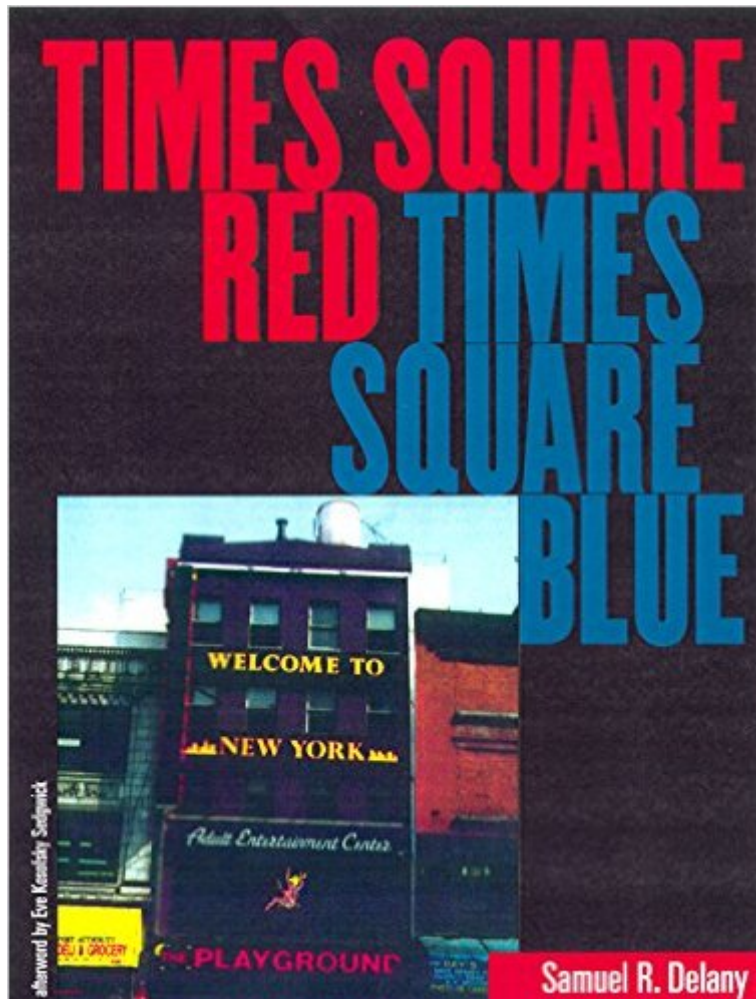


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# Times Square Red, Times Square Blue



## Synopsis

If one street in America can claim to be the most infamous, it is surely 42nd Street. Between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, 42nd Street was once known for its peep shows, street corner hustlers and movie houses. Over the last two decades the notion of safety-from safe sex and safe neighborhoods, to safe cities and safe relationships-has overcome 42nd Street, giving rise to a Disney store, a children's theater, and large, neon-lit cafes. 42nd Street has, in effect, become a family tourist attraction for visitors from Berlin, Tokyo, Westchester, and New Jersey's suburbs. Samuel R. Delany sees a disappearance not only of the old Times Square, but of the complex social relationships that developed there: the points of contact between people of different classes and races in a public space. In Times Square Red, Times Square Blue, Delany tackles the question of why public restrooms, peepshows, and tree-filled parks are necessary to a city's physical and psychological landscape. He argues that starting in 1985, New York City criminalized peep shows and sex movie houses to clear the way for the rebuilding of Times Square. Delany's critique reveals how Times Square is being "renovated" behind the scrim of public safety while the stage is occupied by gentrification. Times Square Red, Times Square Blue paints a portrait of a society dismantling the institutions that promote communication between classes, and disguising its fears of cross-class contact as "family values." Unless we overcome our fears and claim our "community of contact," it is a picture that will be replayed in cities across America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It seems like a lifetime ago, but before there was a Duane Reade, Starbucks, and TD Bank on every street corner, New York was a different place. Working class people could afford to live in the Village, Chelsea, and Hell's Kitchen or Clinton. Your neighbors were not all bland finance types who went to Wharton (I went to Penn, and I feel this way). Native New Yorkers actually worked waiter jobs and tended bar! New York was filled with rough and tumble guys who spoke English with non-Rhotic accents, lived in Single Room Occupancy houses, and those people rubbed elbows with college educated residents of the Upper West and East sides. There was a gritty-ness to the urban feel of New York street life, which now only exists in fleeting pockets, and is quickly being supplanted by the shining marble lobbies and spotless glass vitrines of LEED-certified office towers and luxury condos. Did I mention the Starbucks on every corner? In the 1990s a short-lived Disney Store opened on 42nd street next to the Disney renovated Amsterdam Theater. The efforts to "clean up" Times Square came to be known (perhaps unfairly) as the Disney-fication of the district, but Sam (Chip) Delany chronicles in time capsule-like fashion the lost micro-culture that was displaced in the process. 42nd street or the "Deuce" as it was called, was populated by a heterogenous intersection of rich, poor, white, black, able-bodied, and disabled who partook in the subversive sub-culture of adult movie houses and peep shows. Chip successfully shows how the mixing of the classes in the underground gay sex cruising, straight prostitution, and sundry commerce that took place on the Deuce, brought together New Yorkers from different walks of life, thus serving a civic function.

Samuel Delany is best known as the author of science fiction novels such as *Dhalgren*. He is also the author of a brilliant memoir, *The Motion of Light in Water*. This book is ostensibly about the transformation of Times Square but it's also an extension and updating of Delany's memoir. Delany is not a disinterested observer. He's a participant in the activities he describes. That gives the book a power it would otherwise lack. Delany's focus is narrow. He is not writing so much about Times Square as he is about what I'll call "Porn World". That is the pornographic movie theaters, sex emporiums and bars that served the patrons of these places. The HQ of this Porn World is Times Square but its substation was around 3rd Ave and 14th St. (If you never saw it in the flesh, you may have seen it in *Taxi Driver*). Delany a brilliant highly educated intellectual, apparently loved these places. They were always doomed. There was no way the powers that be were going to allow Times Square a transportation hub and the nation's premiere theater district to forever remain the domain of *Jack The Stripper* and *Teenage Nurses*. As for 14th St, once the East Village became hip and trendy and NYU needed land, that was it for the unusual forms of entertainment that thrived on the east side (along with a very low life drug culture). The book is made up of two essays. I enjoyed the

first one more. It's basically a collection of musings and observations, usually interesting, sometimes funny. The second essay put me off at first. It is "theoretical". However I had a slightly revelatory experience after I started reading it. I was looking at THE SPECTATOR and I came across an article where the author talked about meeting a former manager of Roxy Music and later one of the Sex Pistols through drinking in pubs.

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