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Can We Please Stop Saying That New York City Is Dead?



BY LIBERTY IMHOFF · OCTOBER 6, 2020



A view of the Empire State Building, from 5th Avenue; © Manic Metallic 2020

Surely, you've seen the articles. The ones that proclaim that New York is dead forever, like [this unfortunate piece](#) by author and entrepreneur James Altucher. The question has seeped into every news source, every social media platform – and many conversations that we have with our friends and close associates.

And we know why the question exists: Broadway, what many think of when they think of New York, is shut down for the foreseeable future. Many beloved businesses and organizations have shut their doors for the last time. Companies are beginning to see the value of remote work, and some of them are deciding to make it a permanent part of their operations. The “city that never sleeps” is being forced to sleep a little more than it is used to doing. The list of supposed reasons for New York's death is endless. However, this all begs the question:

Who is New York City dead for?

I've grown tired of hearing this question, discussion, and even the answers about NYC being dead because, after observing how life in Manhattan has been proceeding, it is clear that the whole conversation is missing the most important points.



A view from the park at Chelsea Piers, © Manic Metallic 2020

This is a city that is far from having perished. Parents still play with their children in the park at Chelsea Piers. People still celebrate birthdays in Greenwich Village. Couples and small groups of friends still dine at restaurants together on the Upper East Side. Female dance troupes in Madison Square Park still perform. Brunch in Koreatown still happens. People still dress up and walk the streets of SoHo in groups of 3-4 on the way to a socially-distanced event.



Small groups gather in a socially-distanced manner in Madison Square Park, © Manic Metallic 2020

And for the most part, they do it in a safe, protective way. All proper coronavirus precautions are taken. New York has faced some of the worst coronavirus cases that the world has seen, but – as New Yorkers are wont to do – they got through it and found a way to get on with life in the safest way possible. While the rest of the United States is still trying to figure out which way is up, New York is charting a path forward in these precarious times in which we live.

I do believe that there are those that choose to see the negative side of things when New York is faced with hardship; this treatment that the city faces is a part of being one of the country's only world-class cities. Most other cities are looking up at the position which it occupies.



An outside view of Chelsea Market, which has been moved outdoors during the pandemic; © Manic Metallic 2020

This does not, however, explain the residents that are saying that the city has died. As for that, it seems to be those that are/were somewhat affluent pre-pandemic and are now sad that they can't go to their swanky events and down expensive cocktails by the multiples. There is no knock on being sad about losing those things; I love a great cocktail and an event that gives me a reason to dress up (clearly, the fashion is the part that I appreciate most about events).

However, I bristle at this "New York City is dead" declaration when there are so many people that have chosen to remain in the city. Maybe these people have no choice but to stay because they are a part of the working class and have little flexibility to make decisions such as leaving because they're sad. Maybe they have the ability to make any decision that they choose but remain because they love the city and what it stands for. Whatever the reason, they are still in New York. When people say that the city is dead, they are erasing the choice to stay in New York and the experiences that remaining residents have on a daily basis. These residents matter too.

Where some may see closed restaurants, I see remaining eateries that are gathering together materials to create the best outdoor dining experience that they can for their customers. Where some may see empty streets, I see streets that have been altered to allow for residents to be able to use this space more than the automobiles that usually rule the roads. And where some may see a city that has been battered by this pandemic, I see a city that has been resilient and is willing to do whatever it takes to make it through the tough times together.

Let's talk about how the "New York City Is Dead" mindset carries over to the fashion industry.



7th/Fashion Ave & 31st St, Manhattan, © Manic Metallic 2020

There have been those who held the notion that New York Fashion Week (NYFW) should have been canceled this year due to the pandemic. Can we stop for a second to think of what the true purpose is of having it in the first place? New York Fashion Week isn't meant to be the celebrity- and influencer-filled circus that it inevitably becomes season after season. NYFW, at its core, is a trade show that is meant to allow designers to show their work to both buyers and the media. From these shows, designers:

1. Make sales to different stockists (typically after showroom appointments, that is – not directly after their fashion shows), and
2. Allow the media to see what is in store for their upcoming collections. The media, in turn, reports on the collections to the general public – thus, letting everyone know what trends are coming down the line over the next couple of seasons.

With that in mind, it should be clear that completely shutting down would not have been a great option. Fashion is an industry – and as such, there are many that depend on its continuation for their survival. That is not to say that the pandemic shouldn't be treated with an abundance of caution; to the contrary, many designers opted for digital shows instead of traditional runway shows. But to say that fashion should cease operations for the time being is foolhardy.



Anna Sui S/S 2021; Naeem Khan S/S 2021, photos c/o the respective designers

The fashion industry in New York City pays \$11 billion in wages and generates about \$2 billion in annual tax revenue. Is that the type of money that anyone would suggest to throw away, especially in an economy that is as perilous as the current one – particularly when all protective measures are being taken in the presentation of the work?

Or, here's a question. Imagine if this were an industry event for engineers or sports professionals – would that same sentiment be there? I believe that would not have been the case. This thought that NYFW shouldn't have gone ahead was yet another example of many seeing fashion as an industry not worthy of respect (see [this article](#) that Manic Metallic wrote for our thoughts on this topic). Fashion is a large part of the fabric of New York, and I believe that even residents that are not obsessed with fashion understand this.



Comedian Jerry Seinfeld; photo c/o Wikipedia


If we were looking for a perfect summation of what we believe about those that say that New York City is dead, it's this quote by comedian Jerry Seinfeld – the ultimate New Yorker – in [this op-ed in the New York Times](#):

“Real, live, inspiring human energy exists when we coagulate together in crazy places like New York City. Feeling sorry for yourself because you can't go to the theater for a while is not the essential element of character that made New York the brilliant diamond of activity it will one day be again.”

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