

# “Building and Rebuilding New York:”

## The Radio Urbanism of Robert C. Weinberg, 1966–71

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“...This is Robert C. Weinberg, critic-at-large in architecture and planning for WNYC.”

### Introduction: Robert Weinberg, New York City, and WNYC

Robert C. Weinberg was an architect and urban planner active in New York from the early 1930s until his death in 1974. Over four decades of vigorous engagement with preservation and planning issues, he was both an active participant in or astute observer of almost every major development in New York urbanism. Between 1966 and 1971, near the end of his career, he served as radio station WNYC’s “critic-at-large in architecture and planning,” and his broadcasts are a window onto his remarkable career and the transformations he witnessed in the city he loved. Weinberg’s long personal history in the trenches and behind the scenes gave him unique perspective on these changes—an insider’s overview, with a veteran’s hindsight.

Robert C. Weinberg was born in 1921, and died in 1974. He grew up on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, attending Ethical Culture schools, and received his training in architecture and urban planning at Harvard, completing his studies in 1931. He spent most of his adult life living and working in New York City, although he traveled widely abroad and owned a second home in Ridgefield, Connecticut.

He maintained a private architectural practice from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, after early employment that included work at the city

Department of Parks (under Robert Moses), and at the Department of City Planning.

He taught courses in planning and related fields at New York University, the Pratt Institute, the New School for Social Research, and Yale, and published roughly 150 articles and reviews. He was also the co-editor, with Henry Fagin, of the important 1958 report, *Planning and Community Appearance*, jointly sponsored by the New York chapters of the American Institute of Architects and the American Institute of Planners.

But over his long career, Weinberg devoted the bulk of his considerable energies to a broad range of public-spirited efforts covering almost every aspect of urban development and city life, including historic preservation, zoning, transportation, housing, and planning policy. He channeled these pro-bono activities through over two dozen professional, civic, and community organizations in various official capacities and on numerous committees. Among these, he was most closely affiliated with the American Institute of Architects, the American Institute of Planners, the Regional Plan Association, the Citizens Union, the Washington Square Association, and Greenwich Village’s Community Planning Board #2, to all which he devoted many years of committed service. His tireless efforts for civic improvement may in part reflect his

upbringing within the Ethical Culture movement, with its commitment to human betterment and social reform.

Weinberg kept comprehensive files on all of his professional activities throughout his career, and they include box after box of publications, research materials, reports, clippings, notes, images, architectural plans, and ephemera, not to mention a complete record of his voluminous correspondence. Following his death these papers were transferred to Long Island University, where they are available to researchers.

Among its many holdings, the Weinberg collection includes the scripts of roughly 480 radio commentaries on architecture and urban planning that he wrote and broadcast on WNYC, the City of New York's municipal radio station. These wide-ranging reports were aired twice a week from 1966 to 1971, just three years prior to his death at the age of seventy-two. Produced so close to the end of his career, these scripts make up an archive-within-an-archive, and they create a kind of composite self-portrait of Weinberg, covering the full range of his professional interests and expressing his deep personal commitment to the city and its quality of life. They are a particularly rich resource for researchers, given the depth of his long professional experience as a participant in or observer of (sometimes both) almost every major preservation and planning issue for forty years in the greater New York area.

Taken together, these broadcasts are also a snapshot of a city at an important juncture in its history: During the late 1960s, the momentum of the city's post-war transformation intersected with the community movements and decentralizing policy reforms that gave birth to the Landmarks Preservation Commission and the Community Planning Boards, and reshaped the city's approach to both historic preservation and urban planning.

This research project is the second phase of the New York Preservation Archive Project's on-going investigation of Robert Weinberg and his role in the development of historic preservation in New York. Phase one was carried out by Rudie Hurwitz, who preceded me on Weinberg's trail. She presented some of her work in a lecture on Weinberg at an Archive Project panel in January, 2005, and I've benefited greatly from her research and analysis.

The present work is essentially a close-reading of Weinberg's preservation-related radio broadcasts for WNYC. The decision to pursue this limited scope was inspired by the potential to use sound recordings of Weinberg's broadcasts and other related material from the WNYC archives to complement the information gleaned from his written broadcast files. In the end, it may raise more questions than it answers. But while we have yet to get to the bottom of Weinberg's complex role in the evolution of historic preservation in New York, at least we can become more acquainted with his voice.

### **Acknowledgments**

My thanks go to Anthony Wood, Randall Mason, Vanessa Norton, and Vicki Weiner of the New York Preservation Archive Project, and to Lisa Ackerman of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation for this opportunity to help them pursue their investigation of Robert Weinberg's work. This phase of the project has been funded by a grant from the New York State Council for the Arts.

My thanks also go to Janet Marks, University Archivist at the library of Long Island University in Brooklyn, custodian of the Weinberg papers, and to Andy Lanset, archivist at WNYC. Both have been more than generous with their time and with the resources in their collections.

## Broadcast Overview

Robert Weinberg made roughly 480 broadcasts for WNYC, starting on August 25, 1966, and ending on August 10, 1971. Once they settled into a regular format, they were generally 3-5 minutes each, two per week, and aired as part of the station's "Around New York" program. ("Around New York" was a daily morning segment that gathered short cultural pieces—interviews, drama and music criticism, etc—and announcements of public and cultural events.) Intended for a general audience, they formed a part of the station's basic public service infrastructure.

It isn't clear exactly when the broadcast idea first came up, or who suggested it. Weinberg's earliest written reference to the idea seems to be in a letter to Municipal Broadcasting System director Seymour Siegel in early August 1966. Dated three weeks before the first broadcast aired, the letter refers back to an earlier conversation the two had had on the subject. Weinberg was already on a first-name basis with Siegel, and had been corresponding with him for a number of years. This included a 1963 letter about WNYC coverage of the emerging system of community planning boards, a subject to which Weinberg himself would return in his own broadcasts. [Weinberg to Siegel, 8/4/66. Weinberg to Siegel, 1/16/63.]

In the 1966 letter, Weinberg lays out his ideas for "an occasional broadcast on buildings and building operations going on in New York." He compares these "architectural critiques" to then-airing drama reviews by Tony Schwarz and talks by "the Hayden Planetarium Man," both already parts of "Around New York," and to Ada Lousie Huxtable's regular architecture column in the *New York Times*. The broadcasts would be long enough to get beyond basic superficial coverage, and frequent enough to be timely on breaking developments.

(In connection with an unsuccessful bid for longer, fifteen-minute time slots when the

subject matter warranted, Weinberg makes passing reference to another possible model: some kind of similar broadcast on the BBC by architecture critic Reyner Banham, with the text later published in the BBC's magazine, *The Listener*. [Weinberg to Siegel, 5/1/67.]

From the very start, Weinberg was interested in discussing more than just new building proposals; while his initial short list of possible topics included the recently-approved World Trade Center Project, he also mentioned the demolitions of the Ziegfeld Theatre, the old Metropolitan Opera House, and plans for the Ruppert Brewery site. Over the next five years, he addressed all these topics, and more. [Weinberg to Siegel, 8/4/66.]

Throughout his time working with WNYC, Weinberg maintained a regular correspondence with the station director and staff, covering a range of logistical issues such as taping arrangements, broadcast schedules, and the like, especially early on. He was particularly concerned with ensuring that recordings of talks on time-sensitive subjects be aired promptly. As Weinberg put it in characteristic tone:

To wait until official announcement that construction is going ahead would be much too late to do any good...In other words, the public, which has the highest stake in these matters, needs to be informed of what is about to happen, not only about what has happened. I regard it as part of my job to do so. [Weinberg to Siegel, 7/10/67.]

We are fortunate that Weinberg also devoted two entire broadcasts to discussing the intent of his radio work. As he told his audience in 1967, his goal was

...to make the vast subject of building and rebuilding New York better known to New Yorkers...and the business of building

includes not only the design of buildings—architecture, and the design of neighborhoods, communities and regions—which is planning, but also the social and political factors that enter into the decision making process which results in the creation, and often the destruction, of the areas we live and work in.” [“Architecture and Planning over WNYC,” report #28, aired 10/3/67, WNYC T 1936]

Weinberg was also clear that while his primary purpose was informational, he was animated by strongly held convictions as well:

“After all, we have no product to ‘sell’ over WNYC except information about what is happening ‘Around New York.’ My object, therefore, is to give my listeners information, and one man’s personal opinion, about what is happening in the ‘building and rebuilding’ of the city and the region in which we all live, work, and try to enjoy ourselves.”

He also defined his project’s geographical scope: “New York” to Weinberg was the “entire metropolitan region.” But at the same time, he was frank about his areas of particular involvement and expertise, where his deep local knowledge ran deepest: Manhattan (especially Greenwich Village); Riverdale and environs in the Bronx; and parts of Westchester and southwestern Connecticut. (He owned homes in Greenwich Village and Ridgefield, CT, and owned additional property in Riverdale and Spuyten Duyvil.)

He divided the broadcasts into four categories, which he maintained throughout:

“Critiques” of new buildings: “I play a role on the air, similar to that of radio critics of plays, concerts, or art exhibits, giving one man’s opinion of a new creation or performance in the arts in order that the

listening public may have a slightly better understanding of it.”

“Reviews” of architecture and planning publications “of general interest.”

“Reports” of “urgent and important” items under public review (including early Landmarks Commission hearings), with frequent calls for his audience to attend and/or testify.

“Comments:” [F]ree-ranging observations, subjective of course” of issues and developments in New-York area architecture and planning.

In the end, Weinberg’s “comments” outnumbered his other pieces almost two-to-one, and his personal priorities and predilections can be traced throughout the other more “objective” categories as well.

Weinberg wrote all the scripts himself, and recorded them in periodic taping sessions at the WNYC studios for broadcast. This allowed for a nearly uninterrupted series of commentaries over the five years, even during Weinberg’s frequent periods out of town. (A handful of scripts may have been read by WNYC on-air staff.) There were a number of gaps in the early 1970s, some due to illness on Weinberg’s part, and one during a 1971 period of station cutbacks during a city fiscal crisis.

As a final note, I should mention that like most of Weinberg’s other work on planning and preservation issues, this appears to have been a pro-bono effort. (Weinberg had independent income, traceable to his family’s success in real estate.) As he said in a letter to WNYC director Siegel pushing for more air time: “The one price you have to pay for the privilege of having me on the air as your architectural and planning critic is to give a few minutes every now and then to my concern about how the program is going.” [Weinberg to Siegel, 11/21/66.]

**“Critic-at-large,” and blogger before his time**

Weinberg described his role as that of “critic-at-large in architecture and planning,” and used that phrase as his regular sign-off. This gave him the latitude to address an *extremely* wide range of projects, sites, and issues, from macro-scale regional planning right down to where mid-town Manhattan office workers could still get a decent lunch. With no one to answer to but himself, he was free to choose his own bi-weekly topics, finding his inspiration from building openings, press accounts, public hearings, chance encounters and more, threading a lifetime of personal and professional experience through the prism of current events.

His persistent inclusion of the word “planning” was conscious and significant: although he clearly felt that it was important to extend the presence of serious architectural criticism to radio, he also perceived the need to discuss broader planning issues alongside the new building designs. This distinction, along with his frequent references to articles and reviews in the local press, also makes clear his awareness of the journalistic context of his radio work. While collegial on the surface, it may also hint at an implicit criticism of the general tendency of press and public alike to focus on details—buildings, in this case—rather than the bigger urbanistic picture. This persistent awareness of the larger context informs all of his comments, and for that matter, his work in general.

The broadcasts combine the intimacy of spoken-word radio with an awareness of the broadest audience that Weinberg, accustomed to working alone or within committees, was ever able to reach. Unlike the steady stream of articles and reviews he wrote for professional journals, or the correspondence, memos, and reports he circulated in government and policy circles, or even his steady output of letters-to-the-editor, his radio work allowed him to reach beyond policy makers and his profes-

sional peers to address the community at large over time. For every given broadcast, his audience ran the gamut, embracing insiders (pro and con), current actors, potential participants, and the general public.

On-air, he made every effort to engage his general audience as directly as possible. (Behind the scenes, he sent copies of many broadcast scripts to professional colleagues, government officials, and journalists.) He was constantly urging listeners to stay informed, to visit the sites he covered, to express their opinions by attending public hearings and contacting their elected officials, and ultimately, to cultivate the same kind of engaged concern for the physical city as he did. He regularly solicited their questions, comments, and suggestions, and received a steady stream of cards and letters in return. (Most were addressed to him at WNYC, but some were sent care of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, an understandable mistake given his strong support and detailed understanding of the landmarks process.) In turn, he responded to his listeners frequently, both on-air and off, answering questions, making referrals, and making a number of broadcasts directly inspired by listener suggestions. He was clearly gratified by the response, but may have been overwhelmed at times: “I greatly appreciate receiving your views and questions, even though I cannot help you find an apartment, which is a frequent request.” [“Rules for Advertising Signs in Historic Districts,” comment #301, aired 4/1/71]

For roughly five years, Weinberg was engaging not just in public service, public advocacy, and public education, but also in public *performance*. An independent, volunteer commentator, he was accountable only to his own high standards. (As he said in one broadcast devoted to puncturing myths, “...it does help to be right about things, if and when there is a way of discovering the truth.” [“Some Popular Fallacies,” comment # 161, aired 1/23/69.]

His broadcasts combined information with opinion in equal measure, and were designed simultaneously to educate and to persuade, his goal “to spur the thinking, and eventually the discrimination and taste, of the average citizen.” [“Synthetic Antiquarianism in Building,” comment #2, 10/14/66] This was activism, aimed not so much at “organizing” per se as at educating one listener at a time. At the same time, it incorporated a running dialog with government, neighborhood groups, and the press. (The full extent of this multi-layered dialog awaits further research in the Weinberg archives.)

Taken together, Weinberg’s WNYC broadcasts form a body of work with intriguing echoes in today’s connected world. With his rhythm of regular installments, his broad thematic coverage, his blend of personal and objective observations, and the accompanying give-and-take between author and audience, the radio critic-at-large resembles nothing so much as a blogger before his time.

In fact, the only thing missing is “multi-media content,” particularly images, but as early as 1967, Weinberg had something to say about that as well:

Since pictures cannot come across on the radio, I try the best I can to describe the buildings or areas I refer to. I rely on my listeners’ memory and familiarity with the scene to visualize what I am talking about. [“Architecture and Planning over WNYC.” report #28, 10/3/67, WNYC T 1936.]

In 1971, he returned to the subject, this time in a letter to *New York Times* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable:

I just wish that I could have a little more than four minutes that I am allowed on the air, and that some form of broadcasting will emerge that is not television but

where a radio receiving set can project on the wall a slide or two illustrating what the speaker is talking about. [Weinberg to ALH, 2/4/71.]

With the internet, that form of broadcasting has finally arrived, but Robert Weinberg did not live to see it.

### **Building and rebuilding New York**

For the most part, Weinberg uses his broadcasts to discuss specific sites and issues, rather than to espouse general principles. This is especially true when it comes to historic preservation issues. But all his radio pieces are underlain by the same sensibility, and week by week, a certain philosophy emerges, an approach that embraces historic preservation, but only as part of a much more complex whole. Coordinating intersecting initiatives and reconciling conflicting needs is of course what planning is all about, and Weinberg’s priorities are clearly closely tied to his professional background in urban planning. But this sense of the bigger picture also has more particular implications for his take on preservation.

Weinberg expressed this in a 1962 letter to Whitney North Seymour, who had invited Weinberg to join the committee to nominate the first members of the Landmarks Commission. Although he accepted the invitation, he also added that

“...I do want to repeat that I am much disturbed by the use of the word “preservation” in the title of the official set-up. This smacks too much of archeological, looking-backward, rear-guard actions and romantic sentimentality...[the commission should be] positive, forward-looking, planning and not be limited in its charter to nothing more than the prohibition of destruction of monuments of days gone by.” [Weinberg to Seymour, 1962, quoted in Hurwitz, 2005.]

For Weinberg, deciding what or what not to *save* cannot really be separated from deciding what or what not to *build*. He casts a wide net, setting landmark designations and new construction side-by-side with restorations (and sometimes demolitions) of historic structures, all in the context of how to understand what was going on in the urban scene, and how perhaps, to influence it for the better. In his broadcasts, as in his professional approach, Weinberg covers historic preservation in the larger context of urban planning, just as he covers architecture, transportation, housing, zoning and other issues. This echoes the varied and inclusive context of the built environment itself, where historic structures and new buildings stand side-by-side, and where construction and renovation, demolition and adaptive re-use are carried out simultaneously. Weinberg doesn't say it in so many words, but in the unceasing process that is the "building and rebuilding of New York," everything is connected.

This building and rebuilding is a dynamic *physical* process, of course, and is often seen as out of control. But Weinberg sees it as a *civic* process as well, and more importantly, sees that the civic and the physical sides of the process must be considered together. His broadcast comments on preservation issues reflect this throughout, focusing less on where to man the barricades than on how preservation fits in the context of the changing city.

### **Civic process—preservation, planning, and community involvement**

The 1960s saw major transformations in historic preservation and urban planning in New York. Weinberg was an actor in these changes, and a commentator on them as well.

He began his broadcasts in 1966, just a year after the New York City Landmarks Law was enacted. The passing of the law and creation of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, were the culmination of nearly a generation of

preparatory work that had included an early survey of important pre-World-War-1 buildings (1952–58, published 1963), the architectural walking tours of Henry Hope Read (beginning in 1956), and the New York Community Trust's marking program (1957). In 1956, the state legislature had enacted legislation enabling local preservation commissions drafted by Albert Bard. Weinberg's home neighborhood of Greenwich Village was involved in the movement from early on: the local planning board had called for a "special 'historic' zone" as early as 1959; the next year, neighborhood advocates introduced a successful zoning measure to head off a threatened wave of demolitions and out-of-scale new construction, and another neighborhood group succeeded in saving the Jefferson Market Courthouse from demolition.

Although the full extent of Weinberg's involvement remains hidden in the archives, we know that Weinberg participated in many of these early steps, both city-wide and on the local Greenwich Village level. He contributed to early catalogs of historic buildings, collaborated with Bard on the *Community Planning and Appearance* report, chaired the AIA New York's Committee on Historic Buildings for a time, and served on the nominating committee for the new Landmarks Preservation Commission. In the Village, he served on the local planning board, probably from its inception and was also instrumental in the stop-gap zoning measure of 1960.

This turning point in historic preservation was paralleled by important changes in urban planning taking place at the same time. Comprehensive urban planning had been marginalized in New York for two decades under Robert Moses, and as his influence waned, the City Planning Commission shifted to a more active role. One early and important change was the complete revamping of the city's zoning regulations in 1961. Other changes were more gradual, as new and existing city agencies

turned away from the large-scale slum clearance and urban renewal projects of the post-war period, toward a less disruptive and more responsive approach to urban redevelopment.

By 1963, revisions to the city charter had made community planning boards an official part of the city-wide planning review process. The concept for these decentralized committees to debate and address local planning issues had first been suggested by the Citizens Union in 1947 (probably with Union member Weinberg's direct participation). In the early 1950s, Robert Wagner, then Manhattan Borough President, established twelve such boards in Manhattan on a preliminary basis. Among these was Community Planning Board #2 in Greenwich Village, where Weinberg would serve for almost 25 years. ["Respect for Planning at the Local Level," comment #274, aired 10/6/70.] These changes accelerated under Mayor John Lindsay (1965–73), who extended the notion of decentralization to include education as well as urban planning, establishing a system of local school boards as well. [Jackson, 1995, 232–234. Stern et al., 1995, 1114–49.]

Weinberg was acutely aware of the changes he was witnessing in urban planning in New York. When City Planning Commissioner Lawrence Orton retired in 1969 after thirty-one years on the Commission, Weinberg took the opportunity to devote an entire broadcast to "a history of New York's Planning Commission and, indeed, of the process of planning in this city." ["The City's Planning Commission Enters a New Phase," comment #222, aired 12/9/69, revised 1/6/70.]

After decades of public engagement in planning and architectural issues, Weinberg was a veteran of committee work and public hearings. Although he was a committed advocate of informed public involvement in the planning process, he was also well acquainted with the disadvantages of wide-open debate. His

long experience in Greenwich Village, one of the cradles of community activism in the city, had exposed him to both the best and the worst of this evolving public process.

In 1967, on the eve of the city council's final vote on the community board system, he gave a last push for the concept, but included a warning about public participation:

He contrasts two scenes in City Hall's stately Board of Estimate chamber. On the one hand, he contemplates the room's elegant architecture and 150-year history of reasoned discussion, both, he fancies, rooted in building architect Joseph Mangin's training in late-18th-century France, land of both Enlightenment and revolution.

On the other hand, he presents us with a "typical" New York city hearing:

hard-working, and undoubtedly well-intentioned people yelling their heads off, repeating their arguments endlessly, and generally behaving like a mob of bad-mannered, uninhibited juvenile delinquents.

He looks with hope to the new local boards to streamline the new multi-tiered system of public input:

When the local boards are in full, official operation it will be easier, more convenient and much more sensible to hash out planning problems in your own communities, and then come to City Hall well-prepared, well-informed and present your opinion in a manner that will neither irritate nor bore the city-wide officials who must come to a decision, but will impress them and convince them.

His is a vote for democracy without the chaos, of a system for planned debate that promises to shed more light than heat on vexing planning issues. "Reasoned, brief, non-repetitive

argument,” he concludes, “goes further than mob tactics and emotional outbursts.” [“The Public, the Local Planning Boards and the City Planning Commission,” comment #76, aired 10/10/67, WNYC T 1940.]

Weinberg returned to these themes in a later broadcast on “advocacy planning,” a recently coined term for an emerging model of community involvement that links planning and design professionals with community members and government officials: “[C]ommunities want to have a hand in determining how they will develop physically as well as socially and politically,” but only within reason and in good faith. Local advocates shouldn’t be seeking “community control” in a “crude and childish” anti-establishment sense, but where “the community works intelligently, carefully and with thoughtfulness, in cooperation with and confidence in, the administrative agencies of the city and borough.” Such efforts transcend merely “fighting city hall” to achieve truly positive community-based planning. [“Advocacy Planning,” comment #188, aired 5/22/69]

Weinberg locates the historical roots of the push for advocacy planning in American democracy itself, in the old tradition of the New England town meeting, revitalized recently in communities like his own Greenwich Village as a reaction to “75 years of centralization” in urban government. In fact, he places the Village front and center in the vanguard of the movement, starting with the 1938 battle to save Washington Square Park from the traffic plans of Robert Moses, and developing through zoning battles in the 1940s and the fight to save the Jefferson Market Courthouse at the end of the 1950s.

And if I speak of this with some pride, it is because it is my own home community. I do not pretend any false modesty because I do believe that we, in the Village, have been setting an example for what may be

attained in other communities...What makes all this possible...is that ours is a community of very diverse people; economically, ethnically, culturally, and politically. It is not dominated by any one group nor luckily the scene of strife between two equally balanced groups, but is, in truth, a well integrated, balanced community of every type of opinion and family activity. [“Advocacy Planning,” comment #188, aired 5/22/69]

In his broadcasts, he extensively covered a wide range of projects in Greenwich Village that were shaped at least in part by community involvement, albeit with an equally wide range of outcomes. (In other reports, he also examined similar issues elsewhere in the city, including the Ruppert Brewery, the Municipal Asphalt Plant, the Squadron A Armory, discussed below, and initiatives in Harlem by the advocacy planners Urban Deadline [“The Bard Citation,” report #49, aired 5/1/69], and by the City Planning Commission in four Bronx neighborhoods [“Planning with People in the Bronx,” comment #136, aired 9/1/68].)

In the context of the Village, he discussed four projects and battles in particular: the Greenwich Village Historic District, the Greenwich Village Waterfront Planning Study, the West Village Houses, and Washington Square Park.

### **Greenwich Village Historic District**

The Greenwich Village Historic District was designated in 1969, and with roughly 2000 buildings, it was by far the largest and most varied historic district in the city to date. The new district was an important step in the New York preservation movement’s evolution away from a purely curatorial approach to a more holistic, urbanistic one. As later observers have commented, Village preservation efforts were never just about architecture; they were as much about “history, livability, social heterogeneity, and artistic ambience.”

The full story of the district's creation goes beyond the scope of this project, and the full exploration of Weinberg's significant involvement awaits further research in his professional papers. (One example that Rudie Hurwitz's research has brought to light is Weinberg's instrumental role in effecting stop-gap zoning revisions in 1960 to eliminate a loophole allowing over-scaled new construction. The measure blocked more than 90% of the projects filed for approval.)

Weinberg's on-air public comments concerning the district, in three separate broadcasts spread over more than two years, focused on the long and drawn-out final phase of the designation process. At issue were concerns about legal challenges to the designation, and the Landmarks Commission's response to those concerns. Preservation advocates were adamant and nearly unanimous in their support for the single, large district that had been originally proposed. Opponents fought to block any district at all, and threatened legal action. The Commission had floated a third, "compromise" position, consisting of a cluster of 18 smaller districts, protecting the most architecturally and historically significant buildings, but omitting the intervening fabric of more ordinary, "background" structures.

Twice Weinberg addressed this question of boundaries and scope, laying out the three positions, expressing his strong support for a single, large district, and exhorting his listeners to express their opinions to the commission. In an attempt to inform and reassure nervous property owners, he repeated his attempts to clarify the distinction between the relatively tight controls on individual landmarks and the more flexible ones imposed on buildings within historic districts. He underlined the threat of inaction or half-measures, balefully entitling his February 1967 report "Last Call for Greenwich Village."

But when the Village received historic designation as a single, large historic district in May 1969, Weinberg announced the good news with obvious pleasure. He dropped his usual editorial distance to identify with district supporters. He reiterated his description of the Village as the quintessential historic district (and community), its essence lying in the sum of its parts:

[A]side from a few outstanding large structures...the visual character of the Village and the quality of life that is reflected by this scene consists not so much in the character of individual buildings, each of them as such, but in the character of the community and its scene as a whole. [Stern et al., 1995, 1144–45. Hurwitz, 2005. "Greenwich Village Historic District," report #12, aired 1/13/67. "Last Call for Greenwich Village," report #15, aired 2/6/67. "Greenwich Village Historic District," comment #190, aired 5/29/69]

### **Greenwich Village Waterfront Development Study**

In 1968, a small grant from the Manhattan Borough President's office allowed Greenwich Village Community Board 2 to commission a planning study of the West Village waterfront. The innovative project was conceived by the board as a pilot project in advocacy planning, and was the first city-funded, locally directed planning initiative in New York history. The project goals were developed in advance by a committee of community residents, and it was carried out as a close collaboration between community members and the consultants, a young architectural firm called Beyer & Blinder.

Weinberg cited the project in two reports, first as one example among many of sound, locally-based planning, and later as the subject of a dedicated broadcast, summarizing the project goals and early findings, and highlighting the specific, tangible, and locally-driven

approach of the project as a prototype for other similar initiatives in the city. ["Advocacy Planning," comment #188, 5/22/69. "A Community Supported Waterfront Study," comment #290, 2/9/71]

### **West Village Houses**

Washington Street (west side),  
from Morton to Bank Streets

Perkins & Will, 1963 (completed 1974)

Of the many Greenwich Village struggles against "cataclysmic urban renewal" and top-down city planning, the greatest was the 15-year effort to realize the neighborhood's plan for the West Village Houses. Richard Plunz has called this "the longest and hardest-fought battle for community self-control over development ever waged in New York City."

After blocking a 1961 city plan to study a section of the far West Village for large-scale redevelopment, community members went on to develop an alternative housing plan of their own. Among the local leaders was Jane Jacobs, whose book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was published the same year.

The new design included almost five hundred apartments, housed in clusters of five- and six-story buildings on sites scattered along a seven-block stretch of Washington Street. In contrast to typical government-planned housing and redevelopment projects of the previous two decades, there was minimal displacement of existing residents or businesses and minimal demolition of existing structures. The new construction was carefully tailored as infill, located mostly on sites already cleared by the recent demolition of the southern section of the decommissioned High Line elevated freight railroad.

The project was delayed for years, primarily because of opposition to the proposal from various city agencies still committed to the post-war model of massive high-rise urban re-

newal schemes. Objections focused on the design's cost-saving construction methods, its financing, its call for common outdoor space (considered difficult and expensive to maintain), and its low-rise, contextual scale: its walk-up apartments weren't seen as appealing to the middle-class occupants the project was meant to serve.

Although changing financial circumstances marred its final realization, the project was a turning point in urban housing initiatives. It served as a model for future projects across the five boroughs and around the nation, because of its low-rise scale, its non-invasive infill approach, and the close collaboration between community and designers.

As far as his own radio role was concerned, Weinberg didn't choose to make this one of his battles. (Further exploration in his papers may shed further light on the level of his actual off-air involvement.) He made only a single broadcast on the project, which aired in 1969, when the community was still two years away from winning all the approvals necessary for starting construction.

Searching for a midnight music broadcast, Weinberg describes himself stumbling instead on WNYC's live radio coverage of one of the public hearings on the project, which was "still going strong" at 2:30 am.

I was fascinated by the arguments presented by both sides, especially since I was personally acquainted with most of the speakers, both for and against: lengthy harangues by odd-ball characters such as Marshall Scolnik and Jane Jacobs and straight forward statements by local leaders like Arthur Stoliar and Charles Pagella.

In his comments, Weinberg didn't rehearse the project's long and difficult history. Instead, he chose first to focus narrowly on one of the main criticisms of the project, its walk-up

nature. He added his voice to the chorus of project supporters who'd been pointing out that low-rise, walk up buildings were exactly what helped make Greenwich Village so desirable. He concluded with a flat affirmation that the community had spoken: "This is what the West Village wants. It doesn't want clearance of its narrow old streets and big, impersonal high-rise apartment houses."

[“West Village Housing,” report #53, aired 9/2/69. Stern et al., 1995, 247–251. Plunz, 1990, 289–312.]

### **Washington Square Park**

Washington Square Park has been the subject of bitter struggles between community groups and city authorities since the late 1930s, when Robert Moses tried unsuccessfully to give over a significant portion of parkland to through-traffic. Although the issue of vehicular encroachment was finally resolved in favor of more park space in 1965, a bitter legacy of suspicion remained, and the city's renewed efforts that same year to reconstruct the park provoked another round of organized community opposition. (Conflicting versions of the park's future remain of issue today).

As Weinberg described the turning point of the project in the first of three broadcasts about the park, “[a]gain the community rose up in arms and said... ‘Look here, Mr. Commissioner, this is our park, our community, and we have our own ideas how the park should be fixed up if public money is spent on it.’”

Weinberg credits Parks Commissioner Newbold Morris's “good grace” to admit defeat, and in effect to say to the community, “‘Well, go ahead and come up with your own plan and we will see if we can build it.’ This was a real breakthrough and... marked the first official recognition of what we now call “advocacy planning.”

Weinberg made his first broadcast about the project in August of 1969, when ground was finally broken for the park rehabilitation. He

had spent the four previous years on the local committee charged with developing a design that could muster majority support in the community. In the end, he found both the process and the results flawed, and immediately after the work was completed in June 1971, he devoted two more broadcasts to an analysis of what, in his eyes, went wrong.

For Weinberg, the only way to answer the community's intensive recreational needs was to re-design the heavily-used park from scratch, discarding its existing layout (a legacy dating back to the 1870s) for the best that modern professionals could conceive. But because the design committee and its consulting landscape architect were encumbered by both the community's “squabbling” and the city's “departmental red tape,” the result was a prosaic rehabilitation of the existing park layout (minus the old traffic right-of-way that had carried Fifth Avenue bus traffic through the park). Because of the length and difficulty of the process, costs had ballooned to the point that many serious cuts had to be made as well.

The story is a curious one, involving a series of confrontations between the people and public officials, the exercise of community participation, and finally, an outcome, which some of us believe to be, at least, doubtful in terms of value received for public money and energy expended.

Weinberg had lived on Washington Square North since the 1930s, and had participated personally in all of the battles to save the park in the thirty-five years that followed. The disappointing outcome of that struggle would have confronted Weinberg every time he walked out his front door.

[“Cleaning up Washington Square Park,” comment #202, aired 8/12/69. “Washington Square Park Rehabilitation—Part 1,” comment #320, aired 6/15/71. “Washington Square Park Rehabilitation—Part 2,” comment #321, aired 6/17/71.]

### **Physical process—Adaptive Re-use**

In his broadcasts on specific historic buildings, Weinberg repeated no theme more than that of “future use.” It defined for him the single most effective route for ensuring the survival of historic buildings, even—and perhaps especially—those with landmark protection. [“Historic Preservation: True vs. False,” comment # 211, aired 9/25/69]

On the one hand, architects were responding to the problems of restoring newly landmarked structures and adapting them to modern use with ingenuity and imagination, giving Weinberg a number of projects to celebrate. On the other, demonstrated “economic hardship” could trump the landmarks law in special cases, and did so in 1968, when the recently landmarked Jerome Mansion on Madison Square was demolished under the hardship clause.

### **Jefferson Market Library**

Originally Jefferson Market Courthouse,  
Third Judicial District  
425 Sixth Avenue  
Vaux & Withers, 1874–77

Restoration and library conversion  
Giorgio Cavaglieri, 1967

In a 1967 broadcast entitled “From Courthouse to Library,” Weinberg discusses the recent restoration and conversion of the Jefferson Market Courthouse building on Sixth Avenue at 10th Street. With the opening of a new branch library in the restored structure, it immediately became the most conspicuous example in New York of the adaptive re-use of a landmarked historic structure, and a celebratory exclamation point at the end of a long battle to save the building. As Weinberg says at the opening of his broadcast on the subject, “At long last the citizens of Greenwich Village...have been rewarded...”

He presents the project as a textbook example of how to create a “useable future” for an historic building, calling the courthouse-turned-library

...an admirable example [of the] sturdy old structures built in the Victorian period, that were built with fine materials and workmanship now no longer available. That era has left us many monuments of great substance and beauty that can still be put to good use and well serve the needs of today.

He celebrates architect Giorgio Cavaglieri’s interior work, with its “tasteful incorporation” of modern equipment with the “Victorian style wood trim, symbolic stone carving, intricate brickwork, and stained glass windows.” As to the exterior, he praises the way it has been cleaned and restored without erasing the patina of “venerable age.”

But going beyond the specific virtues of the project itself, Weinberg cites its success in support of the landmarks process as a whole:

[T]his restoration is an admirable example of what can be done with a 100-year old building that is well located, well shaped, and well built, and it proves that the Landmarks Commission has been justified in its efforts to turn our vacated landmarks to useful contemporary purposes...For our architectural heritage can best be preserved not by the artificial embalming of a landmark building as a sterile monument or museum, but by remodeling it, whenever possible, to serve contemporary activity.

Cavaglieri’s work, both at Jefferson Market and at the Public Theatre (then undergoing a phased conversion from library to theater complex) belies the claim that “modern architectural theory” demands that buildings be purpose-built and designed from scratch in order to fulfill a given program: “[T]hese two

remodeled landmarks show that a building conceived as a library can become a fine theater, while one that was built as a courthouse can become an excellent library.”

[“Courthouse into Library,” critique #10; 11/28/67; WNYC T 1955]

### **Public Theater**

Originally Astor Library, later Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society  
425 Lafayette Street  
Alexander Saeltzer (1853), Griffith Thomas (1869), Thomas Stent (1881)

Theater conversion  
Giorgio Cavallieri, 1967–76

### **New School Graduate Faculty Center**

Originally Lane clothing store  
Fifth Avenue at 14th Street  
Cordes, Bartos & Mihnos, 1952.

Conversion to New School Graduate Faculty Center  
Frost Associates, 199–70.

Echoing his “Courthouse into Library” broadcast on the Jefferson Market Library, Weinberg’s “Department Store into University” discusses the New School’s 1969 conversion of a 14th Street retail structure into an academic building (retaining the high ceilings and escalators the former Lane’s store).

[“Department Store into University,” critique #36, aired 6/19/69]

### **Westbeth**

Originally Bell Labs, American Telephone & Telegraph Co.  
155 Bank Street  
Cyrus W. Eidlitz and others, 1861–98.

Converted to artists’ housing  
Richard Meier & Associates, 1969

When completed in 1969, the conversion of the former Bell Labs complex into artists’ housing was the largest such adaptive re-use

project ever in the United States. The massive structure occupied an entire block on West Street at Bethune Street, on the Hudson River waterfront of the West Village. With funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the J M Kaplan Fund, and the Federal Housing Administration, architect Richard Meier created hundreds of raw loft units as live-work space. In his broadcast on the project, Weinberg praises the project’s ingenuity on many levels, citing its cost-saving exploitation of the existing structure’s flexible interiors and grandfathered bulk to spare. He also points out that it was conceived to meet the housing needs of students, artists, single people, and others generally not included in standard low- and middle- income projects.

At the end of his report, Weinberg also mentions another “special feature” of the Westbeth site: the elevated tracks of the High Line, the then-recently-closed freight railroad that terminated at St. John’s Terminal south of Canal Street. The tracks passed through the Westbeth complex, as they did a number of commercial structures along their route up the West Side of Manhattan. Weinberg mentions a pending study of possible reactivation of High Line as far west side rapid transit, from Manhattan Community College at Washington Market clear to Yonkers, “relieving the pressure on the west side IRT subway.” (Although this conversion to passenger use never took place, and the southern sections of the viaduct have since been demolished, the High Line is now in the process of being converted into an elevated pedestrian promenade.)

[“The West Beth Project,” comment #112, aired 5/2/68. Plunz, 1990, 316. Stern et al., 1995, 251–54.]

### **Ruppert Brewery**

In August of 1968, plans were approved for the redevelopment of the four-block site of the massive Ruppert Brewery in Manhattan’s Yorkville neighborhood. Founded by Jacob Ruppert in 1867, the complex had eventually

grown to include thirty-five buildings between Second and Third Avenues from 90th to 94th Street. Its closing in 1965 and subsequent designation as an urban-renewal zone led to protracted discussions between city agencies and community groups about the area's fate, with local groups pushing for large amounts of subsidized housing. The resulting compromise plan called for complete demolition of the brewery buildings and their replacement with a superblock containing mostly high-rise structures to accommodate large numbers of subsidized middle- and low-income housing units on landscaped grounds.

Broadcast as demolition bids were being received for the fortress-like complex, Weinberg's comments decry the plan as a misguided and "expensive exercise in trying to get moderate and low-cost housing into one of the most expensive and luxurious sections of Manhattan's East Side." Concerned that this uneconomic use of the site would be a burden on tax-payers for decades to come, he offers an alternative proposal: to convert the existing structures of the brewery complex to high-end retail, restaurants, clubs, etc. He links this model to such recent precedents as the Westbeth artists housing in the former Bell Telephone Labs complex in the West Village, and to the recently opened marketplaces at Ghirardelli Square and the Cannery, both occupying former industrial spaces in San Francisco.

Weinberg sees such a project as suitable on a number of fronts: upscale retail in an increasingly upscale residential district; lower up-front costs, with less demolition and less new construction; higher tax-revenue going forward; proceeds of sale available to fund low- and middle-income units elsewhere, without requiring additional financing generated by market-rate rentals. ["The Highest and Best Use of the Old Ruppert Brewery," comment #132, aired 8/22/68. Stern et al, 1995, 842-3.]

Two-and-a-half years later, Weinberg revisits the issue with a requiem for the now-demolished brewery,

...that gigantic agglomeration of solid, red brick buildings adorned with cupolas, clock-towers, fortress-like turrets and what-have-you. They are all gone now, reduced to rubble, and the three-block site will be developed, at great expense, for housing, at three different price levels, and at least one school.

After reprising his earlier festival market place proposal and the examples from San Francisco, he adds an additional parallel: the recent proposal to preserve and convert Washington, DC's Old Post Office (1899) to mixed public use with a hotel, commercial space, restaurants, and entertainment venues (realized 1975-83).



*Old Post Office, Washington, D.C. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Theodor Horydczak Collection, LC-H824-T01-1216-001*

He calls it “sheer folly” for the city not to profit from commercial use at Ruppert site, and not to build the project’s subsidized housing elsewhere, where the costs are lower.

Well, New York missed out on this one. I don’t know what other old buildings in our city might still be saved and made over as in San Francisco and Washington. Too bad that we, in New York, do not have the imagination (or is it the courage?) to invest in new and more profitable uses for sturdy old buildings, instead of demolishing them and building new ones at twice the cost. [“A Tale of Three Cities: or How New York Missed the Boat,” comment #297, aired 2/11/71.]

### **Municipal Asphalt Plant**

Asphalt Green Sports & Arts Center

East River Drive at East 90th Street  
Robert Allan Jacobs, for Kahn & Jacobs, 1941–44

When the closing of the Municipal Asphalt Plant on the East River at 90th Street was announced in late 1968, Weinberg was quick to bring his listeners’ attention to the complex, which was completed in 1944. In the first of three broadcasts on the subject, he focuses particularly on the plant’s “mixing chamber” building, housed in a striking parabolic arch of reinforced concrete rising above the East River Drive. He calls it “handsome structure...a real landmark for about 30 years,” and described the “raging” community debate over new use for site, split between supporters of park space and of housing.

He calls the plant’s design “a real rarity in its time,” when the “tacky eclecticism” of 30’s still prevailed, and “when it was customary to cloak every public building in a phony mantle of classic or so-called ‘colonial’ trimmings.” He notes the building’s inclusion in a 1944 juried exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art,

“Built in USA, 1932–44,” showcasing the 47 best-designed structures in country for the period. (The mixing chamber’s parabolic arch was the first application of such construction technology in the United States.)

As an aside, he also points out the way the buildings’ novelty has worn off, now that “interesting structural shapes...have become almost routine by the 1960’s,” thanks in large part to the unconventional designs showcased at the two New York World’s Fairs of 1939 and 1967.



*1939 World’s Fair—Trylon & Perisphere, New York. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, LC-G612-T01-35097*

Weinberg takes pains to describe the plant’s origins accurately, presenting it as an integral part of the East River Drive project, supervised by Harvey Stevenson and Walter Binger, for Manhattan Borough President Stanley Isaacs. With this careful attribution, he was able to make a transition into one of his rare but pointed digs at his old foe Robert Moses.

(Weinberg had unsuccessfully challenged Moses Plans for the Henry Hudson Parkway in the late 1930s).

Weinberg recalls the effect of the plant's "striking appearance" on the public, and on "that now extinct volcano, Robert Moses." In 1944, Moses had criticized the plant as a "horrible modernistic design," and "the most hideous waterfront structure ever inflicted on a city by a combination of architectural conceit and official bad taste," adding that it was time that "a restraining hand be put on freakish experiments which are unnecessarily ugly and obtrusive."

Weinberg ascribes Moses' "derogatory blasts" to his "still smarting" from Borough President Issacs' having blocked him from control of Drive project.

The 'great coordinator's' Philistine tastes would never have allowed his hiring draftsmen to use their imagination and conceive of anything so soaringly original as to enclose one of the various utilitarian operations of making asphalt in a simple shell of striking shape.

Correspondence filed with the broadcast script in the Weinberg archives also includes a note from the original architect of the Asphalt Plant, Robert Allan Jacobs, thanking Weinberg for sending him a copy of the script. Jacobs goes on to write that,

I love what you have to say about Bob Moses. An interesting anecdote is as follows: "When the Little Flower presided over opening ceremonies at the plant he said, 'Now I understand there is a difference of opinion between two of my Commissioners' (namely Moses and Binger) 'as to the esthetic qualities of this building. However, wouldn't it be dreadful if we all fell in love with the same girl.'"

Thus disposing of Moses, almost 25 years after the fact, Weinberg presents an alternative proposal of his own: Whatever happens to the rest of the "sprawling" full block site, the city should retain the parabolic concrete shell of the 'mixing plant' to serve as shelter for "year-round play or other community activity."

Weinberg sent a script of the broadcast to Landmarks Commission Chair Harmon Goldstone, asking him to reach out "informally" to "whatever public agency intends to take over the...property and plan for its future use. They must be convinced of its value as a landmark before they are irrevocably committed to demolishing it." Further research may show what influence Weinberg may have over the plant's ultimate fate.

Not to take any chances, however, he concludes the broadcast with one of his exhortations to his listeners: "Take your cameras and photograph it from all angles and directions, and in all atmospheric conditions, before this unique architectural landmark is actually attacked by the wreckers."

["The Parabolic Asphalt Plant," comment #149, aired 11/21/68. Moses' 1944 comments quoted in detail in Glenn Fowler, "Arch of Asphalt Plant to Survive." *New York Times*. 9/12/71. Jacobs to Weinberg, 1/16/68. Weinberg to Goldstone, 12/10/68.]

In 1969, when the NYC Education Construction Fund released plans for a new school and playground on the site, the plant's imminent demolition was announced. Weinberg devoted a second broadcast to the site, reiterating his proposal to incorporate the "parabolic landmark" into the design, to give it a "useful future." After repeating verbatim most of his previous broadcast on the subject, he concluded,

I hope, however, that the order to demolish is never given, because it will have oc-

curred to the designer of the new school that, by using this handsome shell for indoor recreation, they can save the taxpayers money as well as preserve a unique landmark.["The Asphalt Plant on the East River," comment #208, aired 9/11/69]

In his third and final broadcast on the parabolic mixing chamber in late 1970, Weinberg celebrates that its "useful future" seems assured: Under a mixed-use master plan for the plant site prepared by Davis & Brody, the parabolic arch will be re-used as part of a sports and recreation center accompanying the housing and school buildings elsewhere on the site. The mixing plant was saved, and without the benefit of landmark status. (The structure was landmarked in 1976.)

["A Useful Future for the Former Asphalt Plant," report #64, aired 12/17/70]

**"New uses for old houses," 1:  
the rowhouse revival**

Weinberg House, 21 Washington Square North  
other Weinberg property?  
19 Washington Square North  
58-60 Morton Street

Weinberg considered the entire city his beat, but he had a particular and direct connection to New York rowhouses. Although raised in an apartment in the Apthorpe on the Upper West Side, he lived his entire adult life in a mid-nineteenth-century rowhouse at 21 Washington Square North. He also owned and managed other rowhouses as rental properties. As an architect and planner, and as a Greenwich Village homeowner and landlord, he had a particularly layered understanding of what it meant to adapt a hundred-year old building to suit mid-twentieth-century living.

During the period of his radio work, Weinberg owned two houses in the Village, converted to accommodate a total of six families, including his own, and he returned periodically to differ-

ent aspects of "in-town" living in his on-air commentaries.

As a planner, he succinctly analyzed the difficulty of working with this building type: These nineteenth-century rowhouses fell outside the range of publicly-aided housing programs; with they're relatively high unit cost, such houses were beyond the reach of the families targeted by the city's various subsidized housing programs; furthermore, their idiosyncrasies made them unsuitable for centrally-planned renovation en masse.

Based on his own experience as both owner and renovator, he outlines the type of residential renovation that was transforming the city's "brownstone neighborhoods:" conversion to modern one-, two- or more family use on the interior, while "preserving the character of the exterior of the building, as an element in a historic district."

Although by late 1967 he can already report that few such houses are left in "Brooklyn Heights, Greenwich Village, Upper East Side, and now, even, in Chelsea," they are "still to be obtained at prices low enough to make the finished, renovated project economical for the average middle-income family who would enjoy this sort of living" in Park Slope, Cobble Hill, Boerum Hill; Upper West Side, Harlem, and even Hoboken. His final advice: do your homework, and make sure you get an architect ["Renovating Private Houses for In-Town Living," comment #79, aired 10/26/67. "The Future Use of Landmark Buildings," comment #280, aired 11/5/70.]

Alongside this kind of encouragement to new generations of urban homesteaders, Weinberg also offered this expression of solidarity and encouragement in the battle against bureaucratic red tape:

...compliance with the law puts owners to some delays and inconvenience, as is

being brought home to me right now when I, myself, am engaged in making a minor alteration of my own house, which lies in a historic district, and I am obliged to submit my plans for approval by still one more city agency, which involves time, expense, and trouble, which any owner resents. But if our city is to retain its character as it continues to grow, and its continued growth at a more rapid pace than before is inevitable, we must support the Commission in their designation of individual buildings as landmarks, as well as setting aside entire areas of historic districts. [“The Future Use of Landmark Buildings,” comment #280, 11/5/70]

## “New Uses for Old Houses” 2: The Mansion Problem

### Leonard Jerome house

Madison Avenue at Twenty-Sixth Street  
Thomas R. Jackson, 1859.  
Later, Union League Club  
Later still, Manhattan Club  
Replaced by NY Merchandise Mart  
Emery Roth & Sons, 1973

In an extension of his interest in everyday rowhouses, Weinberg also repeatedly explored the theme of what to do with the city’s historic mansions, extravagant private homes now no longer viable in their original use:

It is seldom that a large mansion built in the days when servants were plentiful and families opulent and hospitable, can be kept up in these days, and when they come on the market they either are used for institutional purposes or demolished for reconstruction as part of the site for a new building. When they are of historic or architectural significance, they are sometimes given a temporary reprieve under present landmarks law, but even this may not save them if no new use can be

found. [“New Uses for Old Houses,” comment #94, aired 1/25/68]

Weinberg’s comments were triggered by the imminent demolition of the Leonard Jerome mansion on Madison Square, one of the few individually designated landmarks to be torn down under the economic hardship clause of the landmark’s law. Originally built for financier Leonard Jerome (Winston Churchill’s grandfather), it was later used by two private clubs. It was sold to developers in 1965 as part of the site for a high-rise office building, just seven months ahead of being landmarked by the just-established Landmarks Commission. The owners challenged the designation in court without success, but later won permission to demolish the building on economic grounds.

On the one hand, such buildings’ value as landmarks is clear: “I believe it important for our city to retain intact some of these great, formal palaces built by the moguls of a generation ago.” (Traces of Weinberg’s nostalgia for old New York are clear as well.) [“Landmarks Preservation Commission Hearing,” report #5, aired 10/11/66.]

But to Weinberg, it is also clear that only *some* can be saved, and clear as well that on its own, “the [landmarks] law is not strong enough to protect such buildings permanently: they can be demolished if no use is found for them within a specified time...[W]e must help the Commission in finding appropriate future use for these buildings, many of them vacant, either by private means or public, for if no use can be found for them, they will eventually disappear, in spite of their all-too-temporary landmark classification.” [“The Future Use of Landmark Buildings,” comment #280, aired 11/5/70,]

Weinberg’s ideal solution involves finding a “private commercial owner, or privately-endowed, tax-exempt institution,” preferably

restoration-minded. These houses, “thus saved by being put to a useful future, especially when their fine interiors are retained and restored... help preserve on the inside, as well as the outside, a bit of the splendor of New York’s residential heritage of a more spacious era.”

Weinberg repeatedly cited a number of examples of this approach, including the James and Nanaline Duke house, on Fifth Avenue at 78th Street, and the group of early-twentieth-century houses known as Pyne-Davison row, which occupied an entire block front on the west side of Park Avenue between 68th and 69th Streets.

**New York University Institute of Fine Arts**  
originally James & Nanaline Duke house  
1 East 78th Street  
Horace Trumbauer, 1909–12

The Pyne-Davison buildings were landmarked in 1970. Three of the four had been saved from demolition a few years before by the Marquesa de Cuevas, granddaughter of John D. Rockefeller, who purchased the three and donated them to various institutions. One had been the site of a New York AIA event Weinberg attended, and he spoke highly of the way the building had been subjected to a “rare type of meticulous salvage, restoration and refurbishing”, with its “interior workmanship...so scrupulously repaired...[and the] spirit of its formal entertainment chambers so sumptuously revived” [“The Future Use of Landmark Buildings,” comment #280, aired 11/5/70,]

#### **Pyne-Davison row**

Americas Society  
formerly USSR UN delegation  
Originally Percy & Maude H. Pyne Residence  
680 Park Avenue  
Charles McKim, of McKim, Mead & White

Spanish Institute  
Originally Oliver D. & Mary Pyne Filley House  
684 Park Avenue  
McKim, Mead & White, 1925–26

Istituto Italiano di Cultura  
Originally William & Francesca Crocker  
Sloan House  
686 Park Avenue  
Delano & Aldrich, 1916–19

Consulate General of Italy  
Originally Henry P. & Kate T. Davison House  
690 Park Avenue  
Walker & Gillette, 1916–17

For other mansions on highly valuable development sites, Weinberg supported their use as museums or other cultural institutions, and cited the already extant example of the former Felix Warburg house on upper Fifth Avenue, donated to the Jewish Museum in 1947.

#### **Jewish Museum**

originally Felix & Frieda S. Warburg house  
C. P. H. Gilbert, 1907–09.

#### **Carnegie Mansion**

2 East 91st Street  
Babb, Cook & Willard, 1899–1903.

Cooper-Hewitt museum conversion  
Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Assocs, 1976.

But Weinberg was also attuned to the repercussions that such changes of use could have in surrounding communities, as in his December 1967 comments on the proposed transfer of the Cooper-Hewitt collections from the Cooper Union on Astor Place to the Andrew Carnegie mansion on upper Fifth Avenue. This would add one more museum to those already in the area, which included the Metropolitan Museum, the Jewish Museum, the Guggenheim, and the new Whitney. He cautions that concentrating too many cultural institutions together in one neighborhood runs the risk of “depriving other parts of the city of the liveliness and stimulation,” and of creating the same kinds of imbalance (and traffic congestion) created in the performing arts by Lincoln Center.

While he recognizes the importance of keeping the Cooper-Hewitt collections intact, he questions the wisdom of relocating them from Greenwich Village to the Upper East Side. He was not alone in his concerns, and quotes Carol Greitzer, Democratic District Leader of Greenwich Village: The locations for such institutions “should be treated as a planning matter...the role such institutions can play as focal points in helping revitalize neighborhoods should be recognized.” Why put the Cooper-Hewitt “cheek by jowl” with the Met, instead of finding a “more off-beat, creative solution?” Weinberg proposes none other than the Jerome mansion, at that time “about to be demolished for want of takers,” as a boost for Madison Square and Union Square, both then lacking in cultural institutions to “liven them up.” [“Relocating Cooper Union’s Museum, comment #86, aired 12/19/67, WNYC T 1937.]

Weinberg returned to the subject of museum distribution through a number of broadcasts spread over the next few years, continuing to link the issues of the preservation of landmark mansions, the planned cultural development of individual neighborhoods, and the expansion of major museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In 1970, the Met had announced plans for expansion on its Central Park site. In his broadcast, Weinberg demurs from commenting directly on the Metropolitan’s controversial plans, instead putting the museum’s growth into city-wide perspective: Why not disperse the expanding collections of the Met and other large museums “to various parts of the city where they may be more accessible to the public, and, at the same time, perhaps revitalize other neighborhoods?” Specifically, Weinberg suggests housing the Met’s proposed new American Wing at South Street Seaport, in the proposed reconstruction of the Fulton Street Market opposite Schermerhorn Row.

He proposes that another of the Met’s impending acquisitions be set up in the former J. P. Morgan mansion on Madison Avenue. On the heels of the Lutheran Church’s recent unsuccessful attempt to overturn the house’s landmark designation and develop the site, its acquisition by the Met could provide an “easy, lunch-hour excursion” for mid-town office workers (perhaps Weinberg himself, on occasion). As Weinberg is quick to point out, the Met just happens to have two new collections slated for new wings at the museum, both of which are discrete enough entities to be located elsewhere and retain their coherence: the Rockefeller Pre-Columbian Collection, or the Lehman Collection.

As Weinberg asked, why shouldn’t Manhattan’s rich cultural institutions “reach out to new audiences rather than talking to the same people over and over again?”

[“Our Growing Museums: Should they be enlarged or dispersed?” comment #233, aired 1/29/70. “The Future Use of Landmark Buildings,” comment #280, aired 11/5/70. “Downtown Manhattan Museums: The Whitney is One Up on the Met,” comment #330, aired 8/5/71.]



*Schermerhorn Row, South Street Seaport, looking southeast. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS NY, 31-NEYO,129A-2*

**“New uses for old houses,” 3:  
House Museums**

**Dyckman House**

4881 Broadway at 204th Street, Manhattan

**Wyckoff House**

5816 Clarendon Road, Brooklyn

**Bartow-Pell House**

895 Shore Road, Bronx

**Alice Austen House**

2 Hylan Boulevard, Staten Island

**Poe Cottage**

Kingsbridge Road and Grand Concourse, Bronx

In addition to the city’s inventory of historic mansions and rowhouses, Weinberg identified another category of domestic architecture worth keeping, drawing attention to it in a number of broadcasts.

He first describes the city’s dwindling stock of “ancient farmhouses” in February 1968. Impossible to convert to modern use, each house’s “future value lies in making it a sort of museum of its period...[to] be carefully preserved...as showpieces of New York’s rural life in times long past.” As positive examples, he cites the Dyckman House in Manhattan (already a museum) and the Wyckoff House in Brooklyn (then just landmarked, but endangered by planned roadwork). He devotes later broadcasts to the Bartow-Pell House in the Bronx (also already a museum), and the Alice Austen House (then just landmarked) in Staten Island. As an example of what *not* to do, he cites the Poe Cottage as trivial and inauthentic. [“Ancient Houses as Museum Pieces,” comment #96, aired 2/1/68. “The View from Staten Island,” report #35, aired 5/21/68. “The Pell-Bartow Mansion,” comment #225, aired 12/18/69.]

**Physical process—New Design in  
Historic Contexts**

A number of Weinberg’s comments on the general scene acknowledge the apparent chaos of the mid-60s building boom. But he sees continuity in it as well:

When one goes around New York these days, one sees new buildings of every sort going up—houses, apartments, stores, office buildings, churches and museums. One cannot help but notice one characteristic of New York that they have in common, which is that they have so little in common. Probably no great city in the world has ever produced so consistently an inconsistent style of architecture...

In contrast with most great European cities, each characterized by what he called its high point in a particular style,

new building in New York continues to be a mixture of the old and new, designed for various reasons by various architects, producing no clear-cut relationship between style and function, or between the creation of the new or the re-creation of the old. [“Synthetic Antiquarianism in Building,” comment #2, aired 10/14/66.]

This inconsistency results in a varied kind of context we would call “layered” today (although I have yet to find an example of Weinberg’s use of the term). Weinberg understood the city’s “true, historic districts” as the “rare pauses” in this layered landscape. To him, relatively cohesive enclaves such as Brooklyn Heights, Greenwich Village, Chelsea, Park Slope, “and a few others,” were precious, almost accidental exceptions to the general rule. (Equally notable were the city’s even rarer “large undertakings by a single ambitious owner,” such as Columbia University’s Morningside Heights campus, and Rockefeller Center.) [“The New Brutalism Comes to New York’s Side Streets,” critique #32, 11/7/68]



*Rockefeller Center from 515 Madison Ave. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, LC-G612-T-37401*

How then to judge, or more importantly, to promote “appropriateness” in new designs proposed for historic districts? Faced with the choice between adopting historical styles or contemporary ones, Weinberg came down firmly in the contemporary camp, like many of his professional peers. Very much a product of twentieth-century Modernism in his professional background, Weinberg rooted his criteria for excellence in architecture in a sense of authenticity and quality. Interestingly, he was firm enough in these convictions to apply these across the board, to historic and contemporary designs alike. In his broadcast “When is a Landmark not a Landmark?” he succinctly set out two standards to judge an architect’s work: “First, its genuineness as a design of its own period, *ancient or modern* [emphasis added]. Second, its intrinsic beauty as an ornament to the community.” [comment #218, 11/13/69]

In a series of broadcasts from 1967 to 1969, he presented his audience with a series of case studies in designing new buildings to take their place among the old.

### **Jehovah’s Witnesses Residence**

107 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn  
Ulrich Franzen & Associates, 1970.



*From rooftop of Watchtower Building, Brooklyn. Jet Lowe, photographer, 1982. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS, HAER NY, 31-NEYO,90-27*

The new building approved for the Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Brooklyn Heights Historic District was widely hailed as a triumph of the Landmarks review process. The property owner and its architects, the community, and the Landmarks Commission worked together to create a new benchmark for appropriate contemporary design in a historic context. It was particularly useful that such a success came when it did, in the thick of public debate over the historic district designation then proposed for Greenwich Village.

With one eye on Brooklyn Heights and one no doubt on the Village, Weinberg devoted two programs to the project, the first when the design was approved by the Commission in July 1967, and the second two years later when the building had nearly reached completion. He

used both to simultaneously praise the design, boost the landmarks process, and give his listeners a crash course in the meaning of “appropriateness” in historic districts.

In his first broadcast, “‘Appropriateness’ in Historic Districts,” Weinberg introduces the proposed new building as “a highly effective contemporary structure,” harmonious in scale and materials with the surrounding rowhouses. He took the occasion of the project’s approval as “a signal step forward...to improve public understanding of the objective of the landmarks law.”

He defines “appropriateness” first by what it is not, laying out two “false assumptions” ascribed to opponents of historic districting:

- 1) *All buildings in a landmark district are of landmark quality.* To this, he answers that districts by their very definition naturally include structures that are “manifestly incongruous, out-moded, or unsafe,” and that their reconstruction, demolition, or replacement would be desirable to all. Historic districts are not frozen in time; thoughtful change is permitted, and in fact, expected.
- 2) *All alterations or new construction within a historic district “must conform to some arbitrary historic style.”* Rather, “appropriate” means using “good taste and common sense” to be in keeping with “character and proportions” of surrounding context, *not* “archeological reproductions.”

In other words, “well-designed contemporary buildings...enhance the character of the neighborhood.”

[“‘Appropriateness’ in Historic Districts,” comment #58, aired 7/26/67]

Upon the project’s completion in 1969, he celebrates the outcome of the process once again, resulting in what he calls

a distinctly contemporary building which in every sense carries out the stated objective of the law, namely that a new building, far from being required to imitate any one of the many ancient styles in which a district like Brooklyn Heights abounds, should on the contrary, be an outstanding example of contemporary design, which, in materials and scale, not only relates to its neighbors but gives them additional character through its up-to-date [missing].

He relates a thumbnail history of the project, covering the early rejection of an initial series of “routine, pseudo-antique” design alternatives, and the beginning of the broadened community collaboration that produced the final proposal. Finally, after reading aloud the bulk of Thomas W. Ennis favorable feature article in the *New York Times*, Weinberg urges his listeners to see the new building, and

...come to understand the difference between, on the one hand, a pseudo-antique structure that is nothing but a sham, or just as bad, a clumsy modern building which fails to relate to adjacent buildings and the street scene and, on the other hand, a well-designed contemporary building, carefully and sensitively related to its neighbors. [“Jehovah Witnesses in an Historic District,” critique #41, aired 8/28/69]

### **Tenth Church of Christ, Scientist**

171 MacDougal, opposite McDougal Alley  
Originally factory & store, Renwick,  
Aspinwall & Russell, 1891

Church conversion, Victor Christ-Janer, 1967

In late 1966, a Christian Science congregation on MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village announced plans to renovate the six-story 19th-century loft building it had occupied since the late 1920s. Weinberg was well acquainted with the site—his home on Washington Square North was just around the corner—

and he had in fact corresponded in the past with church officials about his suggestions for the building. While the project did involve the adaptive re-use of the building's interior, it was the new facade that interested Weinberg the most.

On the interior, architect Victor Christ-Janer's renovation plan included an auditorium, reading rooms, offices, and other program spaces for the congregation's use. The exterior work was more radical: the architect proposed to replace the existing Romanesque-revival facade with an almost completely blank brick front, punctuated with three austere openings at the ground floor (the central one extended upwards to illuminate the auditorium), and capped with a linear corbelled cornice.

Although the site was within the boundaries of the proposed Greenwich Village Historic District, the Landmarks Commission had not yet approved the designation, so the building was not subject to Commission review. Nevertheless, the project's appropriateness was debated at the time. (Ada Louise Huxtable came out against it in the *Times*, calling it "not much better than bleak.") Weinberg, however, expressed enthusiasm for the design, which he presented as a model of compatible contemporary design.

Aesthetically, he described the new exterior as a "neat, narrow, human-scale facade, carefully devoid of flourishes, much less any pseudo-historical decorations," and predicted that the "utmost simplicity" of this "appropriate new face" would echo the renovated carriage houses of McDougal Alley, and "blend neatly into the intimate scale of the too narrow Village arteries...[at] a comparatively quiet transition between the bright shopping scene on 8th Street, and the residential dignity of Washington Square North."

He dismissed the existing historical facade as "rather hideous, undistinguished, late-Victo-

rian, commercial," and encumbered with "pseudo-Romanesque gewgaws." "To have 'saved' it," he said, would have been "silly." But the alternatives had drawbacks as well: "[T]o have applied a fake, pseudo-Greek-Renaissance stage set in the misguided aim of matching the genuine, early-nineteenth-century houses around the corner would have been a hypocritical sham." Alternatively, "to have disfigured the front of the building in a contemporary cliché as a blatant, attention-calling signboard would have been disturbing, to say the least." Weinberg felt this approach was

exactly the sort of thing which the designation of Greenwich Village as an historic district, if that is finally achieved, is intended to encourage. Here we have an admirable example of just what the community hopes to see done throughout the Village, namely, the alteration of an existing building (as, similarly, the erection of a new one), in keeping with the character of the neighborhood, fitting in with it, not disturbing it.

..What is particular satisfying to me, as a neighbor, is that this facade treatment proves my original contention, that it would carry out the Landmarks Commission's purpose to encourage the replacement of inappropriate buildings in historic districts with new or renovated ones that relate well, in scale and spirit, to the character of the neighborhood.

Pragmatically, he also lauded the congregation's decision to retain the existing building, saving on demolition costs

On the building's completion, Weinberg harkened back to the promise of the proposed design, and went on to describe his satisfaction with the results, declaring it "...a delight, inside and out... [the facade] a striking yet simple contemporary treatment, using rough, common brick, so typical of the old houses in

the neighborhood.”

[“A Little Church around the Corner,” comment #17, aired 12/21/66, WNYC T 1968.”  
“That Little Church around the Corner,” comment #87, aired 12/21/67, WNYC T 1959.  
Huxtable, “Of Symbolism and Flying Saucers,” *New York Times*, 12/4/66, X: 37, 40.]

### **Allied Chemical Building**

Originally New York Times Tower  
Broadway at 42nd Street  
Cyrus L. W. Eidlitz, 1903–05

Reconstructed and re-clad Smith, Smith,  
Haines, Lundberg & Waehler, 1966

Weinberg also supported a much more conspicuous—and much more controversial—example of the recladding of a historic building in contemporary style, that of the former New York Times Tower at Times Square. Originally designed by Cyrus Eidlitz as an Italian Renaissance “campanile,” the building’s facade was stripped by new owners Allied Chemical, and refaced in smooth marble and glass panels.

Weinberg singled out this widely decried project out as an exception to his general rule that “modernizations” of older facades were generally misguided:

Many architects, myself included, have been critical of the inept efforts of some of our colleagues who have gilded the lily, so to speak, in putting expensive, smooth new entrances or complete facades on older buildings whose owners seem to think that this will make them rent better. Many a handsome hotel or office building of a generation or more ago, which had been decorated on the outside in the pseudo-Renaissance, eclectic style of the period, has now lost whatever dignity and distinction it had by being faced, in whole or in part, with bland, monotonous, smooth glass or marble surfaces.

But the old New York Times Tower at the foot of Times Square, recently rebuilt for and by the Allied Chemical Company, is an outstanding example of just the opposite, the case where the contemporary clothing which it has been given is a definite improvement on its original, eclectic, period costume.

The new design has removed all “extraneous ornamentation” and “surface clutter” from the eclectic reproduction of an ancient style.

(As an example of a more typical destructive stylistic updates, he cited the Trade Bank & Trust Company’s recladding of Carrere & Hastings’s Black, Star & Frost building at 48th Street and Fifth Avenue.

Black, Star & Frost

Fifth Avenue at 48th Street  
Carrere & Hastings, 1912  
Stern, *NY 1900*, p. 200. MCNY)

[“Modernization can be an Improvement,” comment #31, aired 3/16/67]

### **Squadron A Armory, 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment, NY National Guard**

Madison Avenue to Park Avenue, 94th–95th  
Streets  
John Rochester Thomas, 1893–95

Hunter College Campus Schools  
(originally Intermediate School 29)  
Morris Ketchum, Jr. & Associates, 1969

The fate of the full-block Squadron A Armory site on Madison Avenue at 94th Street was the subject of heated public debate over whether or how to replace the 1895 structure. Preservation issues overlapped with calls for high-rise middle-income housing, new school construction, and public recreational use. Although earlier proposals to insert a sports center or school into the existing structure had been rejected, demolition was eventually halted in mid-course by public protest.

The surviving portions were landmarked in 1966, and architect Morris Ketchum designed a new school building for the cleared portion of the site. Recognizing the intractability of the preceding debate, Weinberg put the best face onto the resulting compromise, calling it an “interesting combination,” integrating a sympathetic school and playground design with the armory’s remnants.

This is architecture at its best—a functional building to meet the strictest demands of a complex problem like a modern school, expressing, on its exterior, shapes and forms that reflect what goes on inside...scale relates to the residential area surrounding it [no tower]...materials, shapes and colors enhance and bring out the character of the landmark it adjoins...Mr. Ketchum’s handsome design for the school looks so good we should be thankful that New York will gain a new architectural landmark, while not losing more than part of the old one.

But if Weinberg gave his qualified approval to the architectural solution to the problem at hand, he made clear that larger planning issues were left unresolved; housing in particular. [“The Armory School on Carnegie Hill,” comment #74, 9/28/67. Stern et al., 1995: 1129–30.]

### **Contemporary religious buildings**

Weinberg had a particular interest in contemporary religious architecture. He returned again and again in his broadcasts to discussions of new church buildings in a modern architectural idiom, which he considered to be an important sub-group of “truly distinctive contemporary buildings on the New York scene.” All had thoughtful though sometimes unexpected relationships with their surrounding context:

### **First Presbyterian Church House**

Edgar Tafel, 1960

West 12th Street at Fifth Avenue

Church 1846, additions 1893, 1919

In Edgar Tafel’s 1960 annex to Greenwich Village’s First Presbyterian Church, Weinberg found another model of a nuanced approach to new structures next to old. Weinberg praised Tafel’s work here (and elsewhere) as “dramatizing the simpler beauties of the old, while at the same time creating modern facilities in a mellow style that is wholly appropriate to today’s more complex requirements.” He described the new building as a “perfect companion, and didn’t mourn the pair of “threadbare, early 19th-century houses” that it replaced.

“What is important is that it in no way attempts to ape the old, neo-Gothic 19th-century eclecticism, nor to denigrate it by using a blatant modern style.” Moving from the specific to the more general, he concluded that:

...Our city and our suburbs are rich in great old churches as well as town halls and libraries, designed by talented architects of the Victorian age, who used the fine materials and skilled artisans that are no longer available to us. These handsome monuments deserve not only to be retained and renovated in themselves, but to have their companion buildings, necessary for expanded activities, designed in a manner that relates to them as well as does [Tafel’s]... In enlarging and rehabilitating our older churches and public buildings, it is not necessary to destroy their original character, much less to erect a fake replica of a quite different historic era. Sensitive contemporary design by an architect who respects the old is always in order. [“New Church Structures Next to Old,” comment #81, 11/9/67, WNYC T 1938]

### **Roman Catholic Church of the Epiphany**

373 Second Avenue, at 21st Street  
Belfatto & Pavarini, 1967

Even before reporting on Tafel's building for First Presbyterian, Weinberg had already begun exploring this theme: In June of 1967, he praised the just-completed new church for the Roman Catholic congregation on Second Avenue. Replacing an Romanesque-revival church designed by Napoleon Le Brun in 1870 and destroyed by fire in 1963, the new building maintained a connection with the surviving school and parish house, but broke with tradition on many fronts:

From the outside, the church is totally unlike the eclectic stereotype of an ecclesiastic building of bygone times which frequently, alas, persists in being revived, here and there, by less intelligent architects and their clients. This church, by happy contrast is not only not an adaptation of an historic form, but not even a conventional plan clothed in modern details. Instead, it presents an entirely new concept of urban church design tailored to its special location and surroundings, striking in appearance and admirably expressing on the outside its functional plan within. ["The New Church of the Epiphany," critique #5, 6/1/67]

To this day, the *AIA Guide to New York* echoes Weinberg's high praise, calling the building "the most positive modern religious statement on Manhattan Island to date." [White and Wilensky, 2000, 211.]

(Weinberg devoted a later broadcast to a second church designed by Belfatto and Pavarini, St. Brendan's, at 333 East 206th Street in the Williamsbridge section of the Bronx. He spoke highly of the exterior in particular, calling it "a striking addition to the urban scene, contrasting effectively with the densely built up, somewhat monotonous residential neigh-

borhood" around it. ["St. Brendan's Church," critique #14, aired 12/28/67, WNYC T 1950.]

### **Congregation Shaare Zedek (Civic Center Synagogue)**

49 White Street  
William N. Breger Associates, 1965–66

Perhaps an even greater departure from traditional urban religious architecture and from the traditional Manhattan streetscape is William N. Breger's 1965–66 design for the Civic Center Synagogue on White Street.

Weinberg's celebrates its contrast, and its quality, calling it one of downtown Manhattan's "neatest, nicest, new religious buildings...like nothing we have ever seen before on a New York business street...striking in appearance...yet admirably fits into the atmosphere of the area." With its "simple and well made" finishes, executed in the "best of taste" and with "admirable restraint," it passes the "special test of good architecture...small in size, yet giving the appearance of dignified monumentality," and "adds distinction as well as interest to an otherwise humdrum downtown street."

Attuned to the urban planner's broader perspective, even on a small scale, Weinberg also notes the buildings specialized sacred function, to provide daytime worship space near work for congregants already affiliated with other synagogues near home.

["Civic Center Synagogue," critique #9, aired 11/16/67, WNYC T 1945]

### **Church of the Resurrection**

325 East 101st St  
Victor Lundy, 1965  
["Harlem's Storefront Churches Resurrected," critique #11, aired 11/30/67]

In the case of the Church of the Resurrection on East 101st Street in Harlem, Weinberg highlights another contrasting church form, but digs deeper into the story. Designed on a

shoestring by Victor Lundy for a consortium of four separate storefront congregations, the strikingly angular building was an early step in the realization of a larger community-based planning initiative. Sited within the “Metro North” area of East Harlem, and originally surrounded by tenements slated for demolition and rehabilitation, the church design was carefully coordinated with plans for new housing and open space, in a plan developed by a number of neighborhood groups in cooperation with Whittlesey and Conklin.

### **Two mid-sized institutions:**

Even outside of designated historic districts, Weinberg was attuned to the dialog between new construction and existing historic buildings. He addressed this with broadcasts on two institutional buildings on the Upper East Side: a social services facility for the Jewish Board of Guardians, and the Hunter College School of Social Work.

### **Group Residence for Young Adults,**

Jewish Board of Guardians  
217 East 87th Street  
Frederick Ginsbern,  
for Horace Ginsbern & Associates, 1968.

Weinberg offers a qualified welcome to the Board of Guardians’ residential center for young adults. With its raw but well-detailed concrete surfaces and overhanging massing, it is one of the earliest New York buildings in the so-called “Brutalist” style. While Weinberg expresses doubt that the new building’s design vocabulary would be appropriate for a whole Manhattan side street, “... as the first and only building of its sort on this nondescript Yorkville block,” it was “a welcome change from the bland glass, steel and formica skin-deep covering of so many new buildings...and which surely fail to give a neighborhood any character whatsoever.”

[“The New Brutalism Comes to New York’s Side Streets,” critique #32, 11/7/68]

### **Hunter College School of Social Work**

127–135 East 79th Street  
Wank Adams Slavin, 1967; enlarged 1988.

Of the Hunter College building, he’s glad the architects have resisted “any temptation to create a pseudo-traditional building,” and complements the way it differentiates itself from its residential neighbors with an “ingenious, tasteful, and effective” modern facade. But it is sited between the rowhouses of the side street and the taller apartment buildings of Lexington Avenue, with a scale somewhere in between. He asks, “What then does this do to the scale of the block front?” but doesn’t answer.

[“A New Facade on Manhattan’s Upper East Side,” comment #182, aired 4/24/69.]

### **Necrology**

I would not ordinarily report on the demolition of old buildings as such, for their removal is more often than not a matter of true necessity, outweighing their historic value, if any. [“Highway Robbery at Highland, New York,” report # 22, aired 6/8/67.]

Although these comments come from a broadcast on the loss of a historic house in upstate New York, they could just as well apply to Weinberg’s reports on greater New York City. He did not devote much airtime to the destruction of historic buildings: His comments on Pennsylvania Station were brief and ambivalent (see below), and he made only passing comment on a handful of other major demolitions of the time, including the Broadway United Church of Christ (the Broadway Tabernacle), Newspaper Row (World and Tribune Buildings), and the Old Metropolitan Opera House. [“Notes on Two Churches,” comment #185, aired 5/8/69. “Pace College and the Brooklyn Bridge,” comment #197, aired 7/24/69. “A Handsome Skyscraper Replaces an Ugly Old Opera House,” critique #46, aired 1/8/70.]

Only a few demolitions became the subject of full broadcasts: the Ziegfeld Theater, the Singer Tower, and an unusual commentary on the gradual disappearance of the city's grand hotels (see below for all three). In addition, Weinberg discussed the demolition of the Ruppert Brewery in some depth, but only in connection with his proposal for its adaptive re-use (see above). ["A Tale of Three Cities: or How New York Missed the Boat," comment #297, aired 2/11/71.]

Weinberg clearly chose his battles, particularly where the radio programs were concerned. But curiously, in spite of his seeming reticence on the air, preliminary archival research shows that he was deeply involved in the struggle to save Penn Station, including letter writing and picketing; he was certainly aware of other demolitions. Further archival research may shed more light on this discrepancy, and on his decision to limit his on-air comments on this theme.

### **Ziegfeld Theatre**

Joseph Urban, 1927

replaced by Burlington House, 1967

Weinberg's broadcast mourning the loss of Joseph Urban's Ziegfeld Theater was aired in January 1967, while demolition was still under way. He signed on "reporting to you on the lost landmark that is disappearing right under our eyes today," and went on to sketch the life and work of "gentle genius" Urban as a much-admired older colleague, and perhaps friend as well.

He described the building in glowing terms, calling it "as remarkable a piece of contemporary design for its time as the Guggenheim was a generation later." He drew particular attention to Urban's ground-breaking interior, with its "continuous, smooth-flowing, concave surface," calling it a "radical departure, for those days, from the pompous, pseudo-Renaissance, Beaux-Arts columns and arches" of

other auditoria. He feels the loss both as an architect and as a theatergoer. "This report is, therefore, a dirge and a swan song for a uniquely beautiful theater...Farewell, therefore, to the Ziegfeld Theater and to the art of Joseph Urban. His New York masterpiece will remain only in the memory of those who knew it." ["Farewell to the Ziegfeld Theater," report #11, aired 1/9/67]

### **Singer Tower**

149 Broadway

Ernest Flagg, 1908.



*Singer Tower, view from southeast. Historic American Buildings Survey, Jack E. Boucher, Photographer, September 1967, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS NY,31-NEYO,71-1*

In September of 1967, demolition was imminent for architect Ernest Flagg's 1908 Singer Tower on lower Broadway. Along with a number of other buildings, it was to be cleared from the site of a new high-rise office building for US Steel. Weinberg didn't mention that the Singer Tower would be the tallest building

ever demolished, but he did ask, “I wonder how many New Yorkers know this landmark and what it stands for...”

He sketched Flagg’s career and work, emphasizing his pioneering innovations in modern construction (steel structural systems, glass-and-metal cladding), and listing his various projects around New York. “Ernest Flagg should be better known and remembered by his buildings in New York than he is,” Weinberg concluded, and urged his listeners to see the Singer Building lobby before demolition begins: “while detailed in the usual French Baroque manner...[it is] nevertheless of such extraordinary scale and exquisite proportions that it deserves a better fate than US Steel has in store for it.”

[“Ernest Flagg, Architect,” comment #70, aired 9/14/67]

### **Pennsylvania Station Grand Central Terminal**

Neither the demolition of Penn Station nor the preservation of Grand Central Terminal receives much attention in Weinberg’s broadcasts. This is surprising, given the important roles both battles played in shaping the preservation movement in New York, and the fact that we know Weinberg was involved in both struggles, both in print and behind the scenes. More archival research should help clarify his involvement.

But in a broadcast aptly titled, “The Decline of Grandeur,” devoted primarily to the gradual loss of New York’s grand old hotels, Weinberg does discuss both train stations by way of introduction:

“We have seen Pennsylvania Station disappear slowly before our eyes,” to be replaced by “...a sort of super subway station growing out of the old Long Island section of the original station.” But curiously, he also betrays a momentary ambivalence about the original Beaux-Arts station: “[T]he grandiose cham-

bers of the original Pennsylvania Station afforded a wonderful gateway to New York,” he admits, but

grandiose implies something more than what was actually needed and that is why the old station...had to fall before the onslaught of economics.

He recovers, and returns to the more orthodox preservation party line:

But true grandeur is something else than grandiose. It is an essential, not a superfluous element of public architecture that implies graciousness as well as spaciousness, style as well as comfort, dignity as well as efficiency. And true grandeur is what the new underground Pennsylvania Station hasn’t got.

True grandeur is something he reserves for Grand Central Terminal’s concourse and waiting room, and the hotels he goes on to discuss (see below).

[“The Decline of Grandeur,” comment #27, aired 2/16/67.]

### **Grand hotels**

#### **Astor Hotel**

Clinton & Russell, 1909  
demolished 1969

#### **Ambassador Hotel**

Warren & Wetmore, 1921  
demolished 1969

#### **Savoy Plaza Hotel**

McKim, Mead & White, 1927  
demolished 1966

#### **Ritz-Carlton Hotel**

Madison Avenue at 46th Street  
Warren & Wetmore  
demolished 1951

In Weinberg’s 1967 broadcast, “The Decline of Grandeur,” he despairs over the gradual disappearance of the New York’s historic grand

hotels. He lays out the importance of “grandeur” in civic buildings, a quality now in increasingly short supply, calling it “...an essential, not a superfluous element of public architecture that implies graciousness as well as spaciousness, style as well as comfort, dignity as well as efficiency.”

He begins with the recent loss of Penn Station, that “wonderful” gateway to New York, replaced by a sort of “super subway station” utterly lacking in any kind of grandeur. But his main subject is “...the decline of grandeur in our hotels which are, in effect, the reception rooms New York offers its visitors, convention attenders or each other, when big parties are given.”

The Plaza still has it, and the Waldorf and the Pierre as well; Weinberg describes in detail the successful way the Plaza’s public rooms work, and how it feels to see and be seen in such surroundings. “All this lends grandeur to large parties and makes New York a great place.”

But so many of the others are gone or slated for demolition: the Ritz-Carlton (demolished 1951), the Savoy-Plaza (demolished 1966), the Ambassador (demolished 1969), the Astor (demolished 1969), and “half-a-dozen others.” Weinberg observed that the same thing was happening in big cities everywhere, in what he called the “current scramble for down-town profits,” that was no consolation. (He even devotes another broadcast to the plight of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, on the brink of demolition in 1967.)

Compounding the loss, the new hotels being built, like the Summit, the Hilton, and the Americana, are sadly incapable of matching “the splendor and spaciousness” of their predecessors, with “public rooms designed as if they were just so much rentable floor space.” With bitter relish, he lists their collective faults: the low ceilings, bad acoustics, and

poor ventilation; the cheap and garish decor; the clumsy circulation and approaches.

Its about as glamorous as an ancient hospital...[and] reduces hotel affairs, whether meetings or parties, to the crassness of a sporting event or a political convention and the discomfort of a subway station...Perhaps the decline of grandeur in New York doesn’t make any difference to a lot of people any more. Perhaps we don’t deserve to have the sense of exhilaration which coming into a grand space can give us. But I doubt it.

As if this weren’t enough, Weinberg goes on to explain that he feels “particularly ashamed”—not only as a New Yorker but as an architect as well—now that the upcoming national AIA meeting is going to be held in the new New York Hilton, where the “completely glamorless public rooms” make it “a sorry place to entertain architectural visitors.”

For Weinberg, the only bright spot is the recent discovery of alternative party spaces: the New York State theater lobby at Lincoln Center, the Whitney Museum, the Seventh Regiment Armory, the Metropolitan Museum, and the Public Theater.

[“The Decline of Grandeur,” comment #27, aired 2/16/67.

“Save the Imperial Hotel,” report #26, aired 8/24/67, WNYC T 1963]



## Appendices:

### 1. Making preservation work: air rights transfers

In 1968, the city zoning regulations were modified to allow for transfers of development rights (a/k/a “air rights”) between adjacent sites. This new mechanism was developed in part with landmarked buildings in mind. Historic buildings are often lower or less bulky than current zoning allows, subjecting them to being demolished and replaced with larger, more profitable structures. The new regulations allowed owners to transfer unused zoning allowances from historic structures to adjacent new construction, thus making landmark designation less of an economic burden.

In a series of broadcasts, Weinberg promoted the use of these transfers as part of a strategy to preserve landmarked structures at a number of prime development sites, including the Villard Houses on Madison Avenue in midtown, and the Schermerhorn Row buildings at South Street Seaport. Transfers of development rights were in fact used at both locations.

Villard Houses  
451–457 Madison Avenue  
Joseph Wells, for McKim, Mead & White,  
1882–85.

Schermerhorn Row Block  
2–18 Fulton Street  
1811–49

With time, these transfers were proposed for a wider range of circumstances, and in later broadcasts Weinberg was careful to address the nuances of such transactions, favoring those with clear public benefits (direct links to the preservation of landmark structures, or providing immediate public improvements), but criticizing blanket transferability of any and all unused air-rights. His examples included proposals for transfers involving the Appellate Division Courthouse on Madison Square and the Old US Customs House at Bowling Green.

Appellate Division Courthouse,  
New York State Supreme Court  
27 Madison Avenue  
James Brown Lord, 1896–99

United States Custom House  
Bowling Green  
Cass Gilbert, 1899–1907

Weinberg was promoting a powerful new tool to link development and preservation goals, one that recognized the economic pressures on city property owners and the need to find ways to avoid “the necessity” of demolishing landmarked buildings. Development-rights transfers, appropriately used, could allow owners of historic properties “to, in effect, have their cake and eat it too.”

[“The Future of Villard Crescent,” comment #135, aired 9/10/68. “The South Street Seaport,” comment #165, aired 2/13/69. “Selling Air Rights Over Public Buildings,” comment #259, aired 5/26/70. “Bonus for Builders versus Air-Rights over Landmarks and other Buildings,” comment #295, aired 3/2/71.]

### 2. Planning over preservation

In all of Weinberg’s commentaries on preservation, he links it with other issues in the overall context of urban planning. In the case of two related efforts to save the neighborhood now known as SoHo from large-scale demolition, Weinberg judges large-scale preservation to be the less desirable alternative.

#### Lower Manhattan Expressway

A cross-town link between the Holland Tunnel and the Manhattan and Williamsburg Bridges was first envisioned by the Regional Plan Association in the 1920s. In the early 1940s, it was added to the City Planning Commission’s highway master plan, and the idea was taken up by Robert Moses, who began promoting what became known as the Broome Street or Lower Manhattan Expressway. His original scheme, for a ten-lane elevated highway paralleling Canal Street, set off a wave of public

opposition that blocked the project and its later iterations for a quarter of a century. (It was at a 1968 public hearing on the project that Jane Jacobs was arrested for storming the podium and destroying the official record of the meeting.) The threat of the expressway project also helped galvanize the movement to landmark the SoHo Cast Iron Historic District, which lay directly in the highway's path. Critics charged that the expressway project would have displaced thousands of residents and businesses, blighted a wide swath of property from river to river, and generated air pollution far worse than that caused by the surface traffic it was meant to relieve. Even when Moses's version of the highway was shelved in the early 1960s, a series of attempts to implement "improved" versions of the design met with equal public resistance, and the project was finally killed in 1969.

Weinberg addressed the expressway controversy in no less than five separate broadcasts, four devoted entirely to the subject. On the one hand, his critique of the existing proposals was scathing. On the other, he insisted on that the original premise of the project was still valid, and perhaps more pressing: the problem of traffic congestion in Lower Manhattan needed to be solved, and a properly-conceived cross-town express link was still the best solution.

Unsurprisingly, this turns out to have placed Weinberg in a difficult position: "Having been in on the very beginning of this controversial project," he began in his May 1967 broadcast on the subject,

I have tried, with some success, to keep out of the more recent discussions that have heated the political atmosphere for the last decade or so...I have kept out of the discussions, because, as a resident of Greenwich Village, I find many of my friends committed to opposing any sort of Expressway on the perfectly human grounds of displacement of apartments and

places of work. On the other hand, I have always felt, from way back in the days when I worked in the Department of Planning and *put this very line on the 1942 master plan*, that some sort of express connection was needed. [emphasis added]

(A 1967 letter from Weinberg to city Housing & Development Board Administrator Jason Nathan clarifies that Weinberg was part of the Planning Commission's "hired help" when the 1942 highway map was prepared. [Weinberg to Nathan, 1/22/67.] A later broadcast script, in slight contrast, makes it sound like the concept was actually Weinberg's own idea:

It was way back in the early 1940's when, as a member of the staff at the Department of City Planning, I was charged with working out a master plan for the city's major highways, that I suggested some sort of vehicular connection across lower Manhattan near Canal Street. At that time, it was, way down on the list of priorities and no specific plan was suggested. The original 1941 master plan simply showed a heavy dotted line in the general location.)

Neighborhood friendships and drafting-room coincidences aside, Weinberg remained committed to the underlying traffic problem in spite of the storm stirred up by the project, even after Mayor John Lindsay declared the project "forever dead" in 1969. Weinberg used his broadcasts to argue in detail for his own proposal, which called for the an east-west express route using an existing street at grade, with minor north-south streets crossings eliminated, and with major north-south streets carried across on bridges, all with less cost and less disruption than any of the previous plans. ["Lower Manhattan Expressway Alternatives," comment #13, aired 11/28/66. "Downtown Cross-Manhattan Expressway," comment #45, aired 5/17/67. "That Lower Manhattan Expressway," comment #180, aired 4/15/69. "Relieving Traffic in Lower

Manhattan,” comment #204, aired 8/19/69. “On Choosing the Right Side of an Issue for the Wrong Reasons,” comment #121, aired 6/11/68.]

### **SoHo: a warning**

In parallel with the fight to block the Lower Manhattan Expressway, momentum was growing in SoHo both to legalize the loft apartments created by artists living and working in the area’s former industrial buildings, and to landmark a large proportion of these cast-iron fronted 19th-century structures.

Weinberg made broadcasts on both proposals, but his verdict was decidedly mixed. In his 1969 piece, “Artists Living in Lofts: A Warning,” he questions the wisdom of creating a special artists’ district: even with revised zoning, the buildings themselves still wouldn’t meet health and safety requirements for residential use, and would be too expensive to bring up to code. He considers the neighborhood’s old nickname—“Hell’s Hundred Acres”—too well-earned, and the buildings too susceptible to fire. Their primarily wood-framed construction (hidden behind their cast-iron fronts and between their brick party walls), and near-total lot coverage (closing off rear access and egress) were simply too dangerous. “[S]upporting a request for a zoning change...would be encouraging the continuance of highly risky conditions that could easily lead to loss of life.”

As for the historic district, he specifically praised the LPC for moving slowly in this case, citing “other planning factors that must be taken into account.”

I must point out that the preservation of some 150 less significant buildings in this historical style, at the expense of long-range housing for more and better housing and/or light industry and parks may be too high a price to pay...

At the time, there were alternative proposals to landmarking the area, including at least one by the Middle Income Cooperators of Greenwich Village (MiCOV), calling for demolition and redevelopment of much of the neighborhood with new housing. Weinberg’s archives may hold information on the level of his awareness of these proposals.

[“Artists Living in Lofts: A Warning,” comment #296, aired 12/23/69. “The Proposed ‘Cast Iron’ Historic District,” comment #305, aired 4/15/71.]

### **3. Lunch 1: affordable mid-town restaurants**

Alongside his eulogy for the grand hotels of mid-town Manhattan, Weinberg also drew his listener’s attention to a related problem afflicting the area, “or for that matter, anywhere there are large, new buildings replacing many older ones: Where do we go for lunch?”

In characteristic fashion, Weinberg dissects the problem: Between expense-account restaurants on the high end and grab-and-go eateries on the low, there had long been a middle choice for what he called “the discriminating lunch-goer” seeking “the proper atmosphere for a leisurely, relaxed noon hour.” But the mid-60s commercial construction boom was bringing that era to an end:

The long-popular, comfortable, medium-priced restaurant is fast disappearing, never, it seems, to be replaced. Gone, one by one, are the basement or one-flight-up eating places in made-over old houses, which served good table d’hote lunches, with wine, at a reasonable price, that is midway between the bars and fancy restaurants and the lunch counters. Gone are the old haunts where one could sit in a comfortable chair, at a table with room to spread things on, and relax for an hour; where one could enjoy one’s midday meal with a glass of wine, a beer or what have you...Going, too, are the dining rooms and

coffee shops in the good hotels...reasonable, light, quiet with plenty of space to spread oneself out and relax.

But as the rows of old houses and the good hotels disappear, they are replaced by huge office buildings whose financiers always arrange in advance to have most of the ground floor space taken by banks, airlines and other “prime tenants.” The medium-priced restaurants never find their way back there...There will no longer be any place left to go—in midtown Manhattan—for a quiet, comfortable lunch hour with good food, a little to drink, and at a medium price.

Weinberg hoped that building owners would recognize this unfolding tragedy on their own, and begin to cultivate a broader range of restaurants, if only to better serve their tenants’ needs. But ever the planner, Weinberg also turned his thoughts to the power of government: “It is curious,” he said, “that there are no regulations about eating, as there are about sanitary facilities. Why should some natural functions be considered and not others?” If the number of toilets required is linked to square footage of office space, why not prescribe a certain number of lunch-hour seats within walking distance as well? If residential areas are planned to integrate families of varying income levels, why can’t commercial zoning mandate a similar range of lunch options? With tens of thousands of new office workers planned for mid-town, the situation can only get worse.

[“Planning for Eating,” comment #19, aired 1/16/67.]

### **Lunch 2: sidewalk cafes**

But the changing culinary landscape of midtown was not without its bright spots: Just weeks after Weinberg’s broadcast on the gradual extinction of mid-price restaurants, he made his first broadcast about sidewalk cafes.

An experienced international traveler, Weinberg clearly appreciated the possibilities: “Eating outdoors, *al fresco*, a term used by the Italians,” he explains, “has been a common pleasure in most cities of continental Europe. Many travelers from this country return home to New York and other cities in the United States and wonder why we don’t have sidewalk cafes here.”

He attributes the growing interest to an appreciation of both “the atmosphere of cafe life as such, and the pleasure of eating in the open.” The obstacles of weather, soot, and fumes, and force of old indoor habits all strike him as easily overcome (this in the years before the Clean Air Act reduced the amount of airborne pollution); the necessary regulation of encroachments on public sidewalk space seems straightforward.

But with more and more restaurateurs testing the boundaries of permissible outdoor arrangements, and the Lindsay administration struggling to stay on top of this new regulatory issue, Weinberg feels compelled to weigh in: While he is all for encouraging outdoor dining wherever practicable, he draws the line at the permanent, enclosed type of sidewalk extensions that had begun to proliferate:

Extended, fully enclosed restaurants falsely advertised as ‘outdoor cafes’ bear no resemblance whatsoever to the delightful practice of informally setting out tables on wide, tree lined sidewalks in good weather as they do in Europe...The whole purpose of outdoor dining is just that—to smell the atmosphere of the city outdoors, bad or good, as it may be, hot or cold, cool or slightly warm.

He is also appalled by the city’s inability to enforce the relatively mild regulations that were finally put in place.

But at the same time, he urges New Yorkers to consider a whole range of additional sites: “I have talked with you a number of times about the pleasures of outdoor dining, and of dining on public sidewalks, which is not necessarily the same thing.” [“Encouraging Outdoor Dining,” report #33, aired 1/2/68, WNYC T 1962.] He points to the new terraces, plazas, setbacks, and arcades then being incorporated into the design of high-rise commercial buildings, such as those at Lever House, the Seagram Building, and Morgan Guaranty in midtown, and Gulf & Western at Columbus Circle, and Chase Manhattan downtown. Deployed to earn square-footage bonuses under the new zoning code, these spaces seem ready-made for providing outdoor refreshments. He also suggests “semi-public” space as well, such as the terraces in front of the main Public Library building on Fifth Avenue, and even underground passages, such as those in Rockefeller Center.

[“Sidewalk Cafes,” report #19, aired 4/27/67. “Encouraging Outdoor Dining,” report #33, aired 1/2/68, WNYC T 1962. “Sidewalk Cafes and the Law,” comment #206, aired 9/4/69. “Gulf & Western at Columbus Circle: A building and a non-building,” critique #61, aired 3/25/71.]

### **Weinberg’s taste in new architecture: touchstones of Modernism**

Weinberg came of age professionally as Modernism was coming into its own on the American architectural scene, and he was of the generation that moved from the minimalist International Style to more expressive forms. (He was an almost exact contemporary of Marcel Breuer, Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn, and Edward Durell Stone.) In new buildings, he consistently favored “forward looking contemporary,” valuing quality and authenticity above all.

Throughout his broadcasts, he frequently returned to a short list of favorite recent buildings (many of which have since been

designated landmarks themselves): Lever House, Manufacturers Hanover Trust, the Seagram Building, and Chase Manhattan Bank. On one occasion, he laments the fact that Seagram and Lever House are so “sadly being imitated, poorly and tastelessly, by the glass boxes we see going up all around town.” He describes the parade of banal modernist boxes of this type along Park Avenue north of Grand Central Terminal as “uniformity without distinction.” [“The New Brutalism Comes to New York’s Side Streets,” critique #32, 11/7/68]

Lever House  
390 Park Avenue  
Gordon Bunshaft  
for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1950–52.



*Lever House, 53rd St. and Park Ave., New York City.  
Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division,  
Gottschow-Schleisner Collection, LC-G612-60918-E*

Manufacturers Hanover Trust  
510 Fifth Avenue  
Charles Evans Hughes and Gordon Bunshaft,  
for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1954.

Seagram Building  
375 Park Avenue  
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1955–58



*Seagram Building, New York City. Night shot, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, LC-G602-CT-[055]*

Chase Manhattan Bank  
1 Chase Manhattan Plaza  
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1960

**Whitney Museum of American Art**  
945 Madison Avenue  
Marcel Breuer, 1963–66

He also devoted considerable time to a discussion of Marcel Breuer's new design for the



*New York City views. "New look of Park Avenue," Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, LC-G612-71606*

Whitney Museum of American Art, lavishing it with high praise:

An architectural landmark of unusual character that has been designed with great ingenuity and finesse. Unlike the mish-mash that makes the new opera house [at Lincoln Center] so disappointingly commonplace, Marcel Breuer's concept of a striking form to add to New York's perpetually changing collection of contrasting sizes, shapes, and styles enlivens a lively street and successfully solves a tough problem of providing a lot of effective exhibit space on a small plot that has no special setting or urbanistic viewing point at all.

Its shape seems curious—until one analyzes the logical steps that led to the choice...Covered in smooth, rich, warm, gray granite, it stands out effectively—which is what every New York building tries to do, anyway. I think we'll get accustomed to it more and more, as it is a striking, yet pleasant variant on a long street full of trivial facades. As to its functional success, time will tell. It shows the results of giving one gifted architect real control.

He calls it “as unique as the Guggenheim, better in many ways.

But as a long-time Greenwich Village resident, he cannot help comparing the new Whitney to the old: “One misses...the quality of the old Whitney [on 8th Street in Greenwich Village]...the richly carpeted floors...the comfortable sofas in every room, even the unevenness and the creaky old beams. [“On Gracie Mansion and the Whitney Museum,” critiques #2 & 3 (combined), aired 10/28/66.]

### **National Maritime Union buildings**

Weinberg also responded positively to Albert Ledner’s new buildings for the National Maritime Union:

With so much undistinguished, unimaginative architecture being seen in New York these days, apartment houses and office buildings turned out of the same cookie mold, it’s a pleasure to note several buildings which display a real sense of imagination. [“The Maritime Union Buildings,” critique #4, aired 9/30/66.]

National Maritime Union Headquarters  
now St. Vincent’s Hospital & Medical Center,  
O’Toole Medical Services Building  
36 Seventh Avenue  
Albert C. Ledner & Associates, 1964.

National Maritime Union,  
Joseph Curran Annex  
now Maritime Hotel  
100 Ninth Avenue  
Albert C. Ledner & Associates, 1966.

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