

NEW CRITIQUES

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Bomb the Suburbs - <http://www.softskull.com/html/bomb.html>

Crossroads - <http://www.turbulence.org/Works/crossroads/>

By James Decker

Bomb the Suburbs. That's the title of William Upski Wimsatt's volume of essays and interviews about grass roots culture, hip-hop, and his several awakenings to race in America. Bombing is not the Oklahoma City sort, *bombing* is graffiti art. How about *suburbs*, think you know what that means? "Suburbanization is one of the most important metaphors of where our heads are at these days," writes



Wimsatt. "Everyone wants to go off with their own group, do their own thing, cut themselves off from everyone else, and cease to be accountable." Suburbs need bombing, it is a service to consciousness. It is Wimsatt's artistic duty. It turns out that cities cannot be left behind after all. It turns out that cities don't create people, it's the other way around. Sophistication and Leisure, Towne and Country, turned out to be more about Security and Surveillance. But these are ideals with economic staying power nonetheless. "Sidewalks, buses, trains, and other relics of public space will continue to disappear. The distinctiveness, character, and history of the landscape will be washed corporately clean." Seven years later, the security industry is booming, "smart growth" passes for principled development, and [the suburbs continue to be built](#). Suburbs always resembled terrariums but increasingly they are built like gated ghettos with grass but without services or crossroads. And, as if starting with cheap materials weren't bad enough, graffiti on suburban stucco seems somehow more unsightly than graffiti on brick and bridges. I suppose fresh decay will always be more gruesome to see than the dry, leathery mouse-corpse kind. That's because it's the transitions that are so darned hard to witness.

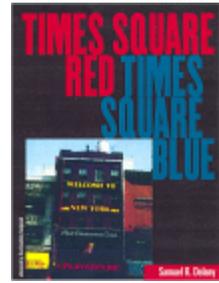


Migrations from rural to urban and back again once told the story of prosperity and cultural logic in America. Now gentrification, displacement, and de-urbanization or disneyfication



are the complicated terms we need to describe the consequences of simplistic ideals. The New Times Square stands as one of the most devastating examples of mirror smashing in the history of American popular culture. Just darn angry with how the whole year was turning out, Times Square started over. It got a new boyfriend and his name was Mickey Mouse. The many faces of Hell's Kitchen were traded in for the classic Mickey mask. Now that characters from television and film have become the real occupants of

Times Square, we get to visit them there, but it may be hard to remember who belonged to the crowds that used to fill the square? Why were they there? [Crossroads](#) is a media reconstruction of Times Square by Annette Weintraub. Crossroads is a kind of digital Bombing of the blank-face of "cyberspace," an anti-brochure for the New Times Square. Crossroads paints thematic layers in video and sound to represent transience within the history of Times Square: when visitors arrived, when denizens lost heart, when lights danced around your



head but darkness still drifted about your feet. Crossroads creates a sense of characters in search of an author, as opposed to Blockbusters in search of tourists. Crossroads recalls a time when people were the main event in Times Square. When crowds would once gather around drums or around "the men in knife studded collars who threw insults at the jostling tourists." It tells of the movie theater balconies as places of intimacy, the stories [Samuel Delaney](#) will tell rather than Roger Ebert, and the movies geared more to sex than to violence, you know back when there still was a big difference.

Today no one will arrive in Times Square bright-eyed dreaming of their big break at the Virgin Megastore retail counter. Crossroads is our B-movie-as-memory where a deep wizened voice slowly explains that "These recent icons don't dig down into the imagination and they won't be burnished through repetition over decades so that even after the original context is lost the image continues on in a life of its own." Crossroads finds more than blight missing from the New Times Square. But since the only way forward is ahead, we might as well start now imagining reuse and recovery projects for broken four-story escalator halls with mirrored ceilings. I suggest that somewhere in the transition from Mickey to mouse leather, we may want those mirrors back down at eye level.
