NAKED CITY: THE DEATH AND LIFE OF AUTHENTIC URBAN PLACES
by Sharon Zukin
Oxford University Press, 312 pp., $27.95

There are people who have never lived in New York City and will never tire of reading about it, and I am probably one of those people. Nevertheless, I was initially disappointed to realize that Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places concerns itself primarily with that metropolis; I had been hoping for some insight into the ways and means of gentrification and preservation a little closer to home. Turns out, of course, that those lessons are to be had even when author Sharon Zukin is laying out the specifics of, say, how Harlem became de-ghettoized or the ramifications of the Williamsburg hipster epidemic. In revisiting Jane Jacobs’ highly influential 1961 classic, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, which advocated for small-scale, mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhoods in the face of massive urban renewal plans, Naked City focuses on three areas transformed by the by-now-familiar procession of flight, blight, creative colonization, media hype, governmental attention and boosterism, private investment, and high-end development – Williamsburg, Harlem, and the East Village – and then examines specific and unexpected ways that public spaces have been somewhat reclaimed or defended as what Zukin calls “authentic” places: corporate control (Union Square), food vending (Red Hook), and community gardening (East New York). In the process, Zukin makes the rather large point that Jacobs-style fetishization of a certain kind of neighborhood ultimately contributes in its own way to gentrification by appealing to wealthier people with wealthier tastes, displacing traditional businesses, and attracting development money. In grappling with notions of “authenticity” – which she poses as a question of who has a right to city spaces rather than who was there “originally” (an almost impossible claim to stake) – she concludes that the process of development in most central cities drives out poor and working-class populations entirely. The only way to maintain authenticity, she holds, is for “the state” to become involved in preservation – something Jacobs failed to see. Rather than “making markets,” as she puts it, government needs to focus on preserving real affordability, providing services to all citizens, and retaining traditional residents. That bold proposition, along with Zukin’s ability to assimilate what must be thousands of facts, events, and theories into a highly readable narrative, makes Naked City a revelation, no matter where you live.
– Cindy Widner

59 SECONDS: THINK A LITTLE, CHANGE A LOT
by Richard Wiseman
Knopf, 336 pp., $24

You need another self-help guide? Well, maybe we all do. Maybe such a thing will provide the solid foundation or the final polishing that we need as we strive for, what, perfection? Nirvana? Certainly for something a little improved over what we’ve personally achieved thus far.

But we could probably do without another volume of suggestions shored up by nothing more than anecdotal evidence, you think? We might hope for a manual loaded with guidance that’s backed by scientific proof. After all, it wasn’t wishful thinking or prayer that put humans on the moon and eradicated polio and built your neighbor’s 72-inch Blu-ray-powered video monitor: It was cold, sweet, reproducible science.

Here’s Richard Wiseman, author of The Luck Factor and Quirkology, offering a compilation of handy life-guidance exercises, of methods (and shall we say tricks, even) for improving your lot in life. The book is called 59 Seconds: Think a Little, Change a Lot, because the gambits suggested can be enacted in that time or less – which is always appreciated in this rushing world. And, boo-yah, this book does that hallowed One Minute Manager canon one second better. And, yes, these gambits the author has gathered, these here’s-what-you-do pointers, are backed up by scientific research.

Well. How rigorous some of the tests and observations may have been, we can only assume, but Wiseman, wise man that he is, provides the particulars (if not the journaled abstracts) for each suggestion. That’s positive reinforcement for any rational thinker right there: Unless you fall into a tiny percentile of resistant personalities or physiological mutants, these methods will likely do what you’re being told they’ll do. Your iPhone doesn’t run on faith; why should your life?

The other benefit of having all this casual data, too, to aid you in reaching your goals. Want to improve your social life by making mistakes? Research by Elliot Aronson and colleagues at the University of California is cited to show you how and why. Wonder if it’s possible to think your way to lower blood pressure? Well-documented investigations by Harvard University’s Alia Crum and Ellen Langer provide the answer.

Wiseman includes several helpful charts and quizzes among the data, too, to aid you in reaching your goals. The other benefit of having all this casual technical reinforcement in the book is that it becomes interesting in and of itself, as a sort of multifaceted window into human psychology.

We haven’t tested this in the laboratory and have used no control groups for proper determination, but we’ll take a semieducated guess here that 59 Seconds is a book that will provide more actual help and entertainment than many others of its kind.
– Wayne Alan Brenner

January Clearance
50% to 70% off msrp

Every item in stock or on special order is marked down 50-70% off msrp. We would rather discount it then pay tax on it! Great selection!

www.gagefurniture.com

Austin-7725 Burnet Rd. North Star Center-454.3613
Round Rock-130 Sundance Pk, La Frontera Center
512.600.0046

GAGE FURNITURE SINCE 1941