

# DESIGN TRUST FOR PUBLIC SPACE

Design Trust Council Event

**Quasi-Public: A Conversation between Paul Goldberger and Danny Meyer**

February 26, 2008 at the New Museum

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DEBORAH MARTON: I can hardly follow that, because what else is there to say about this city? But, as Deborah said, I'm Deborah Marton; I'm the Executive Director of the Design Trust. I want to thank all of you for coming tonight, particularly our Council members; also the Design Trust Board and Deborah and Zack, in particular, our co-chairs, and the New Museum.

The Council is a special group, for us. I hope later on we'll open this up to conversation, because the Council, while it is a financial leadership group, it's very much an intellectual leadership group, and we look to these meetings to help us in knowing where we should turn our attention, where the issues are, where the opportunities are. So I really invite all of you to feel free to converse this evening as we get to that point of the program.

I'm going to tell you a little bit about our first event, because we've conceived of these Design Trust Council meetings as a kind of ongoing conversation. As Deborah Berke mentioned, the first event was at MoMA; it was last May. Malcolm Gladwell and Adam Gopnik, writers and *New Yorker* contributors, spoke, and their talk was called "Gothamitis."

The name "Gothamitis" came from an Adam Gopnik article where Adam wrote – and I'm going to quote – he talked about how, after the socioeconomic depression of the '70s and '80s, and even after 9/11, that our recovery since that time has, quote, "come at the cost of a part of New York's identity, that New York is safer and richer but less like itself, an old lover who has gone for a facelift and come out looking like no one in particular." [LAUGHTER]

So that was Adam's position, and I should say, to be fair to Adam and Malcolm, they took very much different positions even though, in fact, I think they probably feel much more similarly about these matters. So, in response, Malcolm described a coffee shop that he goes to where, every time he goes in, there's 20 or 25 people and they're sitting and they're looking at laptops and they're doing different things: they're writing; they're composing music; they're making art.

So, you know, we can all agree that's highly creative, varied endeavors. And, to a casual observer, they appear to be doing the same thing. But, of course, they're not doing the same thing, and, in Gladwell's words, "Although they're not colliding in the streets, clutching bundles of things to make shirts and belts, the collision now is taking place on a much more cerebral level."

He concluded by saying – and I'm going to quote him now – "If I had to guess what our streets would look like 10 years from now, I would say that increasing wealth and increasing social diversity are going to drive a change toward increased street level diversity, because to serve a highly sophisticated, heterogeneous population, you need to do more than have a Washington Mutual on every corner."

So we were very inspired by the optimism of that vision. I know that many can disagree with that assessment, but the vision is inspiring. So I've offered our speakers tonight three questions that kind of grew out of that "What next?" position that Malcolm left us in, and they are, specifically, "What will follow the current trend of international retail, chains, and banks replacing small retailers and light industries?" And then, further, "Are there models from the hospitality, technology, and design sectors that could inspire diverse uses?" And finally, "What does the café culture identified by Starbucks and Barnes & Noble, our quasi-public of the title, tell us about public spaces that could accommodate new ways of working?"

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So, to help us begin to answer these questions, as Deborah said, we're enormously grateful to have two really highly original civic thinkers with us this evening. And I'm going to tell you a little bit about them and then leave it to them to answer these questions.

I know that their reputations precede them, but Danny Meyer is the C.E.O. of Union Square Hospitality Group, which includes many restaurants you all have been to, including Union Square Café, Gramercy Tavern, 11 Madison, Tabla, Blue Smoke – perhaps most favorably, to everyone, the Shake Shack, and, of course, the Modern at the Museum of Modern Art. Danny's restaurants and chefs have earned many design and cuisine awards, including an unprecedented 17 James Beard Awards.

Danny has co-authored the *Union Square Café Cookbook*, *Second Helpings from Union Square*, with his partner, Chef Michael Romano, and his latest book, called *Setting the Table*, examines the power of hospitality in restaurants, business, and life, which I need to know more about, the power of hospitality in life, a great subject. An active national leader in the fight against hunger, Danny has long served on the boards of Share Our Strength and City Harvest. He's equally active in civic affairs, serving on the executive committees of NYC & Company, Union Square Partnership, and the Madison Square Park Conservancy.

Paul is, as many of you know because I know you all read him, the architecture critic for the *New Yorker*, where, since 1997, he's written the magazine's must-read "Skyline" column. He also holds the Joseph Urban Chair in Design and Architecture at the New School and was formerly the dean of Parsons School of Design. He began his career at the *New York Times*, where, in 1984, his architecture criticism was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished criticism.

He is the author of several books, and most recently his chronicle of the process of rebuilding Ground Zero, entitled *Up from Zero: Politics, Architecture, and the Rebuilding of New York*, which was named a *New York Times* Notable Book in 2004. He's also written *The City Observed: New York*, *The Skyscraper*, *On the Rise: Architecture and Design in the Postmodern Age*, *Above New York*, and *The World Trade Center Remembered*. His writing has received numerous awards in addition to the Pulitzer, including the President's Medal of the Municipal Arts Society of New York, the Medal of the American Institute of Architects, and the Medal of Honor of the New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation.

So I'd like to ask all of you to join in me in welcoming our speakers. [APPLAUSE] And so, gentlemen, tell us what's next.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: So we should stick with our microphones, even though the room is small? Okay. We will try to be technological and do that, then. Well, anyway, thank you very much, Deborah and Deborah. I regretted not being able to be at the conversation last year with my colleagues Malcolm Gladwell and Adam Gopnik. I do sort of feel like maybe you're just going through the *New Yorker* directory and you're on the "G"s. [LAUGHTER]

But it worked last year, so let's hope it works again. [LAUGHS] Because it did sound, both from what you've said now and what others said at the time, like a fascinating evening. We'll try to pick up and continue with some of those themes, possibly reflecting some of the changes that have occurred in the world since then. But, more thoroughly, I think, reflecting possible differences in temperament that Danny and I might have from Malcolm and Adam.

Rather than start with restaurants, which is Danny's subject, because he is also so much of a civic leader and thinker on these issues, along with all of you, I'd like to start by picking up on something that Adam and Malcolm talked about last year, and that Deborah quoted, which was the whole issue of the changes in the city: gentrification; the driving out of what had been a

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certain New York-ness from many places; as Deborah reminded us in her first question, the arrival of national chains that have made many parts of New York seem sort of a little bit like a mall without the roof.

And yet, of course, it still is New York. Do you think that that trend, first, is as prevalent as some people say, as bad as some people fear? Is it getting worse? Or are we making too much or not so much, really, and are we pretty healthy underneath it?

DANNY MEYER: Can I begin by not answering your question for a second? [LAUGHTER]

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Well, it's a great start, sure.

DANNY MEYER: No, there's just something I was thinking about all night that if I don't get it in now I'll probably forget later.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Sure.

DANNY MEYER: You will not remember this, but when I opened Union Square Café in 1985, and Ronald Reagan was president, and Mayor Koch, the Mets had not won for a million years, and all that kind of stuff, one of the early pieces of advice I got from somebody was, "You got to make sure to get press for your restaurant. Okay? And you got to pitch to all comers." I said, "Okay." And I said, "Like who?" "Well, don't just think about food people. Think about every aspect of your restaurant. Think about the architecture."

So in 1985, I wrote Paul Goldberger a letter, because he was the architecture critic for the *New York Times*, and thought that I might get him interested in writing about Union Square Café, which, for all the affection it has earned in all these years, has never, and would never, and should never, win one architecture award in the world. And I said, "I think this is a special place that you're going to want to tell your readers about." [LAUGHTER] You were kind enough not to write me back. [LAUGHTER] But I just had to get that out. [LAUGHTER]

PAUL GOLDBERGER: If everybody whose letter I didn't answer were still talking to me 23 years later, things would be pretty good, actually.

DANNY MEYER: Oh, you could have done a lot worse than not answering me back. [LAUGHTER] But, just so people don't have to wonder, I've had the pleasure of hosting and serving you on many, many occasions at many, many restaurants, and besides knowing a good building when he sees it, he knows a good bowl of risotto, so.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Well, thank you. Well, I should say, though, one of the things that has always made the Union Square Café special is that I think it really is a very serious work of design, but it's a reminder about – it's un-design design. And it's obviously very carefully designed to not look too designed. And you pulled it off without looking too self-conscious, which is a rare thing. You don't see that very often.

DANNY MEYER: Well, we can talk about that later. I do want to try to answer your question.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Okay.

DANNY MEYER: And now I'm taking off my restaurant hat and thinking as a New Yorker, and I've lived here now for 28 years, so it's been quite a while. And I live in the neighborhood where most of my restaurants are, and I think that, to your question, it really depends on the segment you're talking about. I don't really get too concerned that New York is a different place

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because of the Container Store being here, or because of Whole Foods being here, or a Staples every now and then being here.

I don't think that really changes the character of my New York, because the real character of my New York, and presumably some of your New Yorks, is the human beings who make the choice to live here. It's not a place that anyone ends up by accident; it's way too expensive to live here; it's way too complicated of a life. And so the people who choose to live here are choosing to live here because they, whether they know it or not or like it or not, are choosing to be part of a bizarre human experiment about living with people from a million different cultures and overachieving in whatever category they are in.

So, now the question is, "Well, is there anything that we could do, benignly or otherwise, to make more people want to live here or fewer people want to engage in that experiment?" And I do believe that we get in danger when the real estate prices skyrocket the way they have, and you start to look at why that has happened. And whoever in the last talk was talking about the bank on every corner, it only got worse in the last year. In the five years before that, it was the Duane Reade on every corner. And, in each case, you had to go, "Why do we need so many drug stores?" And, "Why do we need so many banks?" And I still don't understand.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: I still haven't figured out the answer to that either, actually. Yes, yes.

DANNY MEYER: So I guess what I want to drive at is this: when that happens, that has crowded out the kind of individualism that I think is one of the things that attracts so many New Yorkers. You don't have the immigrant who says, "I want to have a hardware store," for whatever reason, or the person who says, "I want to have, you know, my own personal kind of restaurant, or my own personal kind of art-wares store, or my own personal kind of bookstore, or my own personal kind of antique store."

And, fortunately, there are still some pockets of that. You've got to go to parts of the West Village or the East Village in Manhattan. But it's getting scary out there. And whereas I paid eight dollars a square foot to open Union Square Café, today there is an out-of-business Zen Palate next door to my office on Union Square where the asking price, I believe, is somewhere like 300 dollars a square foot. And you start to say, "Well, who can afford that?" And the only ones who can afford it are the kinds of people who drove everybody out in the first place.

The good news, if anything, from my standpoint – and anyone, by the way, who has walked through San Francisco recently, or Paris, or London, you see, well, it didn't have to happen that way there. And I'm worried that our city is going to cease to attract the kind of people. But the good news is, as painful as it is, recessions cause everybody to rethink their strategies. And I think the banks are finally going, "This is not sustainable for us." And then the question is, "Well, will anything ever come down to the point that someone with a point of view can actually open a business and afford it?"

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Right. And in all that time, since the rent was eight dollars a foot, you haven't changed the price of the tuna burger, right, at Union Square Café? [LAUGHTER]

DANNY MEYER: Dramatically so, but that has more to do with the labor market than the rent.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Okay, okay. [LAUGHS] Okay. I see what you're saying, and I share your optimism, but I have a slightly different take on it, I think, which is that I think, for better or for worse, what we've seen in the last generation is the spreading out of certain qualities that we once associated only with midtown through much of Manhattan. I mean, nobody ever expected, for example, a family-run hardware store to be at 44<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, or something like that. And those have been gone for a very, very long time.

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And I think there's a certain part of the city that we associate with a certain kind of life that has some appeal and some New York-ness but not that sort of soul that we're talking about and that you've, I think, very well articulated, talking about immigrants and their own businesses and so forth. But it's a very, very long time. It's half a century or more since that's existed in a sort of central core in Manhattan, and I think that area has expanded. It's part of the price we paid for prosperity.

But, at the same time, there are neighborhoods that were untenable that, in fact, now do have the qualities that we used to find in Manhattan. I mean, much of Brooklyn, much of Queens, and much of the Bronx, now, is very, very different from the places they were when you came to New York 28 years ago or when I came to New York 32 years ago, or whatever. And most of those changes have been, I think, very, very positive.

You know, my son, who now lives in Chicago but is hoping to come back to New York, was talking about it the other day, and was trying to figure out, if he does this, where he would live. And he said, "You know, the problem is the neighborhoods you once couldn't walk in you now can't afford." [LAUGHS] And they've sort of leapt all the way over a kind of middle ground. And, while that's a problem in many ways, it's also a certain sign of health. And you do see, in an awful lot of Brooklyn and Queens in particular, but also more and more the Bronx and so forth, that kind of immigrant experience still happening the way it was supposed to happen, and used to, I think.

DANNY MEYER: And my comment would be that this has been happening forever, and I'm going to relate it to a restaurant story. Charlie Delmonico, who was the greatest restaurateur of the end of the 1800s and, I guess, a little bit into the 1900s, was famous in his day for charting out the next new neighborhood. And as Delmonico's went, so went New York, and he continued to go further north.

As a matter of fact, one of the reasons that I felt the confidence to launch two restaurants in the 11 Madison building almost 10 years ago, 11 Madison Park and Tabla, was that that was about as far north as Charlie Delmonico got when he was on the west side of the park, not too far from Deborah's office – in fact, the same building, if I'm not mistaken. And I said, "Why can't this be the heyday for this park again?"

But it has constantly been changing. I think the thing that is just irrefutable is the power of the fact that Manhattan is an island. And I think what we're talking about is not that you can't live in New York or you can't find grit; you can't find excitement and art and immigrants in New York. I think what you talk about is how the westward and downward and upward, eastward expansion of Manhattan is, you know, about 85 percent boiled right now.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Right.

DANNY MEYER: And that's what the issue is, and so that's why I think one of the most exciting things that I think I've heard from this administration – and we'll see how far they get in their last period of time – is developing the waterfront. Because the more that that happens, both in and around Manhattan and also Queens and Brooklyn, the more it's going to be a beacon to just – and to the Bronx and the islands, Governor's Island – is, "Keep going," because that's the reason that, when I go to a place like London, for example, you can walk and walk and walk and walk and walk and it's not like everything got all developed within this little atom chamber to the point that it exploded.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Right.

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DANNY MEYER: And I think you're right. The whole place feels like midtown. That's not going to be too much fun.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Well, which is not so much fun, although I don't think it's the disaster and the total un-New York thing that some people fear. But no, it's not what we think of as representing the best of New York, I think. But I also think it's worth remembering how small the city used to be. And that a lot of what we're seeing is, as I said, the sort of expansion of a certain upper-middle-class to upper-class part of New York.

I mean, the famous New York, the romantic New York of the '30s, the '20s and '30s, for example, that is probably over-romanticized but nonetheless perpetually discussed and remembered today – I mean, that was a place that kind of went from 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It was kind of bordered by the L trains. There wasn't much else to it. And it was midtown and then a couple little spots of the Upper East Side, and that was kind of it.

And, I mean, other than movies that were specifically about other things, like, you know, the waterfront or what have you, most of the great movies about New York sort of happened in a confined little area. And it's now a very, very different thing, and most of that, I think, is to the good, even though there's no free lunch and we pay some price – you should never say that to a restaurateur, I realize, actually. [LAUGHTER]

DANNY MEYER: You didn't hear me disagreeing with you.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: [LAUGHS] But, you know, at the end of the day, we pay a price for it, but there's also a lot of positives that come from it.

DANNY MEYER: I hope so. You're the one that was supposed to be the pessimist, though.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Oh, right. Okay. Well, I'll find something to be very pessimistic about. Don't worry. Give me a minute. I mean, gentrification has certainly served you well, though, right? I mean, given that your business and the neighborhood in which most of your restaurants are set has profited from it.

DANNY MEYER: [OVERLAPPING] Let's put it this way. Any time a neighborhood changes, it's going to create a change. So let me take Madison Square Park as an example, which is fascinating, because having lived through some of the early renaissance at Union Square Park, you know, just so people don't forget, it wasn't that long ago I would walk to Union Square Café in the morning in 1985-1986 and, invariably, there would be the chalk outline or someone who'd been shot the night before outside the Underground, which is now a Petco. So, you know, was Petco replacing the Underground a bad thing, a good thing?

PAUL GOLDBERGER: That's the question, right.

DANNY MEYER: Do we need Petco in our lives? Occasionally. Do we need to trip over dead chalk outlines? Not really. But Union Square Park, which absolutely, along with the green market, which I think is completely underrated in terms of what it does for the city and in terms of giving the city a public space that is not like midtown, developed its neighborhood more quickly than the neighborhood could make the park beautiful, if that makes any sense.

It set off such a fire of reasons for commercial tenants to be in the neighborhood, residential tenants to be in the neighborhood, cultural tenants to be in the neighborhood, that the neighborhood got populated so quickly that we almost forgot to make the park beautiful, and then there were too many people within that area to make the park beautiful.

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So Madison Square Park presented a fascinating opportunity to take an under-populated area, take a park that was in disrepair, not a place you'd want to be, not necessarily safe, with a bunch of monolithic kind of industries around it – insurance, toy, and tabletop industries, very little residential whatsoever – and, as a result, very little constituencies who would push back. And there was an opportunity to make a park beautiful and safe and give it programming before the neighborhood went – and you can use the word “went” in a good way or a bad way.

So here's what's been happening now. I would say the whole thing has taken a lot longer than I expected, because my only experience was Union Square Park, but now we're at a point where you see a whole corridor of buildings along 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue that are going completely residential. You're finally starting to see the buildings around the park become residential, so the MetLife clock tower is going to be luxury condominiums.

The former toy building, which, years before that, was the Madison Square Hotel, which is where all the war parades used to end, is going to be residential. You see former showrooms, because the whole wholesale industry is now dying out because there's no reason to come to New York to go to a showroom twice a year as opposed to just seeing the stuff on the Web.

And so we know we're in the process of all this gentrification. Now, as a restaurateur, I say, “Great.” It's going to be more reservations at Tabla; that's a good thing. Longer lines at Shake Shack; just what we need. [LAUGHTER] As a New Yorker, I go, “Alright, is this a good thing or a bad thing?” Well, the good news is that the buildings are being reused, and reused for what is needed right now, which is more places to live.

The bad part is grocery stores can't afford to come in the neighborhood; there's nowhere to buy food. Who's going to open a school in that area? Where is there going to be more playgrounds? Last time I checked, you know, you can't get into half the restaurants who now can't afford to open new restaurants there anyway. So, hey, I certainly don't have answers to this, but it's not necessarily good and it's not necessarily bad.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Right. No, and I think it's also important to remember that, you know, Detroit would kill to have such problems as we're talking about, and so would many cities, I think. And I say that not to be complacent at all, but nonetheless to keep it in some perspective that the problems we're discussing, certainly in the last few minutes, are the issues that one faces when one is in a position to have a luxurious kind of problem.

DANNY MEYER: But I just want to address a point you made earlier, Paul, which is – you know, so many times when it's your own city, it's easy to lose perspective. So that's why you hear me sometimes make references to London or San Francisco or Rome or Paris, which happen to be cities I love to go to. And so I ask myself, “If San Francisco all of a sudden, if the downtown area of San Francisco around the Transamerica Building – people have walked around there; it's not your favorite place to be in San Francisco – if that started to overtake San Francisco and you got less of the neighborhood quality and the small business that had a point of view, would you be as inclined to want to go to San Francisco?” Maybe less so.

Or if the commercial center of London all of a sudden started encroaching upon everything else in London, would you be as apt to want to visit or as apt to want to live in London? And if the kinds of things happen that make fewer, you know, highly creative, highly curious people want to live here, then it gets scary.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Right. No, I think that's right. And I think in New York we've always been torn between a desire to be somewhat like London or San Francisco and a desire to be like Shanghai or Hong Kong. I mean, we sort of want it both ways. We want unfettered growth; we

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believe that that's sort of somehow in our DNA; and yet we also want things not to change and are often unwilling to accept the fundamental contradiction of that.

DANNY MEYER: Well, you know, when any of us walks down the street in our neighborhoods, there's been this fascinating pattern – you see it all the time – which is that, to the degree that you have a little one of these – I don't think they're called brownstones, but whatever these little buildings are like they used to have in Yorktown that are about five stories tall, and you usually see a whole block of them. And you'll see one of them where a store goes out of business, and then, all of a sudden, you see, on the third floor, some plywood. And then you know that within a week or two the next store next door is going to go out business and you know you're going to get the next high rise, which takes up generally three different stores.

And you say to yourself, “Well, the good news is that none of those building were especially interesting, and the bad news, on the other hand, is that it's going to be one more wall. And it's probably going to get a bank, or it's probably going to get a panini store, or something like that.” And that part, who does something about that?

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Well, now, that's interesting. Let's stay on the panini for a moment, there. [LAUGHTER] Is a panini store inherently less healthy for a neighborhood, say, than a bodega?

DANNY MEYER: It depends on the panini. No, it depends on – [LAUGHTER] I don't think bodegas are necessarily the thing that any of us is missing. But –

PAUL GOLDBERGER: But that may be what went away to make way for the high rise and the panini store.

DANNY MEYER: Or it could've been an old-fashioned coffee shop or an old-fashioned donut store or something. And I know that you talked about Starbucks towards the end of your last session here. And I think something that we restaurateurs think about all the time is trying to create a place that provides a place you can be with human beings, and that creates something that didn't used to be there, that gives you a new way of being with people and a new way of experiencing the city.

I mean, I saw this building when it was a model, but I've never until tonight had the experience of being in this room, let's say. And this is great. I don't know what was underneath it before, but it was probably a bodega. But we never –

PAUL GOLDBERGER: It was an empty lot, actually, for quite a while.

DANNY MEYER: But in the right hands, you have something that is uplifting to the spirit; allows you to experience New York in a way you've never experienced it before. But it's because it creates a place for human beings to be human. And so I don't really care whether it's a bodega or a panini place. The question is: did it give me more breathing room to be human with human beings, or less breathing room?

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Right, right. Let's stay on Starbucks for a moment. I'm fascinated by, well, a couple of things about it. I mean, first, the recent problems they've had, I think, are an indication that the culture is kind of pushing back a little bit, and that you can't – reminding Starbucks and its stockholders that you cannot in fact expand certain things infinitely, that there is such a thing as a saturation point for a lot of things, and they've discovered it and are beginning even to admit it.

But more to our point, I think, one of the things that I've always believed defines the nature of being in public space in New York is that you are simultaneously with other people and by

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yourself, and that, in fact, you feel a reason to go out there by yourself as well as if you're with somebody, that the experience of walking through the city when you're alone can be in some ways as meaningful as being with somebody. And, in fact, sometimes you engage even more deeply because you're not distracted by the conversation or by the relationship with the other person, in some way.

I've always been fascinated by the fact that Starbucks succeeded in getting people to go outside and be somewhere by themselves and exist in that sort of strange, in-between world in which you are sort of with other people, and there's a reason people don't go there and bring their lattes back upstairs to their apartment and work on their computer there, that they stay there and sit and do whatever they do. And yet you're still kind of alone. It's a different experience from you and me going together to have coffee there. What does that say to you about the nature of public space? Is it something to be optimistic about or something to be pessimistic about?

DANNY MEYER: Pure optimism. No, total optimism. And I think Shake Shack is a great example. We spent a lot of time asking ourselves, "Why does Shake Shack work so well?" There's hundreds of places to get burgers. We didn't invent that. There's hundreds of places to get milkshakes and frozen custard. We didn't invent that. You know, I'm proud of the quality of both of those things, and I would eat one every day if I could do it. But we're very, very aware that it's very similar to the Starbucks experience.

You know, when you imagine New Yorkers, who are in a hurry for everything, saying, "I'm going to choose to spend 40 minutes in line during my lunch break to get a cheeseburger," what's that about? It's really about wanting to be alone with people, just like you said. And I think the fact that we were fortunate enough to be able to create Shake Shack within a gorgeous park within some of New York's most iconic architecture – no matter where you look, there's the Empire State Building; there's the MetLife clock tower; there's the Flatiron Building; I mean, we could have a pretty bad cheeseburger and I bet they'd come.

So I'm incredibly optimistic – which we will not do, I promise – but I'm incredibly optimistic about what you're saying, and I think Howard Schultz of Starbucks would be the first one to say it's not a coffee company. It's about the experience of people being with people. I think the sort of public airing of their issues sort of reminds me of how the *New York Times* has been for the last few years; it's sort of the fast-food version of the *New York Times*. They're going to be around for a long time, but we all have to hear about how the coffee smells or doesn't smell.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Yes. [LAUGHTER]

DANNY MEYER: Anything you want to comment on that?

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Well, let's see. Starbucks hasn't sort of surreptitiously accused John McCain of having an affair, so, I mean, they're not quite the same. But nonetheless, you're right. [LAUGHTER] I mean, you're right in that they are both –

DANNY MEYER: You didn't read the coffee cup today. Mine said it right there. [LAUGHTER]

PAUL GOLDBERGER: They're both very, very visible institutions that play a role in people's lives out of proportion to what they cost or what they officially purport to do. That's right. And we have a kind of emotional connection to both of them, and they are each institutions that have gone through somewhat difficult times because they're not entirely sure what their market is and how it's changing and not entirely sure where to go in this particular technological age. So, in that sense, they do have a lot in common. You're right. And they're very identifiable brands, but they also are both examples of successful, let's say –

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DANNY MEYER: Arbiters of taste.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Well, they are arbiters of taste, but I was about to say something else. They're successful kind of ventures into the real in an age of the virtual. And I think that's, in a way, the most significant thing. I mean, Starbucks, as I said, is convincing people to come to a real place when they could sit on their computers at home and make bad coffee. The New York Times is convincing people – not, unfortunately, quite enough people, but people – to buy, you know, a real newspaper instead of just reading it online. And they struggle with the kind of dynamic between those things today. They have that in common.

Let's stay on that for a moment, because, in fact, I'm fascinated by the greater and greater role public space seems to have in our lives as we depend more and more on technology and on the virtual, and as we live more and more in a world in which we don't need public space as we once did. I mean, once you needed to go out in public to transact business. There was kind of no other way.

And then technology, step by step, takes us away from that. First there was the telegraph, then the telephone, and so forth and so on, and now we have an array of tools broader and more extraordinary than ever before making face-to-face encounters less and less necessary. Yet we seem to crave them all the more. Maybe the question is the answer, in effect, that because we don't need them we want them, and they become a luxury. What's your take on that?

DANNY MEYER: Well, no, I think it is a self-answer question, and I think that if you go to a Starbucks – you already said it. What percentage of the people who are by themselves are really on some type of Blackberry or cell phone or computer?

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Right.

DANNY MEYER: So they're doing all the things they do, but within the context of a bunch of other warm bodies around them. So human beings obviously still crave that. If you analyze, you know, when the weather gets warm, and you see a long line at Shake Shack again, look at the people in line. 50 percent of them, maybe, are in a pair, so they're talking to each other. But easily 50 percent of them are getting the thumb exercise or on their cell phone or whatever. But they're doing it in the context of a place that makes them feel good, of a setting that makes them feel good, with a bunch of warm bodies. We are a social animal. We will not stop being den-pack creatures.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: No, I think that's right.

DANNY MEYER: And I think that's a good thing. I do want to point up something, which is that I think that the community boards in New York and even some of the politicians in New York have a very, very mixed understanding of how people want to use open space. And I know that there's a huge concern about privatizing any public space, and it's something that I'm very, very sensitive to.

On the other hand, not all things that are privatized have to be anti-public. So I think Shake Shack, again, is an interesting example. People want to take their coffee in a park. But if that's deemed to be trampling on the use of public space, that poses a tension. Public parks don't get the kind of funding that they need from the city government, which puts public parks in a position of having to raise money in other ways.

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So, for example, the city and the community boards and the public are not necessarily in lock-step on this. If the public did not want there to be a place – and, by the way, we haven't faced opposition for Shake Shack, so I'm not doing this in any kind of defensive way. As a matter of fact, Shake Shack is what I would call a community wealth venture, where the funds to build the building were raised philanthropically, the park owns the building; Shake Shack is a joint venture between my company and the not-for-profit Madison Square Park Conservancy. So a percentage of every sale goes right back into this park. I don't think that's what people object to.

But I think people do want to use parks. They don't want to use them just for reading a book and sunning. They want to use it for activities that allow them to be with people. But I think that community boards are very concerned that too much of that is a bad thing, which is great, but that doesn't mean all of it is a bad thing.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Yeah, I think most people would be inclined, at this point, to agree with you, given the positive experience both with Shake Shack and the fact that, you know, the world didn't come to an end with Bryant Park when that was redone and put under the Bryant Park Conservancy, and so forth. I think we've all now made a kind of peace with privatization under the right circumstances with the right controls and the right balance and things.

I was interested a moment ago – I noticed you used the phrase “open space” more or less synonymous with public space. Do you think all public space needs to be sort of open space in the manner of a park? Or are there other significant kinds of public spaces in New York?

DANNY MEYER: My mind immediately went to Barnes & Noble and Whole Foods – I'm going to Union Square in my mind, and I'm going – the way Union Square has grown, in terms of open spaces, public spaces, has been into Barnes & Noble on the third floor, whatever floor that is, into Whole Foods on the second floor. And what am I missing? I'm missing another one that's right on Union Square. There's two Starbucks, one on either side of Union Square Park. I don't know that Staples is what we'd call that, but.

I think businesses are wise. You don't have to be a restaurant. Any kind of business is wise to say, “We are open for you.” You know, I remember, right after 9/11 – yeah, right – was that like the music, where they – [LAUGHTER] what I was just going to say, briefly, is that the day of 9/11, when no one knew, “Is this the end of the world? Should we be open for business?” And I'm using the word “open” again. “We can't take people's money on a day like this. What do we do?”

And what our restaurants did on that day, and it was a fascinating example of what you're asking, is we were not open for business but we were open for the community. And what that meant was that whatever food we had in the house, if anyone wanted it, it was there for them. But mostly we were open in the sense of giving a hug and having a place that people could just come –

PAUL GOLDBERGER: That's a kind of gathering place, yeah.

DANNY MEYER: And we had people – you know, Rusty Stop, the baseball player, of all people, who – I didn't know this – his apartment was right next to the World Trade Center. And these people had made the trudge uptown, and they would find themselves at Union Square Café, or at Tabla. They were just there for some reason. That's where they went. And just to be with people. And so I know we need it. I know we human beings need it. I think businesses, at their best, do do it.

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And I think that the more that the city becomes a big wall or an extension of midtown, the more those businesses, like Starbucks – say whatever you will about their coffee and their breakfast sandwiches, but they get it. They get the fact that people want a safe place to go that's not work and that's not home.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: Right. Yeah. Sure. I think we can do that. Sure. Thanks, Deborah.

DEBORAH MARTON: Both of you raise very important issues about the life of the city, and I have my own questions. But before I ask my questions I'm going to open it up for comments or questions anyone may have while we still have you here. Oh, if you could say your name, that would be great.

ALEC APPELBAUM: Thanks. I'm Alec Appelbaum from New York Magazine. Mr. Meyer, what has your experience been like in pursuing the Shake Shack at City Field and other projects you're working on now compared with these projects you started a long time ago in terms of working with the city? Is the city more sophisticated, different kinds of design approaches? Or does it think more about different kinds of experiential variables than it used to? I mean, have you all sort of taught each other over the years?

DANNY MEYER: I'll do the best job I can to answer the question. I think with Union Square Café in 1985 – and I really appreciate what Paul said earlier, because in hiring an architect for the first time in my life and not ever knowing what to look for in an architect, I basically lost – the first three interviews I had, people just were polite and they said goodbye, because what I kept saying is, "I want a place that doesn't look like an architect was ever here."

PAUL GOLDBERGER: That's not necessarily the most flattering thing one would want to hear. [LAUGHTER]

DANNY MEYER: Yeah. And the firm that took the job, which was Larry [BOGDENAU?] Associates, ended up going on to have a whole career in restaurants after that, which was sort of a neat thing. But I wasn't very conscious about it. So, to your question, it was only years after that that I looked back and articulated to myself what mattered to me, and that was wherever I would open a restaurant I would want to make it feel like it was part of its environment, not something imposed upon it.

So that's something I've tried to do whether we opened in the, you know, National Historic building of 11 Madison, with two completely different restaurants. How do you make an Indian restaurant feel like it's part of that building, not something imposed upon it, next door to an art deco brasserie/grand restaurant? Shake Shack: James Wines' mission was to make the shack look like it had grown right out of that ground surrounded by that architecture. So the sloping roof, which is iconic of a fast-food place of the 1950s, or roadside shack, is the Flatiron Building on its side, if you look at it closely.

So if we ever were to do another Shake Shack, what we'd want to do would be to look at where it is and make it feel harmonious. I think one of the bigger challenges, and exciting challenges, was asking Bentel & Bentel to do the work at the Museum of Modern Art, because the restaurant, the Modern, lives within the walls of three different architects, three different iterations of the Museum of Modern Art. And how do you make that feel like it always belonged there?

So I don't know if I answered your question, but it's always very much on our mind, and it's a fun challenge, and it's fun to be commissioned. I would say if there's any one new thing after all these years of doing it, it's that restaurants – you know, my first two restaurants, Union Square Café and Gramercy Tavern, exist in buildings of the old-world kind of landlord, not

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developers, but guys whose family owned one building, three buildings, five buildings, throughout New York, and that's what they did for a living.

The newer restaurants you see in today's day and age, so many of them, whether it's in a hotel or a casino or a museum or wherever, are an expression of the fact that society understands that restaurants can drive business. Restaurants can bring people to you. Celebrity chefs – we didn't use to have those in the old days – can drive business. And so now what you see is less of the restaurant making sense within its context, because so often, what's the context?

But I think a place like this, we would've loved to do this, because I knew that the experience of coming to this part of the Bowery with this architecture would provide an amazing opportunity to do a commission project of food service. It wasn't going to be a big food service; it wouldn't have, you know, probably added a whole lot to the amount of business, but the fascination of doing something at a place like this would be great. The fascination of doing something in a sports stadium fascinates, just totally jazzes me. I'm a sports fan, always have been, never thought that food was a driving reason that I wanted to go to a stadium. But whoever wrote the rule that it shouldn't be or can't be? So that would be a neat thing to do someday, and I hope we can.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: You know, Danny, as you talk about that, I realize one of the things – and I say this not to flatter you, but it would be a positive thing – that amazes me about your restaurants is the extent to which you've managed to give them distinct identities that respond to both architectural conditions and ideas like the Indian restaurant, like Tabla is, without making them look like theme restaurants. And in an age when there is so much kind of glib, superficial sort of grabbing of identity onto things, when almost everything seems to have a kind of theme quality, that these don't is actually, to me, the most impressive thing about them as a group, that they seem to have a kind of natural presence where they are. So we'll see. Anyway, some others?

DEBORAH MARTON: Right here?

GREG HALEY: Hi, my name is Greg Haley. I have a question about the variety and the concern of stores changing, larger boxes, and the monotony of retail. And I know that one of the things that makes public space vibrant is different people and different retail and all of that, and there has been legislation like the 421A that calls for affordable housing, inclusionary zoning, and things like that.

And I wonder – there's a developer I think in Dumbo – I don't know the name – who specifically tried to sort of put in small retail, because he thought that was good for his housing to create small, local retail. And I wonder if there might be something sort of like an inclusionary retail, and what you might think of something like that. Or is that kind of legislation antithetical to New York?

PAUL GOLDBERGER: I think it's a great idea, in fact, inclusionary retail, like inclusionary housing. You ask if that's antithetical to New York; I think part of the problem we face today is that we need to take overt action – either legislative, zoning, political, what have you – to give us what we once used to get naturally. And since we have done that, not enough, but we've accepted that premise in terms of housing, it seems to me a perfectly logical thing to carry it further and express it in terms of retail.

And you're absolutely right; a great deal of it does have to do with diversity of not only use but diversity of presence in the neighborhood. You know, people talk about how Manhattan is becoming less and less diverse, and of course it's true. I mean, we all know it. You hardly need to be a sociologist or an economist to know that that is the case.

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What I worry about is the extent to which, even in this Manhattan now that we consider insufficiently diverse, there are still loads and loads of people who are living in either rent-stabilized apartments or in co-ops that they bought 30 years ago when normal people could buy co-ops [LAUGHS] and things like that, and that they will one day either day or decide to sell to some 28-year-old hedge fund zillionaire.

So that if we think it's not diverse now, if things keep going the way they are – you know, wait five years. Wait ten years. And as the people who are the kind of leftovers representing a sort of hold-over diversity begin to go, it will become even less diverse. And so I think we need to continue to look at solutions as we face what is potentially an even worse problem. And your idea's a good one.

DEBORAH MARTON: Further questions? We can have one or two more.

WOMAN: I just wanted to ask Danny how he felt about the recent news about Fleuron potentially losing his lease to a huge increase in his rent, and I think of him as a kind of similar person to you, who's changed an entire neighborhood, and one of the first really revolutionary in that way. How does that make you feel? [LAUGHS] Do you relate to it in any way?

DANNY MEYER: Completely. It makes me feel horrible, and I just think that he is a great example of what we're all going to continue to see a lot more of all the time. I mean, that's exactly what just happened to – you may or may not have ever gone to or liked or cared about Zen Palate on Union Square, but I know a lot of people did, because my office is right next door. And, you know, there's a big double-size "For Rent" sign in the window, and no one who's a restaurateur could possibly afford to move in there. And I don't think anything other than a high-rise or a bank could afford to move in there.

And I just feel like Fleuron is a poster child for a larger thing, because he was a change agent in a neighborhood long before it became the hip Meatpacking District. And where does he – it's just the way of the world. It's really sad that he's not sharing in the upside. As a matter of fact, for all of the pioneering he did, he's now extinct. So I feel horrible about it.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: You know, there's one thought that I want to add to that, which is that the Meatpacking District has sort of exploded in such an insanely exaggerated way that it makes the gentrification that you've lived through at Union Square seem actually almost gradual and ordered and reasonable. And by comparison, I guess it is, you know, even though it may still be more than we would wish.

Very few neighborhoods, thankfully, undergo such an incredible, complete, and insane kind of roller-coaster as the Meatpacking District has, and it's sort of a little bit out of control anyway. But you're absolutely right. I mean, that Fleuron, who did so much to create it, then gets priced out is – on the other hand, it is also the tragedy that we have seen in all of SoHo, you know, with all the artists who were doing precisely what Fleuron did in the Meatpacking District, collectively. And now the only artists there are the holdovers who, like the co-op owners on the East Side, just happen to still be there and bought years ago, cheap, and haven't left yet. But no new ones are coming in, and so it becomes very different.

DEBORAH MARTON: I don't want to end on a down note, so [LAUGHS] if either of you have any closing statements that you'd like to make, please do, or if anyone has something that they have to utter, please utter it now. Well, I'm very encouraged by both of your optimism about the city, and I do feel that I agree with both of you that the next step doesn't have to be a kind of deadening. The developments that have happened are largely positive, and it's maybe a matter

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of adjusting, and maybe it's a matter of rents coming down at a certain time and smaller spaces being possible.

DANNY MEYER: Can I utter one last thing?

DEBORAH MARTON: Of course.

DANNY MEYER: Here's my utterance, because I want to do something hopeful. I think that – and I have no idea how to get the political wheel or the commercial wheel or the developmental wheel to do this, but it's a dream, which is that we have all these appendages to Manhattan, called piers, that are in the process of being developed.

And if you looked at each one of them as a potential new neighborhood, not as another new mall with all the national stores, but if you looked at each one of them – and if the city could get involved with this – as an opportunity to only have tenants that were of a certain smaller scale, with a certain point of view, across many, many different types of business, I think it could be a tremendously invigorating example. To some degree, San Francisco did that with the Ferry Terminal Building, for those of you who have been there. I say “to some degree” – it's certainly more exciting than anything we've done with any of our piers here.

PAUL GOLDBERGER: So far, yes. Absolutely, I agree with you. I would only say, in conclusion, that, you know, I struggle always to balance, in my mind, a sort of visceral recognition of the fact that New York is a living, organic thing. It has always changed. For it to stabilize is the equivalent of death for a city like this. And yet, one has to balance that with a recognition that not all change is positive, and that, as in another organic thing, there is positive change and growth and there are cancers.

And it's very important to know the difference and to figure out how to control them, but control does not mean stasis and freezing, because to be Williamsburg by the Hudson – Williamsburg as in Colonial Williamsburg, not Brooklyn Williamsburg – [LAUGHTER] to be Colonial Williamsburg by the Hudson is not the future we want, but neither is the future we want to be Shanghai. And so navigating in between those things is the challenge right now.

DEBORAH MARTON: Well, I think that's the perfect place to end. Thank you both very, very much. [APPLAUSE]

[END OF TAPE]

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