW DIAGRAM**

Work in progress.

### **[ B.3 ] SMS MAKER**

Work in progress.

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