

Broadway's Open Spaces

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Table of Contents

Introduction	
Bowling Green to Grace Church.....	1
Union Square to Madison Square.....	9
Greeley/Herald Square to Times/Duffy Square.....	13
Columbus Circle.....	20
Conclusion	23
Bibliography	

INTRODUCTION

If Manhattan has a main street, it's Broadway. It goes from one end of the island to the other and passes through some of its most important districts. Much of Manhattan's open space either abuts it or is created by Broadway's diagonal course across Manhattan's north-south avenues. Some of the city's most interesting plazas, squares and parks are associated with Broadway. As the city developed in a northward direction so did it's main street. Different sections developed at different times and in different ways. The first section, from Bowling Green to Grace church is the oldest and the straightest. After that, Broadway angles west and each time it crosses an avenue an open space is formed.

The open spaces of Broadway are unlike the planned closed squares of European cities. In New York the street is usually more important than the square and in some of these open spaces there is actually more street than square. In America the "open road" and the freedom to travel is a concept that's taken very seriously. Where else but in America does Willie Nelson sing about the pleasures of being "on the road again." and politicians make their pleas to "Main Street America". In New York especially, where "hanging out on the street corner" or "taking a stroll on the avenue" are the things to do, open spaces are more street oriented. Even the standard baseball diamond's distance between first and third base is compressed and between home and second is elongated to fit a New York street's stickball game.

I'm going to discuss Broadway's open spaces from Bowling Green to Columbus Circle. This paper will be separated into four sections: Bowling Green to Grace Church, Union Square to Madison Square, Greeley/Herald Square to Times/Duffy Square and lastly Columbus Circle. These separations are geographic but since these sections of the city were developed at different times, they are historic and stylistic separations as well.

Bowling Green to Grace Church

Broadway begins at the front of the Custom House between Whitehall Street on the east and State Street on the west like the headwaters of a river emerging from smaller streams. As these two tributary streets come together on the north side of the Custom House they form a triangle which contains the oval that is Bowling Green. The front door of the Custom House opens onto a small cobble stoned area that is closed to vehicular traffic and is reminiscent of a church parvis (photo 1).



Bowling Green from the Custom House steps

The fenced in green area is just beyond that. The facade of the Custom House appears as a single sculpted unit of columns, windows, statuary and steps with its width matching the width of the open space before it. The height of this ornate facade relates well to the oblong length of Bowling Green. On the west side of the space is Shipping House Row. These three buildings step up from Battery Place: One Broadway at twelve stories, the Bowling Green Building a little taller at seventeen stories and the last step, the Cunard Building at twenty two stories. All of them have their front entrances opening onto Bowling Green. The lowest of these buildings, One Broadway, and the low profile of the Custom House flank an opening broken only by a small subway kiosk at the south-west of Bowling Green. Open sky over Battery Park and New York Harbor seen through this opening is a welcome relief from the dark and narrow streets of lower Manhattan. This same opening can still be seen from as far north as 10th Street thanks to Broadway being laid out in a perfectly straight line all the way to Grace Church. (photos 2 & 3).



Looking South from Bowling Green



Straight line to 10th Street

Two Broadway, on the south-east of Bowling Green, is a twenty-four story glass curtain wall building that is out of context with the other architecture of the site but is necessary to complete the enclosure. To its north, Beaver Street runs off and loses itself in the maze of old Dutch streets to the east. The Standard Oil Building at number twenty-six, shares similarities in design and proportions with the Cunard Building across the street from it. Its curved street frontage seems to draw the walker through the street and in an uptown direction. Its tower, set back from the building line, isn't oriented to any local street but to the uptown grid and it appears that it is meant to be to be seen as part of the skyline and not relate to the street. The northern boundary of Bowling Green is located between the Standard Oil Building and the Cunard Building and this is where Broadway proper begins.

Although much wider than nearby streets, the opening that Broadway cuts through the high buildings bordering it makes it seem like a canyon. Most of the lower Broadway sidewalk is narrow and crowded with subway entrances, newsstands and other street furniture. Looking back at Bowling Green from Exchange Alley the open sky is still prominent and it suggests that the street just keeps on going past the buildings on either side of the Custom House. The narrowness of the surrounding streets adds to the closed effect because they prevent sunlight from entering Broadway even at intersections. The first real sunlight is seen at Trinity Church. Looking east from the front of the church, you can see as far as Brooklyn, and although it isn't perfectly

straight, the narrow slit of Wall Street lets some sunlight through for a few minutes each morning. The front door of the church is right on Broadway and to its north and south is a graveyard that people from the nearby offices use like a square and in fact, this is how some European squares started. In Camillo Sitte's The Art of Building Cities, he explains how in northern European cities a church is sometimes isolated in a square, usually because of the previous existence of a cemetery around the church. Although it is still really a graveyard, this area closely resembles a closed European square. Once inside the northern section, you can look over Broadway at the buildings to its east and hardly see the street. The church is to the south and on the west the elevation of the graveyard is high enough above Trinity Place to remove all signs of it and its traffic from view. The best wall is to the north, the Trinity Building (photo 4).



The graveyard ends at its base which is lined with benches set back under arched windows between pilasters. Its twenty story facade is done in the Gothic style, no doubt to compliment the church. Most of the buildings making up the walls of this graveyard-square are early skyscrapers twenty to fifty stories tall, some with heavily decorated facades. The blending of their facade decoration makes the wall they create seem even more unbroken and encompassing. With skyscrapers for walls, the sky for a ceiling and the graveyard itself for a floor, Trinity Graveyard seems like a grandly proportioned room with the church as its centerpiece.

The next opening in the canyon of Broadway is at Liberty Plaza (photo 5).



This space was created by the builders of One Liberty Plaza's desire for more FAR. In return for their increase in square footage they let the block bounded by Broadway and Trinity Place and Cedar and Liberty Streets "lie fallow." This unbuilt block on the west coupled with a ground level set back of the Marine Midland Building on the east side of Broadway leaves a space across Broadway that is much appreciated by the local office workers (figure 1).

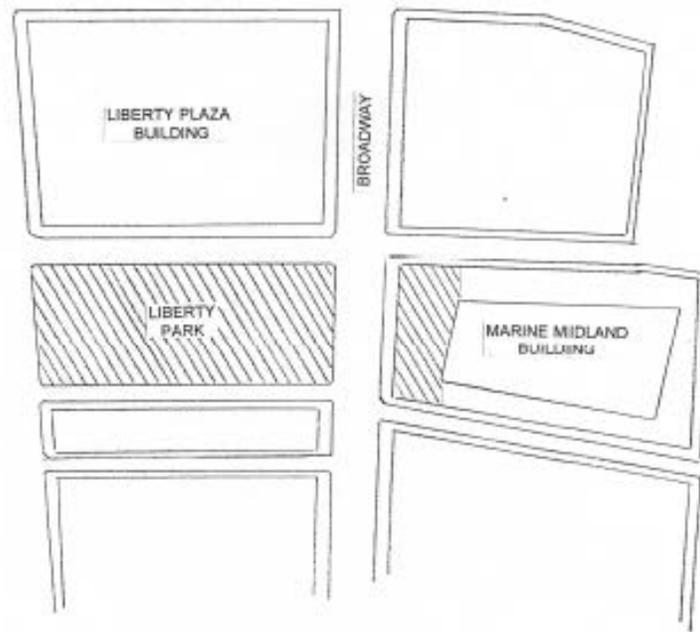
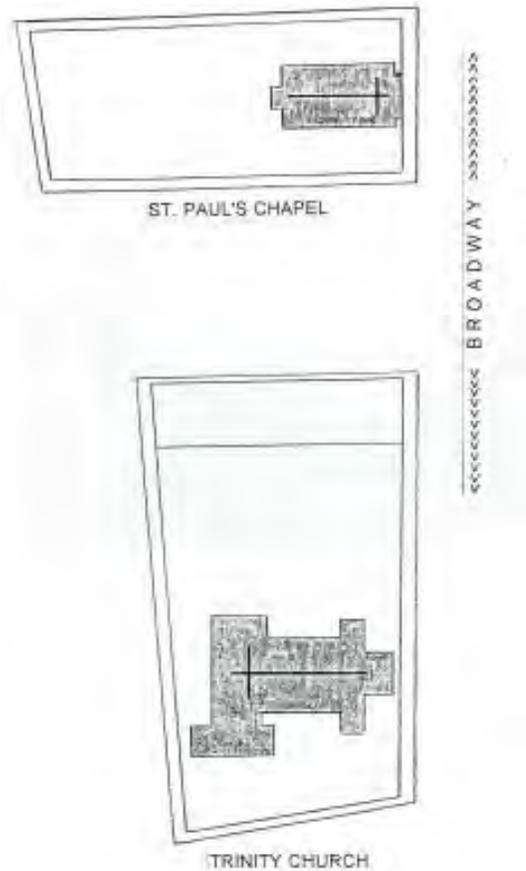


Figure 1

The plaza in front of the Marine Midland Building isn't much more than a widened sidewalk but it contains the famous orange geometric sculpture called *Cube* by Isamu Noguchi. Unlike civic sculpture found in other squares, this piece was commissioned by a corporation to adorn its plaza. Set off against the black slab of the building, it makes this plaza more distinctive and separates it from other corporate plazas. The park on the west and the plaza on the east give the street that they flank a wider appearance at this point and pedestrians are drawn from the standard sidewalk into the open space on either side of the street almost without knowing it. The park on the west is simply paved with some benches and trees but what adds to its character is how it follows the downward slope from Broadway to Trinity Place with steps and terraces. Also complimenting this space is the gothic facade of the United States Realty Building which runs along Cedar Street on the southern side of Liberty Park. It relates to the space better than any of the newer buildings around it. Its contrast to the relatively smooth curtain walls of One Liberty Plaza to the north and the Marine Midland Building to the east, makes it all the more appealing. Looking west over the park from Broadway, squat buildings at lower level Trinity Place and wider streets in that direction give a feeling of openness and brightness.

Three blocks further north is the next semi-open space, St. Paul's Chapel. I describe it as semi-open because oddly, unlike Trinity Church and most other city churches, its steeple is to the west near the center of the block and its back door faces the street (figure 2).

The church is oriented to its cemetery rather than to the street and gives some indication of how rural the surrounding cityscape was when St. Paul's was built over two centuries ago. The church's low height and the openness of its surrounding cemetery signal the end of the lower Manhattan Broadway canyon.



Just north of St. Paul's, Park Row branches off from Broadway toward the north-east leaving the roughly triangular space where City Hall Park is located. To the west along Broadway there are tall buildings that sometimes seem to dominate the park but there is mostly open sky to the north-east over the park. The sky here is broken first by the Municipal Building and then the courts and other civic buildings behind it (photo 6).



To the south of City Hall Park the sky is pierced by the old skyscrapers that house the markets and financial institutions that support the city and here we find the buildings that contain the government that runs it.

City Hall's width and entrance face south and the building is perpendicular to Broadway.

This seat of the city government was at the northernmost reaches of the city it governed, when it was built. It sits in the approximate center of the park like a country manor house with Steve Flander's Square as its broad "driveway" in front leading to the main road, Broadway. City Hall didn't always have a clear view south as it does today.

The City Hall Post Office was once sited at what is now the southern end of City Hall Park. After it was demolished, this end of the park kept a less park-like look and a closer relationship with the street. There's always heavy traffic making the turn around and through the southern tip of the park and there is also a bus layover area here.

Traditionally, ticker tape parades begin at Bowling Green, proceed up Broadway, turn east into City Hall's driveway and end at the open space in front of the building where the keys to the city are presented. This space also serves other civic governmental front door uses such as press conferences, protests and parking for official cars.

A few blocks north of City Hall there's a rise in the street and after topping it, all you have to do is look up to see Grace Church almost two miles away. The area between City hall and Grace Church developed in the 18th Century as light industry with some offices where there was no perceived need for parks or squares. In this stretch of Broadway, except for parking lots and some shallow set backs, there are no openings until Grace Church at 10th Street. Broadway is a perfectly straight line for almost three miles from Bowling Green to 10th Street where it makes a twenty degree turn to the west. Grace Church marks the point of this turn, being the first building on a lot oriented to the new direction that Broadway takes. It's too bad that Broadway traffic runs north-south and not the other way, where Grace Church would be a focal point for most of the ride. Standing at its front door and looking south down the middle of Broadway, the opening between One Broadway and the Custom House is still visible. Much of what is now Broadway existed as Bloomingdale Road which served the farms in the northern sections of Manhattan. Above Grace Church older lots follow the farm boundary lines and are approximately perpendicular to Broadway while the newer lots align with the grid and at an angle to Broadway.

The church building is set back on either side of its entrance and there is open landscaped space on both sides of it. Its steeple is as tall or taller than many of the surrounding buildings and the low height of the buildings directly across from it on the west side of the street leave Broadway with the appearance of being part of a church square. Because of the angle in Broadway the street disappears when looking south from just north of the church. This coupled with the gothic facades of the building directly to its north and the church being framed by the building to its south adds to the illusion that the church is in a square.

Union Square to Madison Square

The first two-way street in the gridiron that Broadway's diagonal crosses is 14th Street. Here it cuts through three blocks that are unbuilt, leaving a rectangle that is the site of Union Square. As you go north on Broadway and approach 14th Street the sudden feeling of openness of Union Square is unmistakable (photo 7).



From here the north wall of the square is punctuated by the Metropolitan Life clock tower and the Guardian Life sign. Even though it's still a long way off, because of its great height, the Empire State Building also has a relationship with the square. The angle of newly built Zeckendorf Towers on the south-east of the square nearly matches Broadway's and directs your gaze and movement forward. The buildings on the east side of the square have facades of varied styles and heights and are all low, for the most part leaving the sky open. Unfortunately, the Zeckendorf Towers obscures the Con Edison clock tower to its east. This openness ends at 17th Street, the northern border of the square, where Park Avenue South and its taller buildings begin. The street on the west side of the square is a bit wider than on the east and so can accommodate taller buildings. Here we find the Chase Manhattan Bank Building and the Union Square Building, two examples of early skyscrapers whose embellished sliver facades add interest to the west side of the square. Again in contrast to the east side, these taller buildings give way as they go north to three and four story buildings on Broadway at the 17th Street border of the square as if encouraging movement in that direction. Once in the square it's easy to see that although some of the surrounding buildings are quite tall, none of them are overbearing. This might soon be a problem on the south side of the square. There's a large vacant site on 14th Street between Broadway and Fourth

Avenue currently undergoing demolition. The zoning allows this site an FAR of 10 which, with a subway improvement bonus and a streetwall of 125 feet could mean a very massive building. Fortunately, since this site is in the Special Union Square District, the City Planning Commission can authorize modifications in the streetwall and sky exposure plane if it finds that the open area of the square will be affected. Additionally, the exceptional width of 14th Street should help in offsetting any negative effect on the square of an overbuilt building at this site. Another potential problem on the south side was defused when the Union Square BID was allowed to make some input into the facade design of Bradlees, a large retail store. Arches, granite, street level windows and a smaller sign were concessions that the retailer made to better fit into the existing design of the area.

An interesting occurrence at Union Square is its "green market." Three days a week the open paved area on the west and the north of the square is filled with the stalls of local producers of fruit, flowers, baked goods and other food items. Many European public open spaces got their start as market places and later evolved into civic and other squares. Union Square appears to be de-evolving into a market square. It even has an outdoor bar and restaurant that's open in the warmer months.

As you leave Union Square you can already see above 23rd Street where Broadway widens on the west side of the next open space to engulf Fifth Avenue. You can also see the Worth Monument with No. 202 Fifth Avenue beyond it. This is the location of Madison Square, where Broadway crosses Fifth Avenue. In many ways it's similar to Union Square: one avenue wide, three streets long and related to the Broadway diagonal. In Town and Square, Paul Zucker says "...if the streets are rivers, ...then the square represents a natural or artificial lake". Both Union and Madison Squares are good examples of the lakes he's referring to. Although perhaps this water metaphor applies more to Madison Square where the Flatiron Building looks like a butte eroded by the River Broadway. For the first block, between 23rd and 24th Street, where Broadway and Fifth Avenue run together the street is unusually wide. The south-west corner of the square and a corner of the Fifth Avenue Building are actually cut off by the street. Then, between 24th and 25th Street the triangular Worth Monument creates a fork that once again separates the two streets. This fork effect comes up again at both Herald and Duffy Squares. Looking at this very wide section of paved street and traffic as you're approaching the square causes the greenery of the square itself to come as a bit of a surprise as you reach 23rd Street. First the flagpole and then a statue at the south-west corner of the square lead your gaze into it as you cross the street. Looking to the north

of the square, the Empire State Building although still ten blocks away, is very prominent in the square's skyline but it's the street to the east, Madison Avenue, that relates best to this open space. This is where the insurance companies have their front doors opening onto the square. Although the Flatiron Building on the south-west seems to point to the square, it's the Metropolitan Life Tower, toward its south-east corner that dominates it. On the north-west corner of an eleven story base that is the width of the block, sits a forty story clock tower. This landmark can be seen from many vantage points in the city but it's certainly at its most impressive when looked at from directly below in Madison Square. From the square the detail in its masonry construction can be clearly seen and appreciated. Its outstanding height causes Madison Avenue to appear narrow and pedestrian-friendly and this height relates well to the avenue width of the square. To the right of the tower, looking from the square, is the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, North Building. What we see is a full block of massive masonry with arched entrances at each of its corners facing the square and staggered set-backs leading up to its full twenty-eight story height. This was just the beginning of a plan that was curtailed by the Depression. According to Robert A. M. Stern in New York 1930, what we see today is only the base of a tower that was expected to be eighty to one hundred stories tall. We can only imagine the effect that such a building would have had on Madison Square (photo 8a & 8b).



On the other side of 25th Street we find the Appellate Division Courthouse. Although dwarfed by its neighbors, this Beaux-Arts gem fits perfectly on the square's east side. Its southerly facing entrance just off Madison Avenue on 36th Street and west facade brighten this portion of the square. North of the Courthouse is a forty-two story black slab with its narrow side facing the square. It overshadows the New York Life Insurance Company building at the north-east corner of the square both figuratively and literally.

From the center of Madison Square each of its four corners appear to be open to the sky but the west side where Broadway runs, seems broken and irregular because of the street cutting through the grid and buildings leaving sharp angles. The buildings from 25th Street to just above 26th Street on Fifth Avenue step up in height out of the square. The north side, along 26th Street has a different feel to it than the rest of the square. The narrowness of 26th Street combined with the building heights, which from corner to corner range from approximately ten to over twenty stories, gives this section of the square a feeling of intimacy. Being enclosed by this ornate street wall creates a sense of place not found in other parts of the square. It's especially different from the south side where busy 23rd Street and its commercial street level facades make for a colorful and active atmosphere. The buildings on the south side are more varied in height and style. The Flatiron stands apart and even the new thirty story residential building to its east can't overpower it.

Unlike many of the other open spaces on Broadway, both Union and Madison Squares are well landscaped and have many large, old trees. Because of this, the look and feel of the squares change with the seasons. The combination of light, foliage and view on a crisp, clear December morning creates a very different square than an August afternoon, just before a thunder storm.

Greeley/Herald Square to Times/Duffy Square

These next squares along Broadway are hardly squares at all; certainly not in the European sense, like the Italian Piazzas or the London squares. Those European open spaces were laid out in conjunction with surrounding buildings and bordering streets. The design of these Broadway squares was determined by the flow of the streets themselves. There is more street than square at these triple intersections where the crossing of Broadway and the north-south avenue forms an axis at a cross town street. Broadway is the only major diagonal on the Manhattan grid and it creates interest and activity where ever it crosses an avenue. At Union and Madison Squares, parks were purposely installed at the crossing points of Broadway and the north-south avenues but here the trimmed and triangular lots that remained as Broadway sliced through the grid became squares with some incidental landscaping, simply as extensions of the street. Despite their seemingly haphazard creation, these openings have become successful gathering places for people.

Heading north on Broadway, suddenly there's an opening ahead. The buildings are at odd angles to one another and the space becomes more interesting (photo 9).



You don't see Greeley Square until you actually cross 32nd Street and are in it. Long before that you can see the bell ringers and clock in Herald Square. In plan these two triangular squares look like a bow tie with the knot just below the center of 34th Street where Broadway crosses Sixth Avenue (figure 3).

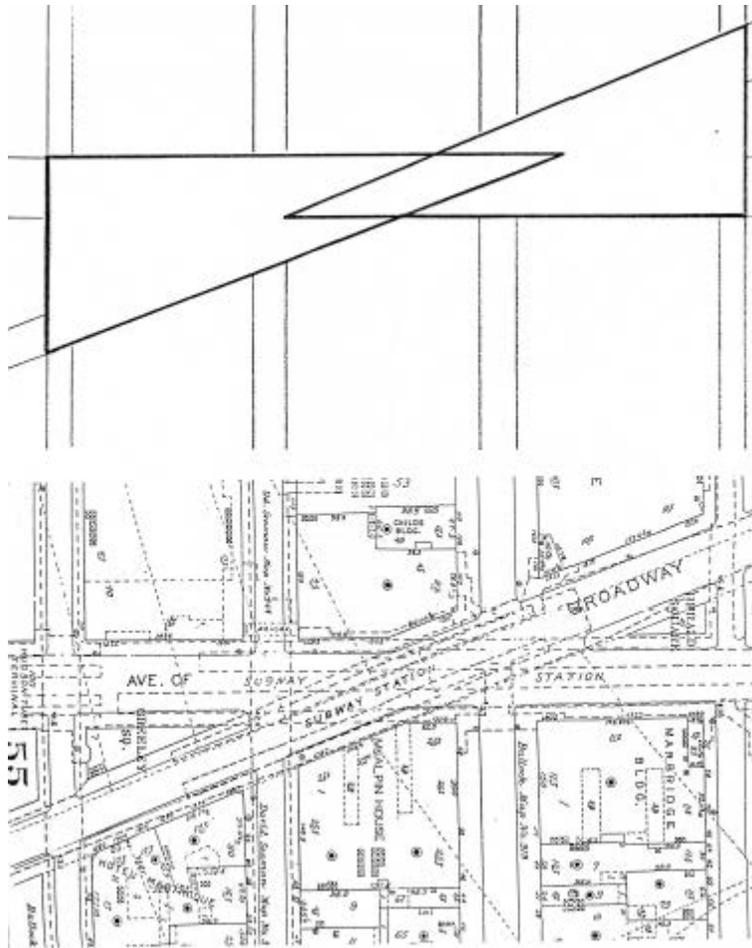
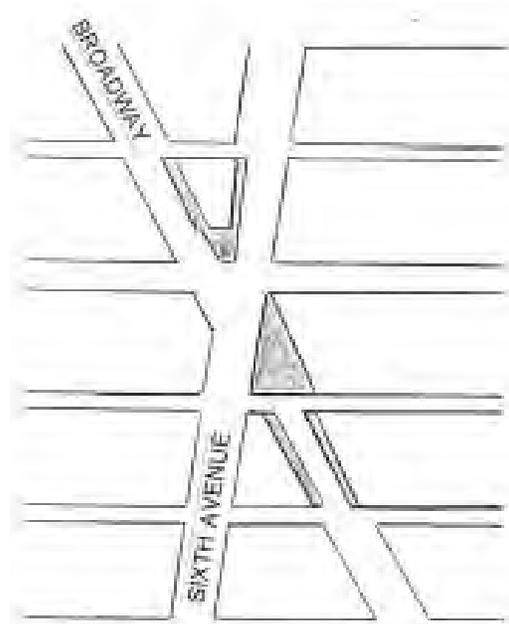


Figure 3

The south-west corner of the 34th Street intersection and the north-east corner of the 33rd Street intersection are both neatly pruned by Broadway. Greeley Square feels dark and enclosed with its surrounding buildings high and streets wide in proportion to the square. On its west side the buildings resemble suburban shopping malls but on the east the Martinique and McAlpin are done in classic New York grand hotel style. Looking back at the square from a bit further north it appears more open with lots of sky showing over the two wide streets. The visual center of Greeley/Herald Square is the intersection of Broadway, Sixth Avenue and 34th Street. It's a particularly American concept that the center of this world famous square would always be covered with heavy traffic and be almost totally inaccessible to pedestrians. From this center, Greeley Square appears to be totally devoted to cars.

In 1993 the Department of Transportation proposed a plan to close Broadway from 34th to 33rd Street virtually eliminating one street from the three street intersection.¹ Each of the squares would have been made wider and the cut south-east corner of the block between 33rd and 34th Street would have been replaced with a pedestrian zone (figure 4).



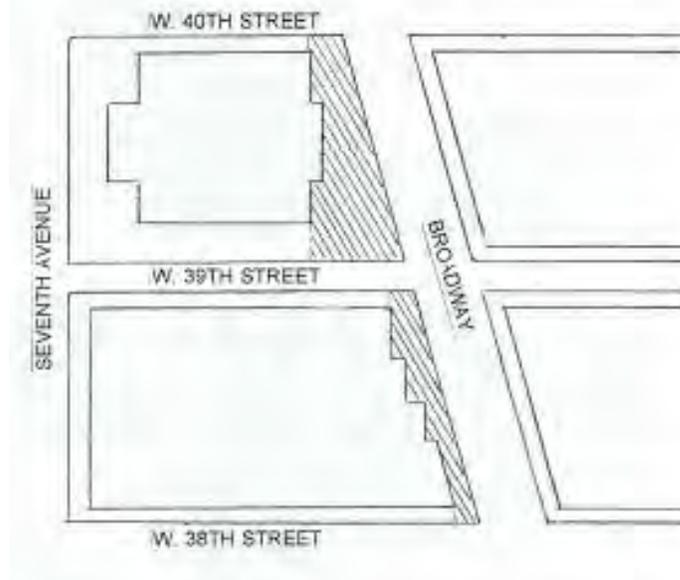
This would be the only break in Broadway's downtown flow through Manhattan. The purpose of this plan was to cut down on traffic accidents and make the square more pedestrian friendly. Some merchants felt that less traffic would mean less business but most agreed that the bulk of their business came from mass transit and pedestrians. Due to a new administration with a more closely watched budget it appears that the project which should have been completed this year, has been put on indefinite hold.

Just a short distance to the north, Herald Square is brighter and friendlier than Greeley. Shoppers stop here to gather themselves and rest. Herald Square seems to work but Greeley Square doesn't. Shoppers are attracted to Herald and street people congregate in Greeley. Greeley Square appears somewhat foreboding. Some of the buildings that surround it include: east - the Hotel Martinique, although it has an interesting facade, is vacant and lifeless; south-east - a tower setback in a desolate concrete plaza; south - a small commercial building where you see more tacky signage and dingy awnings than architecture; west - modernized department store facades which range from bland to garish. Perhaps the square widening and pedestrian zone between 33rd and 34th Street proposed by the Department of Transportation would have helped this lonely spot.

¹ *To Unclog Herald Square, Take a Nip Out of Broadway*, Clifford J. Levy, NY Times, 5/26/93

Although approximately the same shape and size as Greeley Square and bordered by the same width streets on three sides, Herald Square is surrounded by lower buildings more in scale with the streets and square which helps it to appear brighter and more open. The facades of Macy's on the west and the Marbridge Building on the east are similar in style and height and both are in proportion to the square. The low building directly to the north across 35th Street helps frame the engaging sculpted group that holds the square's center. More important than all this, what makes this square attractive is that it's so close to the width and openness of 34th Street. Being just a few feet from an active traffic intersection gives Herald Square an energy that seems to revitalize even the most tired shoppers. Looking back at these squares from just a block north at 36th Street and Broadway, their open space seems to blend back into "streets" and except for some landscaping that shows above the traffic you'd never know that they were there.

Between Herald Square and the Times Square area, Broadway runs through the Garment Center. This is a manufacturing district, with most of the buildings factories or showrooms. Like sections of lower Broadway, when this commercial area was built there seemed to be no need for open spaces. Two of the newer buildings added some open space to this section of Broadway (figure 5).



Not large enough to be called squares but if squares are lakes than these are comparable to small lagoons. As Broadway angles west across the grid it changes the rectangular blocks into quadrilaterals. Most buildings along the way build up to the

sidewalk line with their frontages angled to match Broadway. No's. 1407 and 1411 on the west of Broadway are aligned with the grid and Seventh Avenue. Their front doors face Seventh Avenue perhaps because these are apparel related buildings and "Seventh Avenue" is the Garment Center. The rears of both of these buildings deal with the Broadway angle in creative ways. Between 38th and 39th Street, No. 1407 has three L shaped indentations in the building with the foot of each L either touching or coming close to the property line. This creates a saw-toothed sidewalk with three enclaves that are used by pedestrians to take a break from the busy sidewalk traffic. These L's enliven the shop fronts and one restaurant even puts some tables outside in warm weather, a rarity in the Garment Center. As the building gets higher, various non-symmetrical set backs and angle changes create a multi-faceted facade.

The next lagoon, between 39th and 40th Street at No. 1411 Broadway, is just one large L. It's expansive enough to be called a plaza; "Golda Mier Plaza". At its wider end there's a raised area with some simple landscaping and a bust of Golda Mier. There are usually some food vendors nearby. As simple as this space is, it attracts many pedestrians. The Garment Center is an area of the city that's known as a place where business is done on the street and maybe that's why this open space is so successful. It has the feel of the sidewalk but it's a bit more spacious. Because it's opened to the south it gets plenty of sun which makes it attractive even in winter.

The Times/Duffy Square area begins at 43rd Street (photo 10).

Times Square runs from 43rd and 44th Street, between Broadway and Seventh Avenue. It isn't much more than a triangular patch of concrete with an armed forces recruiting station on it but its name is often applied to a much larger area. To its west is the Paramount Building, one of the most dignified in the area, which rises and sets back to thirty-



three stories. Opposite this on the east side of the square is the much newer No. 1500 Broadway, a black glass curtain wall building. Although it doesn't match the Paramount in style it compliments it with its similar size and mass in a tower on a base style. Neither of

these buildings are covered with signs and lights to the same extent that much of the rest of the area is. Some of the buildings near the 42nd Street intersection have been condemned and vacated for some future use by the 42nd Street Development Corp. Their plan calls for a very tall office buildings at the north-west corner of 43rd and Broadway and another at the north-east corner of 43rd and Seventh Avenue. An office space glut has put this part of the project on hold but their interim plan calls for a glitzy retail street wall with lots of signage above. The Times Building to the south of the square has its giant video screen and the "Zipper" but Times Square itself is relatively subdued compared to the rest of the area. From here on up to 47th Street on the north side of Duffy Square the street walls are almost totally covered with signage.

Broadway actually crosses Seventh Avenue at 45th Street and the effect of the buildings at this intersection, "the crossroads of the world," is what tourists write home about. It isn't the architecture but the signs. Here, where Broadway and Seventh Avenue are indistinguishable we have a very wide avenue. On the north-east and the south-west there are towers set back on bases and the bases are covered with signs. The block on the south-east is a two story building with four stories of signs. The only block that lacks some of what these others have is on the north-west, the Marriot Marquis Hotel. Its lower stories have signs like the others but this building goes straight up to twenty-six stories without a setback. It's heavy and obtrusive and it imposes itself on the open space at the expense of that space and the other buildings. A low street wall with set backs above would have cost the hotel some rentable rooms but it would have been worth it for what it could have meant to the square. The two blocks flanking Duffy Square are both low and open with more of the usual colorful signs. The square contains statues of George M. Cohan and of course Father Duffy, and since this is "Broadway" the line for discount theater tickets at "tkts" winds around the statues. On the north side of the square is a tall and narrow building facade with signs stacked up on it like building blocks. Whoever advertises here has their product's name in snap shots and post cards that find their way around the world.

Times Square, Duffy Square and the curbed traffic dividers between them are situated like islands in confluence of two rivers. The Times Square area is longer and proportionately more narrow than Greeley/Herald Square. This is because at 37th Street Broadway bends a few degrees to the north, following a curve in the old Bloomingdale Road, making Broadway's diagonal angle more acute as it crosses Seventh Avenue. Visitors walk from 43rd Street to 47th Street on one side of Broadway or Seventh Avenue and then back on the other. This promenade is a New York tourist event and it's especially appealing at night

when the square is lit by commercial signs (photo 11).



Except for the "Fuji Film" neon at the south-west corner of 43rd and Seventh Avenue and the video screen and "Zipper" on the Times Building the south square is comparatively dark for "Times Square" but still exceptional. Between 43rd and 44th Street, the staid Paramount and bland No.1500 Broadway don't do much to light up the street. It all begins to happen at 44th Street. The street starts to light up and at the crossroads on 45th Street and except for one still vacant blockfront, you're surrounded by five to seven stories of brilliant facades. Even the Marriot Marquis looks good at night because you can no longer feel its bulk in the dark but you can see its neon, alive and moving. From here on up to 47th Street, Broadway and Seventh Avenue appear to be one street illuminated by blazing colored images. Duffy Square is lit by five stories of illuminated signs on each side and the center building where Broadway and Seventh Avenue fork, is all light and no building. The lights continue uptown on both sides of the fork. The Zoning Resolution limits the size and height of signs throughout the city with especially strict limitations on illuminated signs but from 43rd to 50th Streets buildings with frontage on Broadway and Seventh Avenue are *required* to have illuminated signs. Special Purpose District zoning is generally enacted to help maintain the character of a particular neighborhood. In the case of the Special Midtown District which encompasses these squares, the zoning specifies that each building must have illuminated signs and it allows them to be higher, cover more square footage and extend over the sidewalk further than in any other area of the city. Instead of giving maximums, *minimum* limits are set for Times/Duffy signage to enhance their world wide image.

Columbus Circle

Broadway makes a slight bend to the west at 54th Street and then another at 56th Street. From here the open area where Broadway crosses Eight Avenue and creates Columbus Circle can be clearly seen. Unfortunately the first building that comes into view as you approach the circle from the south is the Gulf & Western Building. It's a forty-four story tower that's out of context with its site. It's aligned with the grid and not the triangular block that it's built on and it has no relationship with the circle that it abuts. To further denigrate its appearance, it's surrounded by a perennial sidewalk shed to protect pedestrians from panes of glass that occasionally pop out when the building twists in high winds. It will soon undergo a re-engineering that will correct this flaw and will then be converted to a mixed-use office-residential building. If this is successful the shed will go but the building will remain. If we're fortunate, perhaps something will be done to better integrate it with its surroundings. Since the building itself can't be changed, the only hope is that the small plaza at its southern tip can be made to somehow relate to the arc of the circle

As you enter the Columbus Circle the next building that you see is the Coliseum to the west. Except for its curved sidewalk the Coliseum, like the Gulf & Western Building, does nothing to acknowledge the circle that sits in front of it. There's been talk for some time about the redevelopment of this site. If the chosen project just deals with its interior we'll have the Coliseum to look at for a long time. If more ambitious plans are made and a new building is erected it will hopefully relate better to its location. Each of these buildings, the Coliseum and the Gulf & Western, aligns with the grid and not Broadway's diagonal and neither have anything to do with the circle. Somewhere else they might be fine, but they're on Columbus Circle and they just aren't part of it. Like most of the elements around Columbus Circle, they don't relate to the circle nor do they relate to one another.

East of the Coliseum and south of the circle is the Department of Cultural Affairs Building. It has a curved, relatively low frontage that at least says something to the open space before it. No. 240 Central Park South is on the east side of Broadway with a clipped back north-west corner and some curved storefronts that indicate its involvement with the circle. Across Central Park South is the Merchants Gate Plaza at the south-west corner of Central Park. The masonry walls and entrance ways making up the Merchant's Gate are set on an arc which echoes a ninety degree segment of the circle to its south-west. The Maine Monument cuts through the center of this arc and

points directly at the center of Columbus Circle. This plaza with its Maine Monument not only relates to the circle but has a constant dialogue with it. The Merchant's Gate Plaza is an active and well used pedestrian space. There's a kiosk of to the north-west on Central Park West that sells snacks, maps, film and other things that a tourist might need, as well as a subway entrance cleverly worked into the wall surrounding the park. The Maine Monument is a usual pick-up and discharge point for horse drawn carriage passengers and the Merchant's Gate is an entry point for both pedestrians and carriages into Central Park. In addition to the stone benches along the walls, people always seem to be able to make themselves comfortable on the monument itself. This whole area is a welcoming front door to Central Park. The problem is that this inviting entrance faces the traffic of Columbus Circle.

Once again referring to Paul Zucker's metaphor: if streets are rivers and squares are lakes, then Columbus Circle is a maelstrom. The statue of Columbus on his column in the fountain should dominate the space but it doesn't because the fountain and base of the column are hidden by cars, trucks and buses. The traffic lights are synchronized for cars, not people. In it's early days, traffic in Columbus Circle was lighter and horse drawn. Now only the young and fit dare to cross it. There's only one, hard to find crosswalk between Broadway and Central Park West that somewhat safely leads to its center. There are some curbed non-car areas but they are inaccessible to pedestrians with signs saying "PEDESTRIANS PROHIBITED" (photo 12).



Some pedestrians might walk across it but none stay for very long in this unwelcoming area because there are no benches or even a rail to sit on.

North of Columbus Circle Broadway is a two-way street. It pours three lanes of traffic into the Circle and takes the same number out. Five lane Eighth Avenue enters from the south and to it's east there are four lanes of southbound traffic on Broadway. Central park South, not a through street, is two lanes in and two lanes out. On the north of the Circle, Central Park West siphons off five lanes of uptown traffic.

Altogether that's twenty-four lanes of traffic which is not much different from any other intersection where Broadway crosses a north-south avenue and a cross-town street.

If pedestrians can feel comfortable at the other open spaces created by Broadway's diagonal, why can't they here? There are two reasons and neither of them have anything to do with lanes of moving traffic:

- First, on the east side of the circle there's a parking area for "NYP" and "MTA" cars as well as a small "motorcycle only" parking section.
- Second, even though the Coliseum doesn't follow the arc of Columbus Circle it tries to make up for this with a very broad sidewalk that does. In addition to this it also has an unnecessary three lane pick-up and drop-off area at the edge of this wide sidewalk. Cars coming down Broadway gain a few seconds entering these lanes and then lose that time when they try to reenter the main flow again.

There's no place for free parking in a heavy traffic area on prime real estate. It should be removed. The Coliseum sidewalk is too wide and has a desolate appearance. People only walk on its outer edge. It can be made a bit narrower and the present pick-up area can be used for Broadway's downtown lanes including the present bus lane. The six separate curbed areas within the circle can be combined and enlarged to make only three areas. Benches, landscaping and other amenities can be added. Traffic lights at Broadway on the north, Eighth Avenue on the south and Central Park South on the east control vehicular flow through the circle. Cross walks that tie into these lights can be installed throughout the circle. All of this can make Columbus Circle more accessible to pedestrians while actually increasing the paved traffic area within the circle. Although the street level remains commercial, Broadway goes on from here as a boulevard with broad landscaped islands, through the residential neighborhoods of the Upper West Side, Morningside and Washington Heights and points north.

Conclusion

I've described the squares and square-like spaces on Broadway beginning at the beginning, Bowling Green and progressing north to the end of the Midtown commercial area at Columbus Circle. I traveled north but I also traveled through time and different periods of Manhattan's development.

The first and oldest group that I discussed has some connections with European style squares. I began with the Dutch Bowling Green, which originally was just that, an open area where lawn bowls was played. This "green" and Manhattan's main street to the farms in the north got their start at about the same time. Trinity Church, built when Manhattan was English, has some similarities to a European square but it evolved over time with building style changes. The Trinity Building matches the church style but the nearby Equitable Building certainly doesn't. City Hall Park is a civic square in the European sense but a bit more open and Grace Church, like Trinity, has some resemblance to European church squares. Except for Liberty Park, this older section of the pre-grid city is more connected with it's European heritage than the sections that follow.

The park-like Union Square and Madison Square were planned but not like a London square, with one builder. Their walls were built over time by many different architects. If there's any continuity in the styles of the surrounding buildings, it's almost accidental. Neither of these squares are residential and they are both definitely tied to "the street." New York has larger buildings than European cities and therefore larger squares with wider streets and more imposing proportions.

Further north and built later in time, the Greeley, Herald, Times and Duffy squares are incidental and the streets primary. The plaza not specifically designed but created as a leftover of street intersections was seen as a problem by Camillo Sitte. Here in New York this same situation was taken as an opportunity. The high land cost of these areas forced developers to replace the "picturesque" with "utility." Economic concerns led to the creation of these world famous squares. The open spaces of the Garment Center, like Liberty Park, are an offshoot of a building's architecture. Simplicity of floor plan and more square footage through plaza bonuses were the factors that gave us these appreciated open spaces and not a planned design.

Sited at an area of intense transition (a subway hub, the end of the CBD and beginning

of the Upper West Side and Central Park), Columbus Circle has simply become a way to move traffic. Although this area has the potential to be made more attractive, perhaps its main purpose is to facilitate the smooth flow of cars.

None of the open spaces on Broadway were created to surround the builders house and none except City Hall Park and the church squares revolve around important buildings. Although open streets are an anathema for European squares, this isn't so in America where the streets cut right through many of our squares. Some of these open spaces are park-like and others mostly concrete and asphalt and none are totally enclosed. None of these spaces were consciously organized but were done by a succession of builders. Where the Broadway diagonal crossed an avenue and eliminated the boring right angles, an area of interest was formed. Simply put, a square is the relationship between open area, buildings and sky. The width of Broadway visually adds to the width of the square and it's Broadway's existence as an open road that creates these open spaces as it runs through Manhattan.

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