Control, Exclusion, and Play in Today's Future City

The title for our work—The Beach Beneath the Streets—refers to the French May '68 slogan. "Sous les pavés, la plage!" often translated as "Beneath the pavement—the beach!" The anonymous graffiti from Paris 1968 conjures up any number of images—a subaltern vitality, the control of something unruly, the dominance of nature, and a possible return of the repressed. The expression also speaks to a new kind of social imagination, a right to view the city as a space for democratic possibilities, a social geography of freedom. "All power to the imagination," is perhaps the most famous bit of street graffiti from 1968. Throughout the period, the Situationists, a highly influential French avant-garde group who took part in the street demonstrations, argued urban space created room for one to consider and conceive of new perspectives on the very nature of social reality. Within such a politics, the rules of everyday life would be turned upside down and restored into a "realm for play" (Vaneigeem 1994, 131).

The Situationist response to the privatization of public space included innovations in approaches to activism. Two primary tactics utilized by the Situationists included interventions termed "détournement" and "dérive." Détournement refers to the rearrangement of popular signs to create new meanings (Thompson 2004). "An existing space may outlive its original purpose . . . which determines its forms,

"The city is burning tonight (Sous les pavés, la plage!)" Photo by view-askew, mural by Seth Tobocman, Norway.

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functions, and structures; it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one," French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre would explain. He described the way the process changed a local produce market in 1969. "The urban centre, designed to facilitate the distribution of food, was transformed into a gathering-place and a scene of permanent festival—in short, into a centre of play rather than of work—for the youth of Paris" (LeFebvre 1974, 167). Dérive refers to short meandering walks designed to resist the work- and control-oriented patterns of Georges Haussmanns redesign of Paris (Thompson 2004). This approach anticipated today's Critical Mass bike rides—a current "best practice" in playful, prefigurative community organizing. "The dérive acted as something of a model for the 'playful creation' of all human relationships," writes theorist Sadie Plant (1992, 59). The point of dérive is active engagement between self and space. It changes the way one sees the streets (60). Such forms of play reveal a sense of agency, of control of the way one wants to participate within the world. While play takes place in all human cultures, its roots in movement activity can be found in the works of the Surrealists and Dadaists (Plant 1992). The Situationists built on this trajectory, which in turn found its way into modern movements ranging from queer direct action ACT UP zaps to Reclaim the Streets (RTS) and Pink Silver style tactical frivolity of the street parties of today's global justice movement (Jordan 1998; Shepard 2009; Shepard 2011).

Dérive and détournement also highlight something important about public space and its relation to the social imagination, the topic of this book. Public space is a source of contestation. It is intricately associated with any number of notions: democracy, public debate, Shakespeare's "all the worlds a stage," Elizabethan theatre, comedy, and tragedy. Such thinking finds its way into the very geography of the public commons. Take the town of Arakoulos, just a few kilometers east of Delphi, the ancient home of the mythical oracle. Today streets still ring with their own chorus. On summer evenings, chairs are set out ten and twelve deep in front of the cafes that line the only significant street in town. They overflow with occupants. Outside, the chairs and conversations of all the cafés intermingle in a daily social ritual that goes on for hours. The agoras in the center of the ancient city states of Greece have long been presented as the absolute ideal of public space. Coupled with the equally engaged and lively use of public space in a Greek town like Arakoulos, the moment is inspiring for a student of public spaces. But it quickly fills an American observer with the simple question: how come streets in the United States no longer feel like this?

The comparison is misleading. The United States does have vibrant, diverse public spaces. There is no single ideal type of public space, yet the bucolic Mission Dolores Park overlooking downtown San Francisco confirms

that there are vibrant examples here as well. In this compressed, urban park only a couple blocks long, there is marvelous integration of different users of the space, but simultaneously firm self-segregation as well. On any given day, one might find in the park twenty-four hour drug dealing down the hill from male sunbathers, kids on the unenclosed playground next to dogs running off their leashes, cops in their squad cars across the field, a political rally next to a basketball game—picnickers, tennis players, people waiting for the trolley, and even the anarchist direct action group Food Not Bombs serving free meals. The park seems like just the kind of space William H. Whyte would linger over as an ideal space of diverse, self-regulating interaction. Yet, the integration of these different uses hinges on a degree of self regulation: chaos would erupt if any of these groups infringed on the space of any of the others.

The segregation is not all voluntary: people have been assaulted for crossing into the drug dealers' space, disputes erupt between parents and dog owners, cops roar down the walkways. The risk of danger is real, as is exclusivity even in this most ideal of public spaces. Public space, even at its best, is a complex balance. And while advocates of public space often are strong opponents of police surveillance or corporate control, the space described here could not exist without order and social control. But control is not emanating from the squad car. Order in public space is generated primarily, though not exclusively in this case, by users. Despite the priority of self-regulation in public space, police increasingly play a role in filtering, controlling, and segregating access to public space. Competing liberatory and controlling visions of public space run throughout this book.

Though these opening vignettes offer glimpses of the recreational possibilities of such spaces, the purpose of the book is serious. Public space has attracted wide ranging attention from far-flung perspectives and disciplines; it is claimed like a battlefield, mourned as a dying species, embraced as the very incubator of democracy. Work coming out of these varied concerns is all valuable, but very difficult to rectify with each other. Three factors are considered here: exclusion, control, and play. In their own ways, each highlights the central features of public space, its repression and resistance, and provides the means by which students of public space can think coherently about the different traditions of the study of public space. Juxtaposing control and resistance, one locates a dialectic in the most passionate examinations of public space—comprised of alarms sounded at the privatization of public space, even the impending death of public space, and celebrations of the singular liberatory potential of the politics of public space. As opposition to privatized space becomes more sophisticated, and activists' interest in the potential of public space becomes more widespread, both the defense of public space and the strategic value of public space benefits from a framework with which to understand the ongoing threats to the future of public space. This book seeks

to provide a framework that can relate insights about recent elite domination of public space as well as breakthroughs in the strategic use of public space for emancipatory purposes.

While the opening examples (as well as a few to follow) come from different sides of the globe, this examination of public space centers on New York. That is useful in part because the politics of space are strongly influenced by elites who seek to shape space and direct its uses—large-scale real estate developers, politicians, and bankers capable of moving large amounts of capital into and out of a region or project. Part of what makes New York an intriguing global city is the way that transnational social and cultural capital infuses its neighborhoods with a distinct glocal—global and local—dimension. Developers hold positions of particular influence in New York City and its politics, making this a particularly productive place to examine spatial trends that are nonetheless influential elsewhere. Thus, while public space takes shape in a local physical geography, the capital behind the bricks and mortar is connected to a neoliberal economic project aimed at the privatization and commodification of countless aspects of life, from water to air to the lands of cities around the world (Klein 2003). When New York faced a fiscal crisis in the mid-1970s, its reorganization served as a kind of trial run for the impact of these neoliberal policies on local space. In the years since, New Yorkers have had to contend with one crisis after another, with various camps promoting policy solutions involving still more privatization. Much of the work of New York activists, radicals, revolutionaries, queers, and community organizers has been a response to the threats borne of the 1975 restructuring. Given this, a brief review of New York City history since its fiscal crisis is instructive.

The Transformation of New York City in Power and Space

The transformation of space that this book examines parallels transformations in capitalism. For some time, authors who monitor the accessibility of public space have linked the loss of public space to the more aggressive turn in capitalism beginning around the early 1970s as the postwar consensus was stagnated by inflation and then replaced by a more ruthlessly profit-seeking global capitalism (Zukin 1991; Sorkin 1992; Davis 1990; Castells 1989; Sassen 2001). That global change had particular manifestations in individual cities, and New York's have been well-documented (Fitch 1993; Abu-Lughod 1999). As capitalists privatized public commons, eliminated programs guaranteeing public welfare, and launched vengeful raids on working class prosperity, elites first backed away from the city, then returned to disemboweled democratic spaces—building within their gentrified, eviscerated shells either elite playgrounds, upper-middle class consumerist shopping festival marketplaces, or

"bread and circus" distractions from the economic restructuring going on all around.[1]

Recently, several important works have delved into the last forty years of New York history to consider the story of its vexing transformation. While Vitale (2008) considered the change in terms of policing, and Fitch (1993) viewed them via real estate, Freeman (2000) and Moody (2007) considered the city's changes from the vantage point of labor relations and shrinkage of the public sector, and Greenberg (2008) considered how New York was rebranded after the crisis. Zukin (2010) examined how the soul of the city has been threatened as the city is redeveloped on the foundation of a commodifiable, gentrified culture. And Marshall Berman (1982; 2007) considered what New York tells us about modernism. Berman, of course, was not the first to view the city as a narrative for our age. "Here I was in New York, city of rose and fantasy, of capitalist automotion, its streets a triumph of cubism, its moral philosophy that of the dollar," Leon Trotsky wrote in his autobiography. "More than any city in the world, it is the fullest expression of our modern age" (quoted in Moody). Implicit is a recognition of the cultural and economic influence of a distinct urban space. Over the past four decades, a transnational, neoliberal revolution in financing, policing, and real estate has shifted the way the city lives, works, and understands itself. Our view of the city begins with a glimpse of the space from the street to the sidewalk, between commerce and pleasure, at the intersection of work and play.

A common thread running through the writing about New York is the flux in public space and by extension the public sector. Here, one is invited to consider the ways the city is organized to preserve, privatize, profit from—sometimes support, and even defend public spaces. Borrowing from this rich tradition of scholarship, we consider changes in the urban environment via its public spaces, the work located within them, the ways people play, build communities, and make lives for themselves here. Much of the recent changes in New York's public spaces originate from the profound economic and demographic dislocation of deindustrialization. New York's deindustrialization really began with the post war era. Years before globalization, technological advances, including containerization, robbed New York's waterfront of some thirty thousand jobs from the 1950s to the 1970s (Freeman 1990; Levinson 2008). In 1966, the Brooklyn Naval Yard closed, robbing the city of some sixty thousand jobs (Freeman 2000). In the years to follow, many of these workers found employment at Kennedy Airport, as New York become more and more connected to the world. The shift was significant. "Changes in the waterfront divorced the city from its past," wrote labor historian Joshua Freeman (1990, 164). As ships increasingly docked in New Jersey, sailors stopped even coming to the city to work, linger, or loiter, leaving the city without a presence dating back to the earliest settlements in the city. "By the 1970s,

much of New York's glorious waterfront lay abandoned," Freeman continued. "Decaying piers on Manhattan's West Side routinely burnt up in spectacular fires. Some docks were used as parking lots, others as bus barns and sanitation department garages. A few served as impromptu sunbathing decks" (164–65). Chapter 4 of this work considers the ways a different set of communities reoccupied abandoned piers on Manhattan's West Side.

Still, people continued to come to New York in search of industrial work. Throughout this period, a "generation of blacks and Latins were conscientiously following the American immigrant model—just when the American immigrant–industrial city was crumbling," Marshall Berman (2007, 17) notes. The new arrivals sometimes had difficulty finding jobs or bank loans to support their neighborhoods. Redlining increased, furthering a capital crisis draining resources from neighborhoods inhabited by minorities (Wilder 2000). Streets and buildings in the Bronx began to disintegrate in front of the world's eyes.

By the early 1970s, the post war business-labor accord, in which business agreed to compensate workers in exchange for labor stability, began to crumble. And the fiscal crisis witnessed a rebellion against the city's social democratic polis. "If we don't take action now, we will soon see our own demise," a New York financier confessed during a closed door meeting of business executives in 1973. "We will evolve into another social democracy" (quoted in Moody 2007, 17). Fearing New York City was becoming a European model welfare state with budgets and entitlements too generous for their liking, New York's bankers, business elite, and Governor Rockefeller pulled the plug, turned right, and sketched a path for the city's neoliberal rebirth. To pull off their coup, New York's business elite built on a series of financial crises.

In the years after 1968 and more intensely after 1972, a well-connected elite comprised of a triumvirate of America's social upper classes, corporate communities, and policy formation organizations called for a shift in direction for US social policy. An oil embargo, cheap foreign labor and goods, and a business downturn had all reduced the dominance of the United States within the world economy, resulting in diminished profits for US companies. While business leaders had once considered social welfare policies an effective means to co-opt social movements and keep the labor force literate, healthy, and productive, by the early 1970s, these same corporate leaders began to reconsider this view. Many in the business community felt these social policies helped cultivate movements that destabilized power hierarchies in the United States (Abramowitz. 2000). "It's clear to me that the entire structure of our society is being challenged," argued David Rockefeller in 1971 (quoted in Moody 2007, 17). With the export of jobs abroad, business interest in the health and safety of US workers began to diminish. Business leaders formed a coalition with the increasingly influential new right. Together, this elite class lobbied to restrict policies which: 1) created jobs for the unemployed, 2) made

health and welfare policies more generous, and 3) helped employees gain greater workplace protections (Domhuff 1998). The years to follow brought a series of social and economic policies, which redistributed income upward, cheapened the cost of labor, shrunk social programs, weakened the influence of social movements, and limited the role of the federal government (Abramovitz 2000).

By 1975, the crisis reached its apex in New York. While pensions, substantive municipal wages, unions, and social diversity were not unusual, "among American cities, only New York was broke," notes Robert Fitch (1993, viiv). "As the recession gathered pace, the gap between revenues and outlays in the New York City budget increased" (Harvey 2005, 45). Banks initially planned to honor New York's debt, but Harvey notes, "in 1975 a powerful cabal of investment bankers (led by Walter Wriston at Citibank) refused to roll over the debt and pushed the city into technical bankruptcy" (45). (Three and a half decades later, Citigroup was more than willing to take in over fifty billion dollars from the Troubled Asset Relief Program when banks faced their own fiscal crisis [CBO 2010]. But we're getting ahead of ourselves.)

The city formed a Municipal Assistance Corporation (MAC) in 1975. "Its the fucking blacks and Puerto Ricans. They use too many city services and they don't pay any taxes," a spokesman for MAC explained at the time. "New York's in trouble because it's got too many fucking blacks and Puerto Ricans" (quoted in Fitch 1993, vii). Every crisis requires its scapegoats. So the city scripted a model of "planned shrinkage" to rid its streets of undesirables.[2] "Our urban system is based on the theory of taking the peasant and turning him into an industrial worker," New York Housing Commissioner Roger Starr, one of the plan's architects argued. "Now there are no industrial jobs" (quoted in Fitch 1993, viii).

Marshall Berman was teaching at City College at the time. "[M]any of the elites whose power was supposed to protect us against predators identified with the predators. They polarized the city into us and them," Berman remembers. "Starr's idea for dealing with the fiscal crisis was to divide the city's population into a 'productive' majority that deserved to be saved and an 'unproductive' minority that should be driven out" (22). Planned shrinkage would "strive to eliminate not bad individuals but bad neighborhoods" (Ibid.).

The MAC formed an austerity plan to flatline wages, reduce welfare services, and curtail the influence of unions in exchange for federal aid. Its business leaders started organizing to create an economy based around finances, insurance, real estate (FIRE) rather than industrial jobs. "The bail out that followed entailed the construction of new institutions that took over the management of the city budget," Harvey (2005, 45) continued. "They had first claim on tax revenues in order to first pay off bondholders: whatever was left was paid to essential services." The net result included a wage and hiring

freeze, service and hiring cuts, and new fees for services, including tuition at City University for the first time. (Ibid.). Subways services declined. "The results could be seen on every street and in every institution of working class New York" (Freeman 2000, 270).

Most of the advances, which working class New Yorkers had helped create, including a thriving public sector, would be lost. The federal government was able to get back most all of the loans provided to New York City with Ford's signing of the Seasonal Financing Act of 1975. In retrieving the money, the lenders "strip[ped] the city government, the municipal labor movement, and working-class New York of much of the power they had accumulated over the previous three decades" (Ibid.). Those workers who could fit into the post industrial workforce would be welcomed. Those who could not would have a hard time maintaining a life in the city. "We have balanced the budget on the backs of the poor," Felix Rohaytn, of the MAC, candidly confessed, as the crisis waned (quoted in Berman 2007, 24). New York would not be the same.

Many observers argue that New York's mid-1970s social and economic transformation served as a dress rehearsal for the neoliberal reorganization of government and politics set in motion with Thatcher, Reagan, Clinton, and Bush (Moody 2007). In this way, the chain of events served as an example of what the neoliberal economics of the next two decades would look like. "The management of the New York fiscal crisis pioneered the way for neoliberal practices both domestically under Reagan and internationally through the IMF in the 1980s," Harvey explained. "It established the principle that in the event of a conflict between the integrity of financial institutions and bondholders' returns, on the one hand, and the well-being of citizens on the other, the former was to be privileged." The crisis established the new precedent that government policy was best aimed "to create a good business climate rather than look to the needs and well-being of the population at large" (Harvey 2005, 48).

New York was a significant candidate for this project. As much a part of the world as the States, New York and its business elite were profoundly influenced by global trends. Their response to the fiscal crisis can be understood as the financial elite protecting their investment in New York's financial sector (Moody 2007). "This amounted to a coup by the financial institutions against the democratically elected government of New York City, and it was every bit as effective as the military coup that had earlier occurred in Chile," argued David Harvey (2005, 45–46). Within this new battle, wealth moved from the middle classes back into the hands of elites. And the world learned a simple, brutal lesson from New York's experience: "[W]hat was happening to New York could and in some cases will happen to them" (Ibid.). "The fiscal crisis constituted a critical moment in the history of privatization, spreading the belief that the market could better serve the public than the government, that

government was an obstacle to social welfare rather than an aid to it," wrote Joshua Freeman (2000, 272). "[T]he corporate world, if left alone, would maximize the social good," (Ibid.). "They seized the opportunity to restructure it in ways that suited their agenda," (Harvey 2005, 47). "Because New York served as the standard-bearer for urban liberalism and the idea of a welfare state, the attacks on its municipal services and their decline helped pave the way for the national conservative hegemony of the 1980s and 1990s" (Freeman 2000, 272).

This trend has been described as "neoliberalizing urbanism," notes sociologist Alex Vitale. "Uneven development inherent in neoliberal entrepreneurial economic development strategies favor concentrated capital at the expense of the poor and middle classes" (2008, 14). And social inequality expands. "Urban development creates social polarization which leads to a large underclass, who in turn must be socially and spatially restricted from newly developed spaces," (Ibid.). Hence the impetus to control, police, segregate, privatize, and overdevelop urban public space. Fixated on "the city's land use and value, taxing and spending priorities, and general business climate," New York's highly integrated business "complex" focused on maximizing the profitability of New York City's redevelopment in the years after the crisis (Moody, 27). "Nowhere in the country is land so valuable as in New York City," Moody elaborated. "And virtually all the components of the corporate headquarters complex have a deep interest in these values" (17). New York's urban neoliberalism found expression in policies and policing approaches aimed at maximizing social control of public spaces, including, "closed-circuited video surveillance systems, anti-homeless laws, and gated communities" (Vitale 2008 25). They were basically "responses to a social crisis" that the business elite helped orchestrate (Ibid., 24).

In *Remaking New York*, William Sites (2003) argues the use of state powers to redistribute resources away from the poor towards elite interests serves as a form of "primitive globalization." This concept echoes Marx's "primitive accumulation," in which the state distributes large portions of capital into the hands of a small elite few. Primitive accumulation is Marx's description for the crude concentration of wealth, which takes place in capitalist economic development. "The basis of the whole process," Marx explains, is a violent, coercive use of force by the state to displace the peasantry from lands where they have worked, followed by "bloody legislation" used to regulate the consequences of jarring separations from traditional ways of life. The beggars and vagrants tend to bear the brunt of the process (Sites 2003, 13). Skipping ahead from feudalism to mercantilism to the present era's transition into cross border economic integration, Sites argues today's mode of *primitive globalization* follows a similar pattern of reactive politics. Ad hoc corporate welfare policies and business subsidies displace the urban poor as the state dismantles the welfare state safeguards, while displacing the poor. Vitale

(Photo by Caroline Shepard.)

A hot August day in 1987, under the Brooklyn Bridge. (Photo by Caroline Shepard.)

concurs, "The entrepreneurial pursuit of centralized corporate economic development strategies therefore are responsible for the rise of the new urban underclass that has destabilized urban neighborhoods and public spaces," (2008, 26).

"On the one side, neoliberal housing and employment markets were increasing the numbers of people who were displaced and homeless," Frances Fox Piven succinctly explained (quoted in Vitale, 2008). "The failure of government on all levels to regulate the market forces driving this development, or to intervene to provide alternatives for the people affected, meant that people coped as they always have." This included sleeping outside, supporting themselves within a black market economy, peddling for cash, and of course self-medicating before another night on the mean streets. Piven concludes, "These behaviors in turn created popular political support for the coercive social controls that came to characterize city policy in the nineties. But neither the homeless nor the public were responsible for the limited alternatives which drove this mean result."

Yet, there is another side to this story. Resistance to neoliberal social controls comes in countless forms. Part of the story of New York's recovery includes the efforts of those who helped organize against the grinding forces

As more and more people found themselves displaced from their homes, the city's parks and public spaces became filled with those who had nowhere else to lay down their bodies. This was certainly the case in Tompkins Square Park in the 1980s when Tompkins Square Park Riot photographer Clayton Patterson took this photo.

of neoliberalism and the hypercontrol of public space. Marshall Berman writes about the ways his students, neighbors, and citizens in New York City resisted the patterns of spatial displacement, redlining, and disintegration, which characterized life during and after the fiscal crisis. With public spaces up for grabs, new art forms—including hip hop and graffiti—brought a range of colors to the panorama of New York's public spaces. Throughout the 1970s, graffiti artists, "developed a vibrant new visual language," Berman recalled. "They made themselves in a drab and disintegrating environment, and infused that environment with a youthful exuberance, bold designs, adventurous graphics." Eclectic and optimistic, urban space in New York also became a site for joyous improvisation—"some playful and insouciant, other existentially desperate; some projecting spontaneous overflows of powerful feeling" (Berman, 26).

Berman, who taught about the interconnections between Marxism and modernism, remembers the first time he saw a DJ spin records at his school. "It was the late '70's, during club hours, somebody would bring out turn tables and a DJ would scratch and collage dozens of records together while kids in the audience took turns playing MC, rapping over an open mike" (27). The result was a dance party ideally situated for the streets and sidewalks of

Graffiti, East Village, 1988. (Photo by Caroline Shepard.)

New York's public commons. Berman was particularly excited about the do-it-yourself ethos of these efforts by students, many whom could not afford music lessons. In between scratches and samples, they brought to the creation of both a new "music povera" and by extension an urban culture of resistance. Between the graffiti and hip-hop, Berman recognized signs of regeneration among the rubble of burning buildings. Berman muses:

> Their voices became the voice of New York Calling. . . . Their capacity for soul making in the midst of horror gave the whole city a brand new aura, a weird but marvelous bank of bright lights. They, and all New York with them, succeeded in the task that Hegel defined for modern man just 200 years ago: if we can "look the negative in the face and live with it," then we can achieve a truly "magical power" and "convert the negative into being" (29)

In the decades following the crisis, residents continued to cope with an ongoing attack on the public sector.

Many of these changes were first seen in New York's public spaces. Here, tolerance for the displaced masses wore thin. "The backlash against the

socially marginal in New York began with the increased social disorder of the 1970's," notes Vitale. Compounding the issue, the 1972 Supreme Court decision in Papachristou v. Jacksonville, declared vagrancy ordinances unconstitutionally vague. Shop owners were no longer able to arrest loiterers. And the iconic image of a homeless man in front of a Madison Avenue department store became a sign of a city which leaned too heavily on the side of civil liberties rather than order. "Squeegee men, panhandlers, and people sleeping in public spaces came to be the most visible symptoms of an urban environment that many people felt was out of control" (Vitale 2008, 70).

As the cracks in social safety grew, those locked out of the new global economy flooded the streets. "[P]ublic spaces throughout these cities became gathering places for the newly dispossessed," Vitale continues. "Homeless people, unemployed youth, and others excluded from regular participation in housing and labor markets became an omnipresent visible statement about the condition of losers in the new global economy" (102).

While New York has traditionally been viewed as a liberal town, by the mid-1980s, a pro-development ethos came to supersede all other political regimes. It would continue to define governing coalitions in New York (Sites 1997). After the crisis years of the 1970s, "The creation of a 'good business climate' was a priority" (Harvey 2005, 47). "This meant using public resources to build appropriate infrastructures for business." Part of this infrastructure included increased police forces. And gradually, a liberal emphasis on prevention of social problems waned in favor of a get-tough approach. During the Koch and Dinkins administrations, neighborhood and business groups pushed the city to utilize order maintenance modes of policing (Vitale, 2008, 117). The trend was built into a very architecture of the city.

Take Donald Trump's Trump Tower. Completed in 1983, this fifty-eight-story skyscraper drew widespread praise. By its very nature, it embodied a model of exclusion. "To gain the right under zoning regulations to build a larger structure, he put a shopping plaza in Trump Tower with an indoor waterfall and even more marble, this time pink," notes Joshua Freeman (1990, 293). This included an atrium billed as public space few social outsiders ever access. While the space was hailed as the "epitome of Sophistication, the atrium merely brought the suburban shopping mall to New York, as the city stopped setting trends and began playing catch up" (293). Trump Tower would serve as a harbinger of New York's suburbanized, gated future (Hammett and Hammett 2007).

In the years to follow, space in New York became a site in a class war between those who lived, worked, and played in public and those who sought to control, curtail, and privatize this space. Shortly after his election as mayor in 1993, Giuliani's police chief William Bratton released a blueprint for policing focused on reclaiming New York's public spaces from the presence of the impoverished, the poor, and other social outsiders (Smith 1996; Vitale 2008). This involved a "broken windows" style of policing that included no toler-

ance for the smallest of infractions, profiling, stop-and-frisk policing of those who fit certain police profiles, flexible deployment, and the ongoing generation of new rules and regulations all combining to create micromanaged public space (Vitale 2008, 121). "[A]uthorities responded by criminalizing whole communities of impoverished and marginalized populations," observed David Harvey (2005, 48). "The victims were blamed, and Giuliani was to claim fame by taking revenge on the increasingly affluent Manhattan bourgeoisie tired of having to confront the effects of such devastation on their own doorsteps" (ibid.). Critics noted that the underside of "quality of life" policing was increased police brutality and social control (McArdle and Erzen 2001; Levitt 2009; Sites 2003). Recent histories of police violence in New York City dedicate considerable attention to this aggressive policing approach (Johnson 2003; Levitt 2009).

Giuliani opponents would note that Mayor Giuliani's Quality of Life Campaign hinged on his definition of quality-of-life. Few suggested their own definition included:

> Community gardens bulldozed throughout the five boroughs; community centers auctioned off to profit-driven developers; aggressive police intrusion into peaceful assemblies; thousands of cyclists and pedestrians hit every year; parks rigged with police video cameras; rents soaring (which profits whom?); sanitized chain stores and remote corporations reshaping every neighborhood in their own image.

The broadsheet was written by Reclaim the Streets (RTS), a direct action affinity group of the Lower East Side Collective (LESC)—an influential New York group, whose struggle for public space is chronicled in Part 2 of this book. While Giuliani took a restricted view of public space, RTS suggested there was more to urban citizenship than going to and from work.

The group's goal was to "reinvigorate inner-city public life. Our definition of 'quality of life' does not mean conventional, homogenized, capitalized life, working 80 hours a week to pay the rent. . . We want real, eclectic democracy, not the brand that's being tossed our way." The broadsheet argued that open public space was a vital ingredient of democratic life. "The Mayor's campaign has been combined with efforts to privatize public spaces . . . already in short supply. If Giuliani is successful, his vision of a whitewashed, Disneyfied New York . . . will replace the diverse, exuberant, exciting New York of the present." It was time for those left out of the three-decades of fiscal restructuring and the more-recent mayoral quality-of-life politics to reassert their right to the city. "Help us counteract Giuliani's 'Quality of Life' campaign by celebrating the real quality of life in New York with an all-inclusive, fun, takeover of Astor Place—after all, if we can't dance, its not a revolution!" Inserting play into the struggle for public space, RTS called for a return of the dispossessed for their first street action in 1998. "We hope to fill Astor Place with all those 'undesirables' that have come (or will soon come) under attack of Giuliani's homogenizing vision. *We need you to be there*."

Over the next decade, a class war between the DIY (do-it-yourself) ethos, described by Berman, Lefebvre, and Reclaim the Streets and the neoliberal urbanism of Giuliani and Bloomberg became more pronounced. At the center of the conflict was a question about public space. *The Beach Beneath the Streets* highlights the struggle within the city between those who seek to enjoy and those who seek to control its public spaces. "New York City feels like a very different place today," Marshall Berman concludes in his introduction to *New York Calling.* Thirty years after Roger Starr's planned shrinkage, the city is more diverse than ever. "It is more saturated with immigrants, more ethnically diverse and multicultural than it has ever been, more like a microcosm of the whole world," Berman (2007) explains. "[A]nd thanks to New York's distinctively configured public space, you can see this whole world right out there on the streets. Its mode of multiculturalism is sexy—and threatening to the ultra orthodox in every religion" (32). Perhaps this is why the Giulianis of the world have sought to curtail and contain the abundance of its public spaces.

As even this brief review of recent New York history suggests, efforts to understand the threats and alterations to public space can benefit from the comparison to change in the economic and political sphere. For while the study of capitalism has identified a series of historical eras and forms, the study of space is much younger. One could view the transformation of public space as involving a single shift from public to private. But such a description would oversimplify the situation. If one links these transformations to shifts in economic and political power, a richer picture takes shape. Just as capitalists reinvent social relations in a series of historically identifiable periods—so that, for instance, for some decades capitalists built cities, then they disinvested from them, today they are selectively reinvesting in them again—so threats to public space have changed over time, from efforts to privatize space entirely, to designs that selectively filter it, to spaces that fully exclude and displace less privileged potential users. Thus, rather than bemoaning public space as something that existed in ideal form and which the public now risks having taken from it, it is useful to see the transformation of public space in the same way transformations to capitalism are understood. Public space faces an evolving threat, as the objectives of various actors who do not support or protect its public character change over time in response to their own material and social needs.

Defining Public Space

Though the term is only thirty years old, the definitions of *public* space are as varied, shifting, imprecise, and contradictory as any. Steven Carr and the other authors of *Public Space* provide a comprehensive definition of *pure* public space as "responsive, democratic and meaningful," places that

protect the rights of user groups. They are accessible to all groups and provide for free-
dom of action but also for temporary claim and ownership. A public space can be a
place to act more freely. . . . Ultimately, public space can be changed by public action,
because it is owned by all. . . . In public space, people can learn to live together. (Carr et
al. 1992, 19–20)

Similarly, Lewis Dijkstra suggests public space be classified according to three
criteria: that it be used by all (highlighting the issue of control), be accessible
by all (that is, how exclusive it is), and that it have a history for all (Dijkstra
2000; Orum and Neal 2010, 1).

These definitions avoid legalistic characterizations of public space ("gov-
ernment-owned property to which the public has access," for instance) that
are too narrow to be useful in an era of public-private partnerships. In a land-
mark ruling that has long disturbed First Amendment and public space advo-
cates, the Supreme Court ruled in *Pruneyard v. Robins* (1980) that shopping
malls are not public spaces but private ones. Yet, for many people, they are
the most frequent site of public interaction. Rather than ignore malls, advo-
cates have included them in their examination of contemporary public spaces.
In doing so, they have challenged the court's conception and argued that free
speech rights should be better protected there (as they are in some states).
Similarly, a legalistic definition would simply eliminate from consideration a
"public" space whose management or ownership had been transferred into
private hands, rather than generate questions about how such changes
affected the space.

A third understanding involves the intimate connection between notions
of public space, civil society, and democracy. It builds on De Toqueville's
arguments that democracy in the United States thrives to the extent that it
mediates between three distinct sectors of national life: government, the
market, and civil society in between. Thus, without community space, there
can be no democracy (Shepard 2002). Without public space, there is little
hope for community change or renewed civic engagement. Warner's (2002)
conception of a "counter public" used by those excluded by barriers to the
public sphere builds on this recognition.

A fourth conception of public space involves notions of a public sector.
Joshua Freeman (1990) describes such space as "social democracy." Such
public spaces are supported by public policies, which assume a commitment
to public education, health, housing, and social welfare provisions (Daniel
2000). In an era of a dwindling welfare state, such a sector is increasingly
embattled (Harvey 2005). Yet, critics argue the decline of neoliberalism opens
up space for resurgence of a public sector. Tensions over the privatization of
this sector inspire a range of social movements (Klein 2003).

Because so much of what is experienced as "public" space is in fact care-
fully controlled by private interests (and is not, therefore, "owned by all," and

cannot be "changed by public action"), we use a broader definition, based on how people experience a given space. Public spaces are places in which a range of people can interact with other people they don't necessarily know, and in which they can engage in a range of public and private activities—though both the users and the uses are inevitably limited. This conception incorporates spaces like malls, parks, and plazas built around retail space—including both spaces that approximate the ideal of public space and that thumb their noses at it.

Paradoxically, for public spaces, which are celebrated for being inclusive and accommodating, the sources of control of the space and the nature of exclusion from the space are what differentiate and define any public space. Just as important, what brings most of these users together, and what carves the space out as public and liberating, is something just as familiar to the wielders of giant political puppets at the rally as to the kids coming down the sliding board: play and public performance. The ludic, joyful, temporarily uninhibited physical engagement with the space itself is both an opportunity to act out one's identity and life and a means to declare and expand the boundaries of accepted behavior. It is an opportunity to explore and experiment with reality, identity, and possibility. At its core, play is truly free activity (Huizinga 1950; Shepard 2009; Shepard 2011; Winnicott 1971).

As play serves as a distinct countervailing force to the privatization of public space, a brief review of the concept is useful. For many, play is viewed as a resource with many applications for social movement activity. Our interest is in its capacity to aid social actors in eluding social controls and reimagining social relations. At its most basic level, play is an intuitive performance in freedom. The meanings of such performances take countless permutations. In the face of duress, social movement activity is perhaps most useful in helping social actors cultivate and support communities of resistance. Here, these new communities support social actors in engaging power rather than cowering in the face of often insurmountable political opponents. Within its very opposition to worlds of work, linear thinking, and social order, play subverts much of the logic of neoliberal urbanism (Shepard 2009: Shepard 2011).

To make sense of these shifting uses, we employ an autoethnographic approach, integrating both participant observation and theoretical understanding in order to cultivate an understanding of play in public space within a series of current social movements (see Butters 1983; Hume and Mulock 2004; Juris 2007; Lichterman 2002; Tedlock 1991). This lens takes increasing shape in Part 2. In contrast, Part 1 utilizes a mixed methodology—including interviews, field observations, and quantitative analysis—to consider class-based exclusivity versus democratic inclusion in public space.

Most importantly for students of public space, the parameters in which authentic play takes shape often extend beyond the boundaries of public and private space, where social norms find themselves in flux. While the English

Diggers failed to hold St. George's Hill in 1649, "what these outcasts of Cromwell's New Model Army did hold dear was the community created in their act of resistance; it was a scale model of the universal brotherhood they demanded in the future" (Duncombe 2002a, 17). Play is an ingredient in which to mix people and communities.

There are many forms of play, including the famous Diggers' land occupation or drag ACT UP zaps, the use of food and mariachi bands in Latino communities, dance dramaturgy, culture jamming, the carnival, and other forms of creative community-building activities. It is the exhilarating feeling of pleasure, the joy of building a more emancipatory, caring world. For Richard Schechner (2002), play involves doing something that is not exactly "real." It is "double edged, ambiguous, moving in several directions simultaneously" (79).

While there are any number of ways to conceptualize play, most studies begin with Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture,* a work which has inspired social movement players for decades. His definition encompasses many of the threads established in this opening discussion. These include the conception of play as "a free activity standing quite consciously outside the ordinary life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly." He continues that play "promises the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means." For Huizinga, play is anything but serious (5). It is a space for "free activity." When play takes place in public space, it often takes on a subversive character. Afterall, play offers the possibility for improvisation and imagination.

Overview

As Margaret Kohn suggests, the value of public spaces is twofold (Kohn 2004). Lively, varied public space is vital to society—not only for its democratic value as an incubator of tolerance for difference and as a stage for organized political action, but in its everyday role as a site for the kind of social interaction that permits individuals to conceive of their participation in a society. Activists have already recognized that for space to continue to serve these vital functions, its pubic quality must be recognized and defended.

To that end, we recognize that the concept of public space is actually made up of many types of space of varying degrees of publicness and inclusivity (or, as we stress, "privateness and exclusivity"), and identify those different types. By doing so, we can better understand the changes that have taken place in public spaces of the city in tandem with the economic restructuring of New York, recognize how certain types of spaces are of value to communities and activists, and consider how activists' strategies that make use of public space are unique.

The book is organized in two parts to consider two elements of a spatial dialectic of *repression* and *resistance*. The first part examines repression in the control of public space by looking at the series of strategies elites developed to exclude people from privately owned public spaces. We see that the transition from one strategy to another is closely tied to changes in the political economy, particularly the landmarks of the 1975 financial crisis and the reorganization of public space under Giuliani. The advance of these elite approaches to controlling public space help explain the growing attention by activists to defending spaces. The second part of the book explores resistance in public space—using case studies to explore the rationale, strategies, and value of mobilizations that are both located in public space and address public space issues. From the attention elites give to restrictive control of public space and that activists give to liberating those spaces, it is clear that actors from a range of perspectives recognize the power of public spaces to shape the lives, behavior, and the social organization of people who use them. As Harvey suggests, there is both a reality and awareness of the influential social role of space: "Spatial and temporal practices are never neutral in social affairs. They always express some kind of class or other social content, and are more often than not the focus of intense social struggle" (Harvey 1990, 239). Our book seeks to make that struggle apparent and offer examples of ways people have joined it. Afterall, the flip side of control is a form of ludic activity designed to resist control mechanisms.

The first chapter presents the typology of public spaces we use to understand the relationship between repression and resistance. In particular, we distinguish among privately controlled spaces the following three types: *privatized, filtered,* and *suburban* spaces. In response to efforts at social control, activists fashion and defend what we describe as *community* space and spaces of "temporary autonomous zones," or *TAZ* spaces, and embrace the ideal public space, *popular spaces.* Each subsequent chapter examines in terms of repression and resistance these types to understand how New York's public spaces have developed and evolved. Contrary to earlier accounts—which suggested that space takes shape incidental to other objectives, shaped more by aesthetic fashion, budget constraints, or whimsy rather than as part of a spatial strategy of social control (Frampton 1980; Wolf 1981)—we argue public space is an important location politically in part because it is so highly contested.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the city's public/private office plazas (called "bonus plazas") to demonstrate how these barren, unusable examples of *private* and *filtered* space are not unintended failures but the very goal of elite developers who took a close interest in their design. Here, influential city decision makers seek to control and influence space for their own social ends just as earnestly as activists seek to open up and liberate space for more public purposes. Chapter 3 explores the implications of elites' interest in public space. As structural speculators, major developers model in their plazas not

the city as it is, but the city as they expect it to become. As a result, public space of the past is a clear indicator of the shapes cities would take. At present, they reflect the *suburban* spaces of the present and near future. Having established the progression of repressive public space design, we go on to examine the strategies of play and resistance in public space.

Chapter 4 examines one kind of space foreclosed by shifts in the organization of public space. This ethnographic account considers the Hudson River piers, which served for decades as a *community* space for queer communities. This story details the plight of those struggling to find a place to call home, as public space shifts and evolves (Davey 1995). Through effective organizing by FIERCE! (Fabulous Individuals for Education, Radical, Community Empowerment), homeless queer youth have countered the hypercontrol of their space and have become a constituency, while democratizing access to public space itself. Chapter 5 presents another ethnographic account of a distinct event in the history of struggles for public space: the first action in New York by international public-space group Reclaim the Streets. Building on this movement, the sixth chapter highlights ways struggles for public space are intricately involved with struggles to support convivial spaces such as gardens. This chapter involves stories of campaigns by groups, such as the More Gardens! coalition, Time's Up!, and the Radical Homosexual Agenda and their campaigns to preserve public space for those at the margins.

Chapter 7 highlights innovative uses of play among users to redefine terms of debate about access to a contested public space: the bike lanes running throughout the city. The community narratives highlighted in Chapters 6 and 7 offer images of ways regular people can stake a claim and successfully build the components necessary to oppose privatizing, filtered, suburban spaces and instead create healthy communities—with Critical Mass bike rides, neighborhood meeting spaces, bike advocacy, community gardens, and community centers. The book concludes with a question posed by Woody Guthrie, which winds its way throughout the volume: is this land really made for you and me, or someone else?

Building on this question, the study of public space can properly embrace the dialectic relationship between the series of assaults on public space by private interests, and the resistance that these maneuvers stimulate, by which community activists build community spaces, use TAZ spaces, and celebrate the capacity of popular spaces to create alternatives to privately controlled space. The energy of urban public space is so great as to make physically palpable the gut-wrenching threat of private interests' dominance in the creation, gentrification, and management of public spaces. But that energy communicates just as viscerally the thrilling potential of user- and publicly-controlled spaces. By understanding the relationship of both the forces of private and public control, advocates and defenders of public space can more readily specify the threats their communities have faced from private control of

spaces in the past forty years, and better define the varied kinds of public spaces they need.

As the studies demonstrate, honest and engaged examinations of public space hold the dual promises of identifying the latest threats to democratic freedom through authoritarian control of public space, and identifying the most dynamic strategies to reclaim that liberty.

It is clear that something is happening in the streets and plazas of modern America. And this reflects how we think about citizenship. Without public spaces, many would argue that talk about democracy goes out the window (Ferrell 2001). Yet, access to public space is increasingly restricted. What are the meanings of barriers to access to public space? And what will become of movements for social change if they are excluded from physical access to public spaces, and by extension, a public commons for debate? After all, if you can't walk in the street, can you be considered a citizen? (Ribey 1998). Understanding the social actors who install such barriers, and identifying movements that challenge them, are important steps to nurturing the social component at the core of the democratic potential of a city like New York.