

**From:** GILBERT TAUBER  
**Sent:** Monday, October 02, 2006 10:43 PM  
**To:** comments@lpc.nyc.gov  
**Cc:** viverito@council.nyc.ny.us; mail@cb7.org; landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org  
**Subject:** 2710 Broadway, former Automat

October 2, 2006 Hon. Robert B. Tierney Chairman NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission

Dear Mr. Tierney,

The former Horn & Hardart Automat building at 104th Street and Broadway deserves to be landmarked. It is one of the last survivors of a building type that was an important part of New York life from the 1920s through the 1960s.

To people who remember that era, particularly those of us who had little money, the Horn & Hardart Automats were one of New York's more accessible pleasures—like riding the ferry or going to a concert at Lewisohn Stadium. The food was cheap, tasty and filling, but the Automat was not only a place to be nourished. Its Art Deco architecture was a delight. The action of its gleaming gadgetry was in itself an entertainment, and its changing cast of patrons exemplified what Walt Whitman called the “man show” of a great city. It was a neighborhood social center, a lunchtime Rialto, a poor couple's evening out, and sometimes a place to go when you needed to be alone.

Although it originated in Philadelphia, the Automat flourished in New York and became closely identified with this city. As a setting typical of New York, it was portrayed in numerous films, mentioned in song lyrics, a setting for novels and short stories, and the subject of jokes on network radio shows. For out-of-towners, a visit to the Automat was as essential to experiencing New York as a ride on the subway or seeing the view from the top of the Empire State Building.

The Automat was also emblematic of the era when the Machine Age was embraced by popular culture. It pointed to the same bright future promised by gleaming skyscrapers, streamlined locomotives, the 1939 New York World's Fair, and every cover of *Popular Mechanics*

The modernity of the Automats was proclaimed in the architecture of their buildings. Typically, they had expanses of glass showcasing the interior, fine metal ornament and decorative terra cotta. Nearly always there was a generous curve, either in the framing of a window, the rounding of spandrel or, as in the recently demolished 57th Street building, the curving of the entire façade.

At one time there were dozens of Automats in Manhattan alone. All but two are now either destroyed or altered beyond recognition. At 104th Street, the building's original street level is concealed but nevertheless mostly intact behind a stone veneer. Up above, the grand arched window and the polychrome terra-cotta panels are fully visible. The only other surviving Automat, on West 72nd Street, is already landmarked and has

been tastefully restored. The 104th Street building has the same potential and deserves the same future.

Gilbert Tauber, AICP