Washington Square Park: Struggles and Debates over Urban Public Space

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WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK: STRUGGLES AND DEBATES

OVER URBAN PUBLIC SPACE

by

ANNA RASCOVAR

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the

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ABSTRACT

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Public space is often perceived as a space that is open to everyone and is meant for gatherings and interaction; however, there is often a great competition over the use and control of public places in contemporary cities. This master's thesis uses as an example Washington Square Park, which has become a center of contention due to the interplay of public and private interests. In the center of the current confrontation is New York University's plan to add 2.4 million gross square feet of new development by 2031 for academic use, faculty and student residential space, athletic facilities and a hotel on two primarily residential "superblocks" near Washington Square Park, which will turn the area into a de facto campus for the school. Nowadays, blending the public and private appears to be a logical result of the model of privatization, which was applied to many public places in different world cities, including New York City. Yet, it raises several questions: what is "public" about public space and who really controls it? The study suggests that public space plays an important role in modern cities; however, making a public place work in the right direction is a complex process that must be approached from different angles. By combining a theoretical background with qualitative research, this thesis aims to provide a better understanding of the underlying issues and draw conclusions about the future of urban public space.

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Introduction

Since the late 1940s folk music blossomed in Greenwich Village, mainly in Washington Square Park. The folk singers had been gathering near the park's fountain – usually on Sunday afternoons – playing guitars, banjos, autoharps or singing songs. Famous musicians such as Bob Dylan, Dave Van Ronk, Pete Seeger used to come and play at Sunday's folk concerts. The gatherings were peaceful enough, yet the folk singers had to obtain permits from the city for their get-togethers in the park. As the years passed by, some residents of the Village began to complain about the music in the Washington Square and about the crowds that the musicians attracted to the area.

In the spring of 1961 the Parks Commissioner Newbold Morris refused a permit to the folksingers for their afternoon gatherings, explaining that "the folksingers have been bringing too many undesirable elements into the park" (Salazar). In response on April 9, 1961 the folksingers and about five hundred supporters sang songs without a permit near the park's fountain, then marched from the park through the arch and to another side of the park, but were quickly stopped by the NYPD Riot Squad which attacked civilians and arrested ten people (Folpe 180). That incident appeared on many front pages of newspapers and became known as "The Beatnik Riot." Parks Commissioner Morris said that he was not against the folk musicians but against their followers, who brought "adverse conditions to the park that ought to be a neighborhood park" (Salazar). Morris tried to convince folk singers to find another place to gather, but ended up lifting the ban shortly – only six weeks after the riot - announcing that the musicians were allowed to play and sing in the park since the residents of the village enjoy their presence on the Square (Salazar).

This folk singer's protest to preserve the music on the Square "sparked one of the city's most legendary free-speech fights" that was described as a battle "over man's inalienable right to strum and sing outdoors" (Salazar). Furthermore, since the Beatnik Riot and for the decades that followed, the area around the fountain in Washington Square has been used as a site for resistance and free assembly; and the park itself became known as a place that welcomes and fosters alternatives. Yet, the park has changed throughout the years; moreover, nowadays Washington Square is at risk to lose its status of an activist's space and protest hub, due to the involvement of various private institutions that are trying to control the park and to use its space for their own financial gain.

Chapter I. Understanding Public Space. Public Space: Introduction to the Concept. Public Space and Public Sphere.

Public space has always been one of the most important and controversial subjects in urban studies, which has caused numerous debates among sociologist regarding its significance, role, and definition. The term *public space* has various aspects - each problematic in itself - and is often used in many different contexts; therefore, it is necessary to clarify that in this study, the term public space will be applied only to physical places, such as streets, squares, parks etc. It is also important to differentiate between *public realm/sphere* and *urban public space*, since they are two different concepts. Setha Low emphasizes that in most of the non-geographical discussions the concept of the public sphere is de-spatialized (153). In Jürgen Habermas's account, for example, the public realm is a universal, abstract sphere that does not have any physical boundaries and is a fluid concept; it is a form of social space, or the city's "quintessential social territory" (qtd. in Low 154). Urban public space, meanwhile, is material. It constitutes an actual place, "a ground within and from which human activity flows" (Low 155). According to Habermas, public space can be considered as an expression of civil society, but does not remain contained within it, rather it emerges in "between civil society and the state" (qtd. in Low 154). Low points out that for Habermas the public sphere is spatially undifferentiated, yet his model of civil society is formulated "based on the spatial imagery of the urban café where people communicate and exchange views as equals through a bracketing of social class and other forms of difference" (qtd. in Low 157). Richard Sennett, like Habermas, sees the public realm as universal and argues that ideally the state should administrate the public sphere, since only then "it can function as an open and accessible forum where the very

foundation for democratic society can be guaranteed by the free and unrestrained exchange of opinions between its citizens" (112).

This idea of a democratic and inclusive public sphere has been often criticized by scholars of various fields of studies. The German philosopher Hannah Arendt, for instance, argues that public sphere is constituted by social power relations and that power "is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence" (qtd. in Low 200). Arendt does not see the public sphere as an idealized space where different social groups co-exist, she rather sees it as a place where different, often conflicting interests are constantly competing against each other. Don Mitchell in his book *The Right to the City* also questions a "normative ideal for public space" in which the public has access to interaction with all other members of the society (116). Mitchell illustrates the exclusionary nature of public space with numerous examples from ancient Greece to nowadays:

> The public that met in these spaces was carefully selected and homogenous in composition. It consisted of those with power, standing, and respectability. … In Greek democracy, for example, citizenship was a right that was awarded to free, non-foreign men and denied to slaves, women, and foreigners. The latter had no standing in the public spaces of Greek cities; they were not included in "the public". … Nor has "the public" always been defined expansively in America history. Inclusion of more and varied groups of people into the public sphere has only been won through constant social struggle. (116)

Even though many political theorists posit that public sphere is normative, Low herself believes that the public sphere is embedded in historical and political practices and this grounding in physical space "offers a spatial location for conflict, cross class associations and social change

(161). If the public sphere can be described as "the sphere of private people coming together as a public" (Habermas 27), its emergence then has a geography as well as history, Low suggests (159).

A number of scholars and sociologists support Low's idea that public space and the public sphere can't be conceptually or physically separated. Philip Howell asserts that the public sphere is "both a normative ideal of political action and a historical phenomenon … it had its origins in Western Europe in response to late eighteenth century ideals of citizenship in the context of an increasingly informed male public, emerging from new forms of political action, and representative and participatory government" (qtd. in Low 160). In her article, Low also refers to Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch and Annika Teppo who claim that public sphere is located in both physical and virtual places - cafés or internet - and that the "the public space is reflected in ownership and property regimes, and socially in terms of diversity" (qtd. in Low 161). This conception of public space echoes John Dewey's idea that public space produces the public sphere "through a location where diverse people's voices and bodies are recognized and included" (qtd. in Low 162). Low concludes that public space and the public sphere "represent conjoined arenas of social and political contest and struggle: this conceptualization of the public realm includes spaces of multiple publics and the ability through conversation and political practices to transform the public sphere" (162).

In addition to the examination of the nature of public sphere, a number of scholars in different areas of studies have been trying to define the term *urban public space.* According to Sennett, public spaces are "the places where strangers meet," and they are often characterized by democracy "in terms of celebrating cultural diversity, coming across strangers and being anonymous" (17). For Sharon Zukin the "defining characteristics of urban public space are

proximity, diversity, and accessibility" (*Naked City* 262). Stephen Carr sees public space as a center of communal life, "where people carry out the functional and ritual activities that bind a community, whether in the normal routines of daily life or periodic festivities" (11). Whereas, Mitchell posits public space as property, and more specifically as a bundle of "rights" and "responsibilities" (5). Yet, often a space's "publicness" is simply measured by the extent to which people have access to it without asking permission.

The concepts of public sphere and public space are still mainly associated with the name of Jürgen Habermas, however these concepts have been revised by other scholars who in different ways contributed to our contemporary understanding of public space and public sphere. Whether the public sphere is perceived as a democratic, inclusive and consensus based sphere, or as a conflicting sphere operated by power relations, it can't be conceptually or physically separated from the concept public space. Yet, the public space and public sphere are two different entities; therefore, these two concepts should not be treated the same. Nonetheless, to understand the meaning of *public space*, it is important to look at the historical development of the term; therefore, it is necessary to sketch at least a brief history of public spaces around the world with a focus on American cities in the second half of the 20th century.

History of Public Space.

When we think of urban public space, it is more often parks, streets, waterfronts, plazas or squares that come to mind. For many scholars, the notion of urban public space can be traced all the way back to the Greek *agora* which functioned as "a place of citizenship, an open space where public affairs and legal disputes were conducted" (Mitchel 29). The agora was mainly a political space, yet commerce and spectacle also took place in the public space of the agora

(Mitchel 7). While scholars attempted to document the history of public places, most of their historical narratives usually jump from ancient period to the Middle Ages, when public life occurred in the city's squares, in the important civic buildings and cathedrals or the streets where different shops and workshops were located (Lennard 25). First, people came together for social reasons, and later, public places began to function also for religious, civic and market purposes (Carr 199). According to Suzanne Lennard, during the Middle Ages the market was the center of the city's social and economic life and the city often grew in direct response to the market's success; the market places were surrounded with high-density, mix-used buildings, streets that were "intimate and lovely," and had a cathedral or fountain as a focal point (25). However, during the Renaissance and Baroque many market places were destroyed together with other public spaces and replaced by "geometric arrangements of streets and avenues for royal processions and marching armies" (Lennard 26). These newly created public places - especially the ones that were located in front of the palace or some government building or church - were not meant for social life, they were designed to uphold the existing power structures such as Church and King.

Further damage to urban public places, Lennard suggests, occurred with the advent of the automobile when public places became useless (25). As a result, for decades the significance of public places for improving public life was ignored by government and city planners and only "when cities all over the world were inundated by cars and threatened by the loss of the public realm, that the subject was rediscovered and reversed by scholars and other professionals" (Lennard 26). By 1960s, cars for the most part were excluded from central parts of hundreds of European and North American cities and towns, and local governments and urban planners focused on restoring or creating new public places to provide a setting for the social life of their

citizens (Carr 26). Furthermore, by the 1970s, public space in most American cities had become more democratic and inclusive. Political demonstrations, performances, and festivals have made public spaces more attractive and more open to different social groups, however, public spaces have also attracted so-called "undesirable" public - drug dealers, drug users or homeless (Zukin, "Naked City" 89). According to Zukin, for the past fifty years in American cities "these combined conditions of festivity and dereliction" have led first to a devalorization and then to a revalorization of public space (*The Cultures of Cities* 123). During the 1980s, in most American cities, support for preservation of old buildings - landmarks - and the desire to make public places less dangerous and more profitable encouraged various movements to re-aestheticize the center, which as Zukin explains, occurred in several senses: "financial, in terms of property values; moral, in the sense of social values; and visual, in aesthetic values suggesting 'good' or 'bad', 'dangerous' or 'safe', evoked by relations between a public space's users, uses, and design" (*The Cultures of Cities* 127). However, by 1990s, Zukin argues, the re-aestheticiztion of public space mostly relied on a growing "symbolic economy" - which is based on cultural production and consumption - and concludes that nowadays "the common symbols of public space are increasingly derived from the nexus of aesthetic display and commercial culture: streets and parks are designed as if they were spaces of consumption" (*The Cultures of Cities* 93-95). Many public parks in New York City nowadays are under the influence of private actors and institutions, which are turning these parks into expensive gardens, the "spaces of consumption" (Zukin, "Naked City" 94). Yet, Washington Square Park continues to remain a true public space that is open to everyone and doesn't need to sell itself to attract visitors from all over the world.

Thus, the symbolic economy produces new forms of public space such as shopping complexes and megamalls that are replacing traditional public spaces. Many of these newly

constructed public places are created to be used in a certain way and only be certain type of people, and are not meant to be a site of the debate or discussion unlike to a traditional public space.

The Significance of Public Space

While urban scholars have varied in their views on the definition of public space, the majority have accepted that the public spaces are integral parts of modern cities. The importance of sharing public space and the influence of the physical environment has been well documented by several influential scholars such as Arendt, Simmel, Mumford, Jacobs, Sennett, Madapoir, Zukin and others. All of them suggested a strong connection between urban public space and civic virtue (Amin). Jane Jacobs, for instance, refers to the public sphere as a "glue that holds a city together" and suggests that the interactions among strangers in public places create order "under the seeming disorder" in the cities (50). In his book *Space is the Machine*, Bill Hillier also emphasizes the effects that built environment has on "co-presence" and "co-awareness" and argues that they are the "raw material for community" (141).

First of all, what makes public places important is that they give people an opportunity to be among others – to observe and be observed – and enable humans to experience themselves less alone. In addition, public space is a place where people with different social backgrounds meet. This exposure to a diversity of people, according to Lennard, teaches people to be tolerant to others (32). She emphasizes that it is especially important for children to be exposed to a diversity of people, different physically or mentally, to observe different models of behavior and to learn from it (34). Carr and Stone suggest that "in a well-designed and well-managed public space, the armor of daily life can be partially removed, allowing us to see others as whole people.

Seeing people different from oneself responding to the same setting in similar ways creates a temporary bond" (qtd. in Amin). In his essays on urban design and segregation, Lee Marcus also emphasizes that sharing public space and everyday activities is an important precondition for promoting integration and tolerance in society and further suggests that built environment can help to reduce segregation between people of different social groups (qtd. in Amin). Furthermore, public spaces are important due to their ability to stimulate the development of community and the desire to be actively involved in improving it (Madanipour 115). Finally, public places often provide a scene for protests, demonstrations and debates, which plays a significant role in shaping place's identity and promoting democracy (Mitchel 45). As we shall see later in this paper, Washington Square Park played an important role in the development of the community and fostering various political and cultural movements that contributed to the character of the neighborhood significantly.

Quality of Public Spaces and Why It Matters. Successful Public Space vs. "Antispace."

After the importance and values of public space was acknowledged and brought back to urban planning in the 1970s, sociologists began to theorize the question of whether the quality of public spaces affects human behavior and everyday experience, and what makes certain public places welcoming and attracting, while others unpleasant or even deterring. Several scholars - White, Jacobs, Gehl, Madanipour - have done their research to define the essential elements of a successful public space. Most of them discovered that the success of the public place heavily relies on economic well-being, which means having present and future financial security. The researchers point out if the public place receives enough funds for its maintenance – either from government, private actors or residents in the area – this place will be well-managed and

welcoming; it will attract people, facilitate the growth of the community, and can be used as a marketing tool. On the other hand, public places that are lacking financial support are usually badly managed public spaces; they only "exacerbate the overall physical and social decline of an area and fail to improve the quality of life for the local people" (Madanipour 4). The question then arises: how do we measure the success of public space and what makes some public places succeed while others fail?

In his book *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, William Whyte, a pioneer in the study of human behavior in urban settings, aims to determine why some urban places are successful while others are not. He uses the plaza at the famous Seagram Building in New York City, completed in 1958, to demonstrate what the successful public place looks like. According to Fred Siegel, most of the plazas built under 1961 zoning regulations failed as public spaces, because "the plazas were built as settings for buildings, not as usable space" (377). Most of the time developers constructed plaza in exchange for taller buildings, creating dull and uninviting public places. Nevertheless, the Seagram Plaza succeeded and Whyte was eager to find out why. In the *Street Life Project* - a film-study about people's behavior in public places - Whyte observed and recorded the interactions and behavior of people at Seagram Plaza and other plazas in the United States. After analyzing the recordings and other data, White and his team of researchers were able to identify the main features of successful public places. First, they have an abundance of places to sit such as benches, movable chairs, and steps. Plazas that lack life did not provide such seating. In addition, some private owners of these plazas intentionally deter people from sitting by placing spikes on surfaces, designing planters too high for sitting or providing no seating at all (White 120) The study suggests that "the biggest single obstacle to a provision of better spaces is the undesirable's problem," however, poor design in a number of

semi-public spaces is the result of the developers desire to keep people out. White argues that designing uninviting spaces is often self-defeating, because "places that are designed in distrust get what was anticipated" (qtd. in Siegal 376). Whyte concludes that three main factors - water features, abundance of places to sit, and food vendors - all play a crucial role in attracting people to urban plazas such as Seagram Plaza (148). Therefore, the greater the number of these key features, the more people gravitate to urban public spaces. The presence of other people is also considered by many researchers as an imperative when it comes to good quality public spaces (Davis 17). Whyte famously notes that "what attracts people most, it would appear, is other people" (45). Later Sennett developed this idea by demonstrating in his research how crowded places become even more crowded, while empty ones tend to remain empty (19).

Nevertheless, the way the physical environment is designed, Bill Hiller argues, can often change "the patterns of co-awareness, resulting in empty spaces or spaces that are dominated by single social categories" (169). Whyte refers to this type of places as "failed" or "dead" public places, where streets faced blank walls or lack shops, windows, doors or simply places to seat and relax (qtd. in Siegel 377). Whyte's project succeeded in reviving several "dead" public places such as midtown's Exxon Park. Some places required a lot of work but often Whyte recommended small simple change such as replacing fixed benches with movable chairs, taking down fences, or moving in food vendors to make public places more welcoming and safe. Whyte also notes that in many American cities with low population, the streets are designed primarily for cars and suggests to those cities to concentrate their public spaces in order to generate activity (123). In his research Whyte demonstrates how social life in public spaces plays such a critical role in the quality of life for those who live in urban areas. He writes:

I end then in praise of small spaces. The multiplier effect is tremendous. It is not just the number of people using them, but the larger number who pass by and enjoy them vicariously, or even the larger number who feel better about the city center for knowledge of them. For a city, such places are priceless, whatever the cost. They are built of a set of basics and they are right in front of our noses. If we will look. (Whyte 145)

In addition, public places fail if they are not safe. *Street Life Project* uses as an example of unsafe public space Bryant Park before it was renovated in the 1980s. Bryant Park is located behind the main building of the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue between 41st and 42nd Streets, in a central commercial district of office towers and stores. According to Whyte, originally the park was elevated to accommodate the library stacks below and surrounded by a high hedge; tall walls and trees isolated the park from the view of passers-by, thus Bryant Park became a popular spot for drug dealing and derelicts (White 76). During the Great Depression, unemployed people tried to sleep in the park, and during World War II soldiers and visitors of the city used the park for illicit trysts and meetings. In the 1970s, drug dealers used the park even during the day, making others, especially women, afraid to enter. Thus, toward the end of the 1970s, the New York City Parks Department yielded to the request of a private association of owners of office buildings and their corporate tenants around the park, and turned over the park's management to them (Zukin, "Naked City" 134). In the 1980s Bryant Park was rebuilt: the hedge was taken down, the entrances were opened from the street, gardens and the lawn were redesigned (White 79). Today, Bryant Park is full of life and activity; it's a safe and welcoming public space, which attracts both tourists and city dwellers, so one might find it hard to believe that for most of the 20th century, the park was a dangerous place that has been very difficult to control. The new design of Bryant Park - with various rules and mechanisms of surveillance - is

certainly the response to the city's need to promote the sense of safety. Nowadays, the obsession with the security, that began to grow after September 11, is a common trend that repeats itself around the city. While some individuals feel more safe with the security cameras and guards in public places, others argue that the surveillance doesn't reduce crime but produces the effect of the of Big Brother watching over the city dwellers.

Nevertheless, a number of scholars suggest that the quality of the urban public space is extremely important as to whether a public place is characterized by its life or lifelessness. However, whether a public space is successful or not depends not only on economic well-being or obvious features such as an abundance of places to seat or concentration of people, but also such things that are harder to measure. Madanipour, for instance, suggests that the quality of a place is closely related to "the degree of identity shaping and socio-spatial segregation" and further argues that "overcoming social exclusion, requires an awareness of spatial dynamics" therefore the quality of public spaces is a crucial factor in the battle against segregation, because they stimulate contact between people of different social groups and act as "integrating mechanisms" (133-134).

Stephen Carr and Andrew Stone refine this idea in their book *Public Space*, in which they argue:

> Successful public places … the parks, plazas, markets, waterfronts, and natural areas of our cities … are the places where people from different cultural groups can come together in a supportive context of mutual enjoyment. As these experiences are repeated, public spaces become vessels to carry positive communal meanings. (344)

Thus, one of the main and most important feature of the successful public place is being inclusive, is being open to different social groups; public place should welcome and embrace

diversity, and only then it becomes a *successful* public place, that will be able to encourage various interactions and activities among its users and to promote active citizenship.

Decades ago Jane Jacobs declared that the Washington Square Park is one of the most successful parks in the United States, and suggested that "it should be treated tenderly and the reasons for its popularity studied and applied to the field of urban planning" (qtd. in Folpe 270). In Jacob's account the park owes it success to the diversity of users and activities, because the diversity is what ultimately makes public places, neighborhoods and cities live and the lack of it makes them die.

Furthermore, Amin underlines the importance of the "ties" - that are created by daily meetings with other residents of the community in public places - which gradually evolve "into closer contacts without requiring a more emotional involvement or losing one's anonymity." Such ties are ways of sharing knowledge and information, and they also contribute to a feeling of security and make people "feel at home in their own neighborhood" (Amin).

To summarize, a good quality public space is not only the one that is welcoming or attractive, but the place that is open to different social groups and encourages various activities from observing to protesting, eating, reading, socializing or just walking around. Ideally public place should provide to its users a sense of community and a sense of control and comfort at the same time, facilitate tolerance towards each other and build the social cohesion that is so necessary for a vibrant culture and democracy.

Role of the Public in the Public Realm

In recent decades sociologists frequently have addressed a question of what is the role of public in the public sphere. In his article "Public Space and the Geography of the Modern City,"

Peter Goheen draws attention to two contrasting points of view regarding this issues: one that the public sphere has been devalued as "a powerful social and political ideal in the modern city" (Sennett 158), another that public spaces remain fundamental elements, they are places where "groups of every description can achieve public visibility, seek recognition and make demands" (Zukin, "Naked City" 187).

In his book *The Fall of Public Man*, Sennett claims that in contemporary cities public space became "empty space, a space of abstract freedom but no enduring human connection" (375) and as a consequence the public has lost its power and relevance in the public sphere. He suggests that the outcome of this crisis can be traced back to the nineteenth-century when the urban population "lost a sense of itself as an active force, as a public … due to the preference for private comfort and the disastrous decision to resist the demands of crowds and privilege the claims of individuals" (261). Sennett declares that public space is an important precondition for a functioning democracy and illustrates this idea with different historical examples of the urban public places that served as platform for many democracy movements (37). Among the first places like that was the Ancient Greek agora, and later streets, parks or plazas became the places where different social groups could meet, communicate, relax or protest. Sennett argues that in contemporary cities the private sphere is highly prioritized, which makes public space a target for privatization and commercialization; therefore, less and less public places nowadays can be identified as free open spaces and public often regards public sphere as "meaningless" (261). Sennett criticizes local governments that together with private institutions populate public space with "privatized surrogates," declaring that privatization of public spaces leads to a "reduction and trivialization of the city as a stage of life … and undermines the capacity to support a vital public culture" (qtd. in Goheen 487). In other words, Sennett views public space as a prerequisite

for a free democratic society and points out how this condition has been affected by various factors, such as private interests, mass media and communication. Many public places in New York City, including public parks, are already affected by these factors; they are increasingly privatized or virtualized. Yet, some public parks such as Washington Square remain the essence of true public place, although the park has to constantly defend itself from the invasion of various private institutions.

Other scholars have an alternative - to Sennett's - view on the role of urban public space and public per se in the public realm. Philip Ethington, for instance, emphasizes the importance of the behavior of people in urban public space and disputes Sennett's idea that the nineteenth century saw a withdraw of public from the public sphere (qtd. in Goheen 490). In *The Public City*, Ethington observes the influence of the public on nineteenth-century San Francisco, on the way it was governed and how its opinion was formed and focuses on "an institutional sphere that was neither state nor society, but the arena of collective action that linked those two domains: the public" (qtd. in Goheen 489). According to Ethington, "the nineteenth century public sphere was the stage of history itself" (491), and the most important transformation in American political culture occurred by virtue of the public sphere; therefore, the significance of the public should not be underestimated.

Sharon Zukin in her book *Naked City: The Death and Life of Great American Cities* also argues that public space is inherently democratic. The space that interests Zukin is physical space "where strangers mingle" (45). Zukin asserts that the public plays a crucial role in the public realm – it has the power to decide what is acceptable or desirable and what is not - and further insists that nowadays public spaces serve the same purposes as in the past "to frame encounters that are both intimate and intrusive with the culture of the city" (*Naked City* 44).

However, the production of public space, Zukin writes, is a consequence of the "synergy of capital investment and cultural meaning" and suggests that at the present time the spillover of the private interest into public sector and a fear for physical security redefine attitudes towards public space and stipulate the withdrawal of the public from public sphere (*Naked City* 139).

To summarize, public places are essential components of cities, they are at the core of urban experience, because "it is in public that one feels the "pulse" of the modern city" (Kasinitz 273). For the vast majority of their history, public spaces in urban settings have been the places where people meet, read books, stroll, sunbathe or sell drugs. At the same time, public space can serve as the platform for political and social formation and host events that can alter the course of history. Public space, moreover, often becomes an area of conflict of various competing interests, mostly private and public. Therefore, public space can be viewed as the scene where power is stated or challenged, as well as where strangers mingle, socialize, or just enjoy the presence of each other.

Struggles and Debates Over Public Space. Decline in Public Realm.

According to urban planners and sociologists, public spaces are an essential ingredient "to the sustainability of cities for political, social, economic, public health and biodiversity reasons" (Tonnelat 1). However, as Stephane Tonnelat points out, "the dominating trend observed by many scholars today is the shrinkage of the public realm in contemporary cities rather than its expansion" (1). Influential analysts such as Sennett, Madanipour, Friedmann, Zukin, Harvey and others explain this phenomenon in relation to evolving cultural and socio-economic factors. Back in 1976 Edward Relph pointed to the fact that mass media together with "a monotonous and random building pattern," produce dull landscapes that lack any diversity or

significant places (77). He argues, - "that lack of form and meaning makes it difficult to tell one location from another and thus people lose their sense of place" (79); therefore, considerable decline in public life and the related demise of public space occurs. That idea of placelessness and lack of social contact and connection is also described by John Friedmann in his *Insurgencies: Essays in Planning Theory*, where he advocates for the need to recover small urban places in order to "re-humanize city neighborhoods" (152). In the current crisis of public space, it is certainly necessary to create more vital, welcoming public places, open to various social groups and activities. It is also very important to encourage city residents to assert their right to gather in any urban public place and to claim it for the idea of a public.

Richard Sennett in his book *The Fall of Public Man* argues that the disappearance of public space in the twentieth century can be attributed to a development in communication technologies. He specifically draws attention to the role the electronic communications play in what he calls the "fall of public man," or the decline of public life. Mass media increases the knowledge people have about each other, Sennett writes; however, it simultaneously reduces the necessity for actual contact (27). This theme has been picked up and explored by Ali Madanipour in *Public and Private Spaces of the City* in which he states that nowadays many activities don't require direct social contact because mass media, communications and technologies made it possible to exchange information and other services without leaving a house (137). The fact that the public realm can be found in the cyber world as much as in the physical world, Madanipour suggest, inevitably effects public sphere since "social life begins to lack spatial manifestation" (124). Surely, technology and other social media had a great impact on public sphere; and this process is only getting worse with the advent of cell phones, unlimited data plans and the variety of places in the city that provide free Wi-Fi. Nowadays the number of people who prefer to

communicate through the virtual sphere increases, whereas gathering and interacting in physical public places becomes less and less popular.

In *The Vision Machine* Paul Virilio develops an argument about the displacement of traditional public spaces such as city streets, parks, squares by "public image" and argues that:

> This public image has today replaced the former public spaces in which social communication took place. Avenues and public venues are from now on eclipsed by the screen, by electronic displays, in preview of the 'vision machines' just around the corner … Really once *public space* yields to *public image*, surveillance and street lighting can be expected to shift too, from the street to the *domestic display terminal*. (64)

Virilio is extremely pessimistic about the future of public place; he claims that people and city squares "are replaced by the television broadcast networks" (89). Therefore, for Virilio the rise of new telecommunication technologies and mass media is one of the main reasons of the erosion of public sphere and decline of public space. In addition to the influence of mass media and technological progress, scholars point out to other factors, such as suburbanization or excessive use of cars, that stipulated a declining use of public space in contemporary cities (Harvery 23). Yet, according to many sociologists, private management of public spaces - privatization - remains the primary reason of considerable shrinkage or even demise of public space and decline in public life.

Privatization of Public Spaces.

As Sennett famously notes, public space has always been a hybrid of commerce and politics, and it certainly remains a contradictory space today (21). Zukin refines this idea in her book *The Cultures of Cities* where she examines the way the public space in New York City

being privatized by corporate and commercials forces and argues that public culture had been displaced by "this pervasive withdrawal into a private sphere" (25). According to Zukin, during the 1980s, most American cities, tried to employ different cultural strategies "to enhance the visual appeal of urban spaces" to make cities less dangerous and more profitable (*The Cultures of Cities* 140). Redevelopment and re-aestheticization of the city center always require money which city governments can't often provide to every public place. In fact, throughout 1960-80s New York City Parks Department "has been starved of government funds"; therefore, many urban spaces of all sorts have become a target for the investors and local governments, given the conditions of privatization of public spaces (Zukin, "The Cultures of Cities" 152). For instance, in 1980s half of the funding for Central Park was raised privately by the nonprofit organization called Central Park Conservancy. Its original mission was to raise money in a private sector to help park with its physical deterioration, but it soon "developed an authoritative cultural voice" (Zukin, "The Cultures of Cities" 167). Since 1980s the conservancy is in charge of park's design and maintenance, park's rules and regulations. In addition to Central Park, several other parks in New York City - Bryant Park, Brooklyn Bridge Park, High Line Park and other - are now privately funded or managed by private firms instead of local governments; hence, these parks are also becoming progressively less public. Zukin suggest that most of these parks are designed for urban leisure with a high concern for security, with "implicit code of inclusion and exclusion", which makes them "in certain ways more exclusive now than at any time in the past hundred years" (*The Cultures of Cites* 169). As Zukin points out, private management of the parks serves to control the parks in a way that leads to the exclusion of certain social groups such as homeless, street artists and the young, "which reinforces the social inequality in the city and weakens the diversity of experiences and contacts that define urban life" (*Naked City* 128).

Besides, the exclusion of certain social groups, when private organization starts to manage public parks, their nature and character starts to evolve over time. Central Park used to be a popular meeting spot among activists and members of various political movements. However, with the involvement of Central Park Conservancy, the park's essence changed drastically: the Conservancy began to control all the events in the park, as well as imposed rules that affected certain social groups, marginalized groups and street artists for the most part. All of these significantly narrowed down the public sector of Central Park, but improved the its safety and appearance, and began to attract more tourists and wealthy residents of the city. Nowadays private or semi-private city parks are usually sanitized programmed places that are designed to attract consumers and visitors of the city and bring an income to their private owners; these parks are not used for rallies or other political events, unlike Washington Square Park that is still hosting a number of various protests every month.

Since the 1980s and till nowadays the desire to make the city center a clean, safe and an attractive place for middle class and potential customers, according to Zukin and other scholars, remains one of the main sources of privatization of public space (*The Cultures of Cities* 130). However, a number of scholars - Neil Smith, David Harvey, Michael Gunder - hold the position that in today's metropolitan areas the privatization of urban public space is also stipulated by a significant influence of the logic of global neoliberalism - a policy model that transfers control of economic factors to the private sector from the public one (Harvey 200). Harvey emphasizes that neoliberalism is "a theory of political economic practices rather than a complete political ideology" (Harvey 199). Michael Gunder claims that nowadays the cities around the world are the spaces where a variety of neoliberal initiatives have been articulated: the neoliberal city competes with others for investments, innovations and economic development through

privatization and cost-benefit analysis - the approach to achieve benefits while preserving savings (qtd. in Amin). In such a setting the urban lifestyle is so closely connected with the consumption patterns that the cities are "in competition to become nodes of consumer goods" (Zukin, "The Cultures of Cities" 123). This conceptualization, Zukin suggests, brings the new critical role of consumption into the urban context, in terms of "consumption of space" and "spaces of consumption" (*Naked City* 125). Therefore, the quality and appearance of the urban public spaces become a strategy for attracting consumers to the city. This tendency to make public places more pleasing so they would sell goods and the cities themselves is reflected in the urban design in several ways. One way of making public spaces more attractive is to use a strategy of reshaping the existing places with the help of private investors or private firms and creating semi-public spaces. This strategy was adopted in the 1980s for the Bryant's Park renovation. In 1980s Business Improvement District (BID), a non profit organization, invested a substantial amount of money in Bryant's Park redevelopment: it paid for new design plans and landscaping, new furniture and kiosks. BID aimed to make park more attractive for middle class and to make it more "civilized" (Siegel 380). Zukin draws attention to the fact that the park is not only protected by a large number of security guards, but also has very strict rules and regulations: no one may be in the park after sunset except at a cultural event organized by the BID, no one can pick things from the garbage except for homeless people associated with one church near the park, etc. (*Naked City* 137). Even though many of the rules are the same as in all public parks, yet, according to Zukin, "Bryant Park was one of the first parks to post rules on signs in the park and to employ security guards to enforce them" (*Naked City* 148).

The second strategy to create attractive and safe public spaces that sell themselves and city as a whole, according to Margaret Crawford, is to build new consumption hubs in the form

of shopping malls and "theme parks," (14) in other words in a form of entertainment spaces. The main feature of these public places is that they are privately owned from the very beginning and were not privatized in the process like Bryant Park or Brooklyn Bridge Park, for example. The shopping malls of all sorts are the major forms of these constructed consumption centers; the function of these so-called public spaces is to provide a clean and safe environment, where its users are under constant surveillance in order to exclude the disturbing disorder, and attract more consumers to make a profit (Crawford 21-23). These newly constructed open spaces claim to create new public places; however, since all of them are funded by private organizations, they often function as a pseudo-public space and benefit certain social groups while exclude others. Therefore, nowadays it is often hard to define any urban space as public, considering the controversial features of newly built urban environment. This second strategy of prioritizing security and private interests over broader social concerns, just as first one, Zukin argues, can threaten "civil liberties and diminish diversity in public space, transforming public spaces into highly regulated sites of consumption-based activity" (*The Cultures of Cities* 99).

The fact that cities produce more and more public spaces under private control sparked the discussion in recent decades among the scholars about the future of public realms. Some sociologists like Zukin and Harvey find privatization alarming and insist that giving a control over public spaces to private investors means "giving them carte blanche to remake public culture" (Harvey 149). Yet, other scholars have an alternative view on privatization of public spaces. Tyler Cowen *In Praise of Commercial Culture* advocates for the role of private organizations and the market economy in arts production and urban culture and doesn't find alarming shifting authority over urban space from government toward the private sector (qtd. in Zukin 3).

Thus, even though privatization has some benefits for public spaces, it produces massive social polarization at the same time. Bryant Park, for instance, since its renovation has changed the look and character and has become safer and more attractive than it was prior to the 1980s. The private organization has certainly succeeded in creating a public space that is more useful than the old park, yet it created an exclusive space, open only at certain time to certain users. By redeveloping Bryant Park according to the standards of neoliberal space, BID created an "eroding" model of privatization - reshaping public space through consumption spaces and private management - that has being applied to Times Square and other public spaces in New York City and other American cities (Zukin, "The Cultures of Cities" 137).

The Revitalization of Times Square

Today Times Square is one of the world's most visited tourist attractions that draws millions of visitors every year; however, from around the 1930s to1980s Times Square, like Bryant Park, had been a hard area to control. In her article "Destination Culture: How Globalization Makes All Cities Look the Same" Zukin tells a story of the degradation and "the sterilization of Times Square" (11). During the Great Depression, many residents of Times Square moved to cheaper neighborhoods, the number of popular commercial theaters declined, and the number of pornographic shops and brothels steadily rose, drug business and crime took over the streets, as Zukin narrates in her book *The Cultures of Cities* (130). In 1960, 42nd Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenue was described by *The New York Times* as "the worst block in town" (qtd. in Zukin, "The Cultures of Cities" 156). The area acquired a reputation of a dangerous neighborhood and in the following decades bothered all municipal administrations because the public authorities couldn't control it. Private real estate developers showed no

interest in the area until the 1980s, when with the expansion of the stock market, private institutions proposed to redevelop Times Square. They planned to tear down old buildings, evict low-class and illegal uses, and transform 42nd Street into a financial district. However, significant opposition to this plan came from Municipal Art Society - the supporters of historic preservation – who campaigned to protect the historic and aesthetic qualities of Times Square by preserving its look. They criticized the designing of skyscrapers that were too tall and "insufficiently interesting" for this space (Zukin, "Destination Culture" 14). Criticism was also directed to the lack of bright lights, big advertising signs, and moving electric message boards - the visual "noise" that had represented Times Square for most of the 20th century. When the crash of the stock market in 1987 caused an indefinite delay in the financing for redevelopment, the idea slowly emerged of transforming Times Square into a new public space of commercial culture – to re-aestheticize 42nd Street according to the American model that developed during the 1980s (Zukin, "The Cultures of Cities" 225). However, instead of developing new theaters, planners and architects proposed to renovate old theaters and add new stores and restaurants "under the theme of family entertainment and safe commercial culture" (Zukin, "The Cultures of Cities" 225-230). Zukin notes that the Disney Company played a big role in financing Times Square's re-rasterization. She looks at Disney's three-part contribution to 42nd Street as an "urban" intervention: the Disney Company opened a Disney Store, renovated a theater to produce Disney plays based on Disney movies, and took an investment share in a project for a new hotel (*The Cultures of Cities* 142). As a result, 42nd Street was reborn as a public space for tourists, suburban residents, and families on vacation since a local urban public was no longer there. Zukin concludes that from the beginning of its renewal Times Square "has suffered from a homogenized plastic entertainment culture … 42 Street has become a fast food franchise of

popular entertainment which represents a standardized consumer culture" ("Destination Culture" 15). This type of redevelopment and reshaping of urban public space, pioneered by the Disney Corporation in 1980s, have become a dominant trend across the United States and other world cities, and became known as Disneyfication.

Reshaping of Public space, or Welcome to Disney World.

A number of sociologists have tried to define the term Disneyfication ever since it was invented by American urban studies scholars in the 1990s. For David Andrews, Disneyfication occurs "when a corporation enjoys a long-lasting glory of its self-proclaimed wonderful-ness" (qtd. in Matusitz and Palermo 96); and for Alan Bryman, "Disneyfication is the process by which the principles of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world" (qtd. in Matusitz and Palermo 96). Disneyfication originally referred to a themed visual coherence, that one finds in Las Vegas and Disney World; now, however, Disneyfication is no longer a metaphor (Sorkin, "See you in Disneyland" 209). It refers to the real presence of the Disney Company's projects in urban redevelopment strategies - "a decisive presence in raising financial, moral, and, superficially, visual values" (Zukin, "The Cultures of Cities" 134) In other words Disneyfication can be described as a use of the strategies employed by Disney Corporation or other private management in the reshaping urban public space to maximize consumption activities.

As Sorkin points out in his essay "See You in the Disneyland," since 1990 when the strategy to re-aestheticize 42nd Street emerged, many New Yorkers have criticized the Disneyfication of the city (224). Critics have mostly complained that Disneyfication produces "bland, mind-numbing sameness of corporate brand names, bad food, and banal entertainment,"

making places like Times Square standardized places of consumer culture (Zukin, "Destination Culture" 16). Sorkin refines this idea in his essay:

> Disney invokes an urbanism without producing a city. Rather, it produces a kind of aura-stripped hypercity, a city with billions of citizens . . . but no residents. Physicalized yet conceptual, it's the utopia of transience, a place where everyone is just passing through. This is its message for the city to be, a place everywhere and nowhere, assembled only through constant motion. (231)

According to Gunilla Anderman and Margaret Rogers, Disneyfication refers to the internationalization of the entertainment values of the United States' mass culture, thus Disneyfication is an overarching term that includes more than just the Walt Disney Company (qtd. Matusitz and Palermo 96). In their article "The Disneyfication of the World: Globalization Perspective," Matusitz and Palermo argue that the current Disneyfication of the world follows the grobalisation model. They further explain that *grobalisation* is a theoretical concept coined by George Ritzer in his book, which is a combination of two words "growth" and "globalization" (97).

As a radical form of globalization, grobalization refers to the imperialistic goals, desires, and needs of multinational corporations, such as Disney, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and Wal-Mart to enter diverse markets worldwide so that their impact and profits can grow on the local level (Ritzer 13). Matusitz and Palermo claim that globalization is more general and refers to the global diffusion of practices; globalization is not monolithic or homogenizing, "it does not try to erode local cultural arrangements altogether" (96). Unlike grobalization, globalization does not promote standardization, homogenization, and universalism (Matusitz and Palermo 97). Grobalisation, in contrast, is more monolithic than globalization and seeks to eliminate the local

and impose the global, hyper-invasive to local cultures and constitutes more than just a global consciousness; therefore, it is important to immediately distinguish grobalisation from globalization, Matusitz and Palermo suggest (97-98).

According to Zukin, despite the negative influence of Disneyfication, the city government officials like the way Disney World functions as a public space: it is clean and safe, it brings profit and "justifies private control over an unknowable and potentially unruly public" (*The Culture of Cities* 139). Zukin further suggests that from this perspective the Disney Company is no longer an enemy of public space; instead "Disney World idealizes urban public space" and learning from Disney World "promises to make social diversity less threatening and public space more secure" (*The Cultures of Cities* 52-54). Zukin also points out that often the public itself regards the theme park as public space, even though it is privately owned and managed. Thus, blending the public and private appears to be a logical result of the model established by Bryant Park, Zukin argues, and further suggests to abandon simple definitions of what is public and private since public space, public culture and private interest "are mediated through the contest varying interests" (*The Cultures of Cities* 219).

Public places can certainly get disneyfied in slightly different ways but all of them resemble one of these aspects - theming, consumption, merchandising, control, and surveillance, which are all combined to create a Disney theme park (Crawford 15). Times Square resembles pretty much all of these aspects of the theme park, whereas Bryant Park only some of them. For instance, the presence of the Disney Company itself is not as evident in Bryant Park because there are other private actors and institutions that are involved in managing the park. Yet, whether it is Walt Disney Company or any other private company - that decides to revitalize an

urban public place, it is still just a private corporation that is going to use that public space to pursue its own interests.

The Spillover of Private into Public Realm.

In the past decades a number of scholars have theorized a question, - what effects does the privatization have on public space and public realm? According to Mitchel, in the name of the comfort, safety and profit, city governments with the help of private organizations design and build public spaces that aim to reduce political activity and to sell goods or the city as a whole (136). He further argues that interactive politics has effectively been banned from the public places in the city, and that "corporate and state planners have created environments that are based on a desire for security more than interaction, for entertainment more than politics" (138). As we shall see later, the events and the activities that are taking place in Washington Square Park nowadays are often determined by the influence of private actors and institutions. One of the results of contemporary urban planning that is significantly affected by privatization has been the growth of what Sennett calls "dead public spaces" (27) and the development of festive spaces that encourage consumption (Mitchel 138). Both types of space - dead and festive spaces - are "pseudo-public," according to Mitchel, they are created for order, surveillance, and control over the behavior of the public, since "planners have found that control-led diversity is more profitable than the promotion of unconstrained social *differences*" (146). Thus, even if the new groups claim access to the public space, the homogenization of "the public" continues, because the diversity that pseudo-public space encourage is a diversity unified with homogenizing forces of commodity and brand-oriented consumption (Davis 178). The homogenization typically has advanced by disneyfication of public places – creating landscapes in which every interaction is

carefully planned, including the sorts of "surprises" one is supposed to encounter in urban space (Sorkin, "See You in Disneyland" 227). These carefully controlled "public" spaces were criticized by Davis in his *City of Quartz* and analyzed by Sorkin in *Variations on a Theme Park.* The new so-called public places, such as shopping malls, museums or parks employ a series of restrictions for access. At best, such places could be defined as semi-public places. Furthermore, Mitchel argues that marketable landscapes and controlled public places together with disneyficaton displace the "extemporaneous interactions" among people in contemporary world which "increases alienation of people from the possibilities of unmediated social interaction and increasing control by powerful economic and social actors over the production and use of space" (141).

Thus, the predominant purpose of public space, as Crielley argues, is the creation of a "public realm deliberately shaped as theater in which a pacified public basks in the grandeur of a carefully orchestrated corporate spectacle" (qtd. in Mitchel 147). Mitchel concludes that carefully controlled public spaces conspire to hide from its users the widespread privatization of the public realm and "its reduction to the status of commodity", yet all levels of government, urban planners and politicians laud the privatization of public space (141). Zukin also argues that privatization erodes public realm and speculates about the future of public places. She writes: "the globalization and homogenization of public sphere may turn out "to be a cruel Darwinian evolution, selecting certain elements of cities - as well as languages and musical traditions - for preservation while blending others into hybrid, fusion, or "global" forms" (*The Cultures of Cities* 24).

Tonnelat is also rather pessimistic in his analysis of the impact of privatization on public space. In his article he states that in the last fifty years diverse processes of privatization have

given rise to city forms "less and less amenable to the daily co-presence of a diversity of urbanites"; therefore, "global indicators of segregation - class, race and ethnicity- seem to show a worldwide growing separateness of the different categories of the population" (3). Hence, the globalization and privatization of public spaces has another potential consequence - further widening a gap between those who consume in such spaces, those who are there to serve them and those who can't access these public places such as homeless or undesirables.

Public Space and Democracy.

Struggles over public space are certainly struggles over opposing ideologies, yet they are struggles over the practice of democracy, the practice that is often determined in the streets, on the sidewalks, and in the parks (Mitchel 5). How and where people can meet and what they are able to do or discuss in public places are all themselves points of struggle. In his book *Right to the City*, Mitchel states that ideal public space is a "place of relatively unmediated interaction: it is a vision of public space that understands a space's very publicness as a good in and of itself, that understands there to be a collective right to the city" (5). Mitchel argues that this vision and practice of public space is significantly threatened in many American cities and claims that the threat comes from the steady erosion of the public and the promotion of private, rather than democratic, control of space as the solution to perceived social problems (Mitchell 137). One of the main questions of Mitchel's book is who has a right to the city and its public places, how this right is determined, policed or undermined (3). If Sorkin shows how regulatory practices often homogenize and sanitize difference from public space, Mitchel demonstrates how those practices limit civil liberties, like the right to gather, protest, dissent, be homeless, or not consume (23).

Today much of what we think of as public space is a private or semi-public corporate space that welcomes only certain members of society. In some areas like downtowns, it may only be for consumers, or for people who look a certain way, and some places are designed only or mostly for tourists. The disneyfication of public space, Mitchel suggests, excludes both marginalized people and political movements from public space (141). He argues that legal, physical, and cultural practices serve to control who uses public space and how, which threatens the notion that public space is for everyone to enjoy (148). From this point of view, the grobalization and privatization of public space not only takes away places to gather, picnic, relax or protest, in addition it deprives citizens of basic human and civil rights. Human rights such as freedom of movement, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, association, to culture etc. are all recognized in international human rights declarations; however, people need public space to exercise these rights. Mitchel emphasizes that urban space is "the playing field for protest and dissent," thus closing or limiting access to it challenges First Amendment rights and other liberties (145).

The principal argument that many scholars make is that when a public space is privatized or securitized it stops to exist as a truly public forum. As Davis famously notes, "the universal consequence of the desire to secure the city is the destruction of any truly democratic urban space" (157). Since 1970s Sennett has been writing about anarchic liberty; in his books Sennett encourages the readers to "transcend the need for order," because public realm, he asserts "should be gritty and disturbing rather than pleasant" (qtd. in Siegel 382) White also believes that sense of security and control can be achieved by the presence of other people (20). Mitchel supports this theory and claims that the central contradiction at the heart of public space is that it demands a certain disorder and unpredictability to function as a democratic public space, and yet

he admits that "the democratic theory posits that a certain order and rationality are vital to the success of democratic discourse" (Mitchell 130). Zukin also points out the desire to fight terrorism and crime with reinforcing surveillance and sterilization of public spaces will only continue to erode the public sphere. She believes that the "scale of interaction today demands a degree of trust among strangers that we no longer command" (*Naked City* 158).

However, many scholars addressed the idea that not all spaces can or should be public, such as private homes in which marginalized public can meet "without threat of further oppression" (Nemeth 815). In addition, some form of control is often required or desired, or else a "tragedy of the common arises whereby each actor advances her own position at the expense of others and only the fittest survive" (Nemeth 813). Furthermore, publicness is always subjective. Since public space is never homogeneous, "the dimensions and extent of its publicness are highly differentiated from instance to instance" (Low and Smith 3). Even though publicness of place is often hard to measure, a number of scholars suggest that "truly public space" is the one which is open and accessible to everyone without a need to ask a permission from anyone else.

To conclude, suburbanization and highways, "theme park development," technologies of surveillance, shopping malls, gated communities - all testify to an ongoing enclosure of public space and decline of the public realm (Low and Smith 206). Nowadays, globalization together with grobalization and disneyfication serve as a main strategy for creating neoliberal cities. The number of public places, such as parks and plazas, and shopping areas that are now managed and governed by private organization is steadily increasing. As Zukin notes the paradox of public space is that private control can make it more safe and attractive to a broader public, but the state control can make it more repressive and not representative at all (*Naked City* 158). While tourists enjoy the bright lights of the Dysnefied streets of The Times Square, while some city dwellers

enjoy the greater safety and comfort of the privately owned public places, the other city residents are excluded from these places by neoliberal criteria of human worthiness. Besides, the cleanness and attractiveness of these neoliberal public spaces is provided by the private organizations that city residents can't control. And the price for these comforts and commodities is even higher than one can imagine – it is a potential loss of a truly democratic public space.

Chapter II. Washington Square Park.

Historically public places around the world, including New York City, had been built as places for exchange or trade, and later on became the places where individuals of various social groups began to come together for different purposes. Therefore, urban public places are inherently diverse. Furthermore, New York City is a huge melting pot of people from all over the world, whose presence adds a cultural flavor to the city and its public places, making them even more heterogeneous. For decades this diversity made a significant contribution to American culture and often played a major role in shaping the identity and history of public places in the city. Thus, many public places in New York City have a fascinating history. Washington Square Park is one of them. It is a public park - located in the heart of New York City's Greenwich Village - a place with a long and rich history. It is not the largest park in the city; however, it one of the most densely used parks in Manhattan. For almost two centuries the park has been a place to meet, relax, play, perform or protest. Nowadays people of different ages, professions, and interests continue to actively use this small ten acres park. Moreover, Washington Square Park like a magnet attracts visitors from around the world which makes the Square even more vital and diverse. The park has been featured in several movies such as *I'm a Legend* and *August Rush,* and continues to be a popular shooting location among filmmakers. The park's famous arch often appears on photographs in social media and advertisements, including the one by New York University, the park's closest neighbor.

History of Washington Square Park.

The history of Washington Square Park is well-documented by Emily Folpe in her book *It Happened on Washington Square*, where she describes how the area that is now known as

Washington Square went through a number of transformations before it first became a park in the 1820's. According to Folpe, centuries before the actual park, there was a marshy ground with a waterfowl and a Native American village Tobacco Field nearby (7). The ground was farmed by New Amsterdam's freed African slaves until 1797 and then the City purchased the area for a new potter's field, or public cemetery: it was used mainly for burying poor or unknown people – mostly victims of epidemics, such as yellow fever - and was filled after twenty years of use (Folpe 11). In 1826 the City bought additional land around the potter's field aiming to redevelop the area; as a result the Square was leveled, landscaped and officially declared as Washington Military Parade Ground - a public space where volunteer militia companies could train (Sorkin, "Twenty Minutes in Manhattan" 120). The new parade ground gained a privileged status for the area, and thus within a few years, a prime residential neighborhood had emerged around the Square, which by 1850 was redeveloped again and gained a new name - Washington Square Park, "esteemed for its patriotic associations and genteel society" (Folpe 37). From the nineteen century the park became associated with the names of Henry James, Edgar Allan Poe, Eugene O'Neill, Edward Hopper and other notable cultural figures. In his novel *Washington Square* Henry James described the Square as a place of "riper, richer more honorable look," than other parts of the city, "the look of having had something of a social history" (24). Even though the park has been redone several times since James's youth, the elements of the 1850-1870's plan are still evident in today's Washington Square (Folpe 5).

According to Michael Sorkin, the Square "in its first incarnation as a park was landscaped in a geometric style," later fenced in iron and by 1852 received its first fountain (*Twenty Minutes in Manhattan* 123). In 1889 a large plaster and wood arch, designed by Stanford White, was erected at the entrance of the park to celebrate the centennial of George

Washington's inauguration at Federal Hall in 1889. The Arch was modeled after Arc de Triomphe that was built in Paris in 1836. The design of the Washington Square Arch gained such a success, that White "was commissioned to create a permanent version in marble to stand in the park" (Sorkin, "Twenty Minutes in Manhattan" 118-123). The Arch was installed in 1895 and ever since has formed the entrance of the park on its North Side (Folpe 87). Throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, real estate values around the park significantly increased. Developers were eager to build higher, which led to a replacement of some historic buildings, yet the four residential buildings on the Square's west side survived till the present time (Flint 108). As Folpe points out, "balancing the tall loft buildings on the east of the Square, they form an imposing wall for the great outdoor room that is Washington Square Park" (186).

Cultural and Political Importance of Washington Square Park.

It is important to point out that Washington Square's appeal "owes less to the park's landscaping than to the people who have lived around it and the events that occurred on the Square" (Folpe 2). In her book Folpe provides numerous examples of political events, celebrations and demonstration that took place in the park and therefore contributed to the emergence of the Square as an "iconic place in the city and country's development" (3). For instance, in 1834 a labor riot erupted on the Square when stonecutters protested NYU's use of prison labor in construction of their buildings because it was cheaper than hiring local stonemasons. In 1912, approximately twenty thousand workers marched to the park to commemorate the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, which had killed 146 workers the year before. Later in 1915 over twenty five thousand people marched on the park demanding women's suffrage (Folpe 159-163).

Nowadays Washington Square continues to attract many small-scale demonstrations and protests - in solidarity for human's rights such as "Black Lives matter," for instance - and other important political events such as rallies held by the candidates running for a president. On September 27, 2007 Barack Obama held a rally at Washington Square which was described "as one of the largest campaign events of the year" by *The New York Times* (Cohen). Bernie Sanders also held a rally at the park in April 13, 2016, where he spoke to approximately twenty seven thousand people. In the current Trump era, when protests occur on a regular basis, Washington Square Park has been New York City's second most popular protest spot after the Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue. Just in recent months there were rallies in the park opposing the Muslim ban, cuts to Planned Parenthood, protests against new immigration policies imposed by president Donald Trump and the demonstrations in support for other human rights. Sorkin suggests that Washington Square "has historically been the site of protests and demonstrations", and perhaps this is one of the main reasons why the park remains a popular spot among protesters today - it provides "certain latitude that other public places in the city may not" (*Twenty Minutes in Manhattan* 102).

At the same time, as Folpe claims, the park in the nineteenths century was "an incubator for American art and architecture" (5). Since the 1830s Washington Square began to attract the writers, painters, sculptors, and architects "which gave the Square a counter-cultural aura it still possesses" (Folpe 123). Yet, old residents of the area were still there. Thus, from around the 1850's rich and poor New Yorker's shared the park: the wealthy residents on the north side, poor immigrant communities in the south, and political activists, artists, writers, so-called bohemian, in between. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twentieth century the Square became the heart of Greenwich Village, that attracted radicals, artist and activists from all over the country and

later in the 1950-60's the park also became a gathering spot for the Beat generation, folk and Hippie movements (Flint 102). Their activities, according to Folpe, "recharged the park's reputation as a place where people were free to recite poetry, stage a revolution or behave in any way they wished" (147). In addition, throughout the twentieth century residents of the area patronized local artists, commissioned noteworthy buildings, founded art institutions, and helped to raise the money to renovate the park's Arch.

Washington Square as a Place of Conflict.

Since the early nineteen century Washington Square Park has been a place for personal expression, a public place that hosted various political and artistic movements. All of these certainly helped to form the cultural heritage of the city and the country; however, the park has often been a site of economic, political and urban planning issues. For instance, in 1935 Parks Commissioner Robert Moses proposed to cut a major roadway through Washington Square – in addition to the existing traffic that used to flow through the park - to connect Fifth Avenue with lower Manhattan, where he was planning an east-west crossing that would have destroy sections of Soho as well as historical sections of Greenwich Village, including Washington Square Park (Flint 127). In proposing a plan before consulting the local population, Moses provoked the neighborhood's resistance: local residents, business owners, and New York University officials all opposed the idea of the double highway. The fight was led by the activists Jane Jacobs, Eleanor Roosevelt and Lewis Mumford who finally achieved victory in 1958. Moreover, the activists were fighting against Moses' other ideas such as building a series of apartment complexes and raising fourteen blocks in the heart of Greenwich Village (Flint 45-47). None of these projects received approval from the City; the fight was over, and Greenwich Village

became the first community that could defeat Robert Moses. The park grounds "were left as they were, and for the first time Washington Square was traffic-free" (Folpe 35). With the elimination of Moses' threat, the park was redesigned in 1970s; however, as Sorkin argues, the landscape plan was not without controversy (*Twenty Minutes in Manhattan* 112). In fact, it took the agitation of Jacobs and others to preserve the great circular pool at the center of the park for gathering and performances, "rather than using it as a purely ornamental fountain" (Flint 97). The addition of the playgrounds, chees tables and bocce courts made the park even more attractive and popular among local residents, families, tourists, chess players and street performers.

Once the traffic was removed from the Square in 1964, the central area around the fountain began to flourish as a performance space and, according to Folpe, it remains "one of the world's great sites of free assembly, the core of the park's meaning and use" (223). Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Josh White, Pete Seeger, Harry Belefonte and other musicians had been gathering in the center of the park near the fountain to sing and play guitars since the end of World War II. However, not all residents of the area were enthusiastic about having music and street artists in the park, thus the tension and conflicts began to develop between the bohemian and other residents of the neighborhood. Due to the complaints that city received from the residents of the Village, the government began requiring permits before public performances could be given in Washington Square Park (Sorkin, "Twenty Minutes in Manhattan" 140). In the spring of 1961 the Parks Commissioner Newbold Morris refused a permit to the folksingers for their afternoon gatherings and later authorized a ban on the musicians' permits. As was mentioned previously, on April 9, 1961, the folksingers held a rally in the Washington Square to protest the ban. The rally was successful; and the ban was lifted only few weeks after Morris' decision (Folpe 180).

These tensions between musicians and other street performers and city authorities did not die down for some time, and moreover, they are still evident today.

Street Performers and the Right to Public Space.

Nowadays, an eclectic mix of music genres is displayed in the public places of New York City, including Washington Square Park. Street performing, or busking, has been an important part of city culture for hundreds of years, beginning back in Europe, and has made its way through American cities as well. History shows that many famous musicians and artist used to perform on the streets of New York City. Busking kept them in touch with the real public, let them to present their works and at the same time make a living as they developed their art. David Bowie, Robin Williams, Bob Dylan and others – all started their careers as buskers and moved to a further greatness afterwards.

Many often think of New York as a place of culture and music, yet there is a dark past regarding music on the streets of New York City. According to David Cohen and Ben Greenwood, for decades busking was illegal in the United States: it was considered to be a craft of beggars and undesirables, and by 1930s busking became a "quite controversial enterprise in New York" (15). Buskers were everywhere; they were fighting over the pitches and the public. Due to numerous complaints about fighting and violence among street performers, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia banned busking on the grounds for safety reasons (Cohen and Greenwood 17). Nevertheless, busking continued to exist in New York but on a much smaller scale. If people complained about buskers, the police could require the buskers to move or even arrest them. Cohen and Greenwood point out that from 1970 to 2011 there have been numerous legal cases in the United States regarding laws and regulations that have decided the rights of buskers

to perform in public and concludes that "most of these laws and regulations have been found to be unconstitutional when challenged" (168).

As Hannah Cohen notes, "the presence of street performers has been one of the defining characteristics of Washington Square Park." For decades visitors have been mingling with street performers on the Square. However, back in 2010 the city park department changed a policy rule that was intended to control commerce in the busiest New York City parks: vending also covered street performers who solicit donations. The rule stated that "artists couldn't sell within fifty feet of a monument or five feet from any bench or fence" (Foderaro). The rule was very hard to obey since there are only few locations in Washington Square Park that are fifty feet away from a memorial or fountain. Thus, it was very problematic or even impossible for street performers to follow these new regulations. However, the parks commissioner Adrian Benepe claims that there is enough space for street performers away from the monuments and continues to argue "if you allow all the performers and all the vendors to do whatever they want to do, pretty soon there's no park left for people who want to use it for quiet enjoyment. This is a way of having some control and not eighteen hours of carnival-like atmosphere" (Foderaro). After the change took effect on May 8, 2010, numerous street performers in the park were given the summons or tickets ranging from two hundred fifty dollars to a thousand dollars (Cohen).

However, the lawyers were able to challenge the idea that street performers were selling a product as a vendor does. An art vendor sells artistic products such as paintings in public places, but street performers receive the money as donations - not by selling anything - thus they are not violating a law. The advocates argued that street performing is legally considered to be artistic free speech that is covered by the First Amendment and faulted the city for creating what they called "First Amendment zones" through the new rules (Foderaro) As Cohen points out, "first,

the original expressive matter rules violate the First Amendment rights of artists and performers, and second that the differences in enforcement between these two groups violate the equal protection rights of the Fourteenth Amendment." The restrictions that were placed on street performers in 2010 could certainly damage the cultural health of New York City, which is known for the quality of its art. Besides it was unfair to place such regulations on folksingers who changed music, the city and our world beginning half a century ago.

Today buskers don't need to obtain a permit to perform in New York City parks, which promotes the proliferation of live-performances in the city, including Washington Square. Yet, some buskers think that a little light regulation might be helpful because in certain cases street performers still need protection. For instance, from time to time police officers hand out tickets and summonses to buskers for causing a disturbance in public places. Street performers who have a permit are more likely not to be bothered by the city authorities. There are certainly two contradictory points of view on busking in the city parks. Some people support it by claiming that busking makes parks more attractive and vibrant and argue that street performers have made a significant contribution to American culture. Others consider busking a practice for unsuccessful performers and often advocate to make busking forbidden or illegal. Perhaps not all the buskers of Washington Square Park are great artists, but many of them are very talented street performers whose presence adds a cultural flavor to the neighborhood and the park itself.

Nonetheless, both the Beatnik Riot and 2010 ban on tip-collecting artists in New York City parks raised some fundamental questions with regard to public space, such as how do we determine what is permissible in public space and whose park is it after all? These issues are still relevant today as Washington Square continues to battle with ongoing challenges.

A Need to Preserve or Adopt.

Today Washington Square Park has the status of a landmark, which protects it from demolishing or radical redevelopment. Some buildings around the park also received the status of landmark, but other valuable cultural property in the area is still in danger and can be demolished like Edgar Poe's house or completely redeveloped like Provincetown Playhouse. Since the 1980's, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation has fought for protecting and preserving historical buildings in the area. One of the main issues in protecting cultural property around Washington Square Park is due to the difficult relationship between the interests of the individual and the community, the balance between private and public rights. For decades, the residents of the Village have been participating in the development and growth of the park: first, by raising funds for the park's improvements and later by objecting to the new design and other changes proposed by Parks Department.

By the 1980's due to the lack of funds from the city, Washington Square Park became a rough and run down place. When drug dealers almost took over the Square, the city finally suggested to renovate the park and impose new rules and regulations. The idea was fully supported by the residents of Greenwich Village; thus in 1986, Parks Commissioner Henry Stern closed Washington Square Park for three days to clean and repair the park and to get "rid the park of drug dealers" (Sullivan). After the park was reopened, Stern announced that from now on park would be closed from midnight to seven in the morning and visitors are not allowed to bring glass containers and radios in to the park. The residents of the Square supported new rules, which helped to improve the safety of the park. However, local resident and the members of Community Board - the organization that patronizes Washington Square Park - often view the changes and improvements proposed by the Parks Department as a destruction of the park's

design and violation of the law. According to Bowley, in 2005 the Parks Department proposed "to move the fountain so that it would be aligned to the Washington Square Arch, flatten out the playground and asphalt, and install a four-foot-high granite and iron fence around the park that would lock at night." Community Board 2 (CB2) and the Villagers objected the city's plan to refurbish the park and argued that "environmental costs were too great" and that Washington Square Park "did not need a facelift" (Williams). However, in 2007 after almost three years of protests and fighting in the court, the Manhattan Supreme Court approved the redevelopment plans and the city began the park's refurbishing (Sullivan). Eventually, the park was redesigned and some of the local residents accepted the changes as improvements. Yet, a core group of protesters remains unconvinced and considers the improvements and new design as an environmental damage (Williams). In addition, in the past decades many residents of the Village expressed their concern about the influence of New York University, whose buildings now surround the park and whose campus is rapidly expanding in the neighborhood.

Community Board 2 vs. New York University.

For decades residents of the Greenwich Village were fighting with Robert Moses and city planners over the future of Washington Square Park and the Village, finally achieving victory. Yet, the neighborhood campaign against the New York University "invasion" was less successful. According to Sorkin, NYU's current prosperity has resulted in a program of expansion including "a brace of giant dorms in West Village that has made the university a public enemy number one in the neighborhood" (*Twenty Minutes in Manhattan* 119). In the past few decades in response to the NYU's growth local residents have formed a significant opposition. The construction of twelve stories high, block-long Bobst Library on the southeast

corner of the park, for instance, was greeted by years of protests and lawsuits. Eventually, NYU won the case and received the permission from the city for the building "to rise more than twice its allowable height" (Rosenberg). The library was completed in 1973, and "it has been casting a shadow over much of the Square ever since" (Rosenberg). In her article Eli Rosenberg mentions other NYU projects that "have drawn the neighborhood's ire": a construction of a thirteen story law school building that required the demolition of two historic houses, one of them a building where Edgar Poe used to live. Thus, the University with its ambitious growth, is not only taking over the neighborhood, but it also "wears off" the history of the Village. All of these actions raise a question: whose neighborhood is it anyhow?

As Sorkin points out, NYU and the Village are closely bonded through their history and location and owe a significant part of their successes to each other (*Twenty Minutes in Manhattan* 147). The Village was just beginning to emerge as a neighborhood when NYU opened its first building on the east side of the park in 1835 (Rosenberg). In the following decades the University greatly expanded in the area after it sold its campus in the Bronx and relocated to the Village. Back then the city just transformed the space that is now Washington Square Park from the potter's field to a parade ground, and "with new residents and a new park, the area began to develop quickly" (Folpe 213). Rosenberg concludes that in the last thirty years NYU was able to convert itself "from a second-thought commuter school into a global institution, gaining much prestige due to its roots in the cultural center that is the Village." NYU now owns most of the property around the Square and continues to build steadily, turning parts of the Village into de facto campus for the school.

It Takes a University to Ruin a Village. It Takes a Village to Mount a Rebellion.

At the heart of the most recent confrontation between NYU and the residents of the Village is the NYU 2031 Plan, according to which:

> The University seeks to add 2.4 million gross square feet of new development by the year 2031 for academic, faculty residential, student dormitory, athletic facilities, hotel and retail uses on two primarily residential "superblocks" bounded by West 3rd Street to the north, Houston Street to the south, Mercer Street to the east and LaGuardia Place to the west. ("NYU 2031 Plan")

The first time NYU announced its plans for expansion in the Village was in 2007, during the meeting with the Community Board 2 (Dailey). As a reaction to the NYU 2031 plan to rezone the superblocks and add four more buildings over the next years, the residents of the village formed protest groups "Save Washington Square," claiming that NYU "was on the verge of taking over the park" (Rosenberg). The opposition - CB2 and other local protest groups - urged NYU to reconsider their plan insisting that the proposal is far too big for such a densely populated neighborhood (Berger). CB2 argues that NYU 2031 Plan would have "severely damaging and long lasting consequences to the neighborhood's essential character and resources, including its socioeconomic diversity, public open space, historic preservation and quality of life." Ironically, many of the university's faculty members supported the neighborhood opposition led by CB2 (Cohen). Yet, the university remained unconvinced and after series of meeting with the community NYU confirmed their plans for expansion in the Village.

Dailey points out that NYU simply needs more space to meet their needs. Many journalists ask the same question - why doesn't NYU want to build anywhere else? Marty Markowitz, who was Brooklyn's borough president until 2014, proposed to NYU officials to

relocate its Tisch School of the Arts – that does acting, musical theater writing, film, television, photography, dramatic writing – to Brooklyn and to use that space in Manhattan for something else (Dailey). NYU has several buildings in Brooklyn but the school's long-term plan is to stay in the Village and complete their plan by 2031.

Hence, the conflict between CB2 and NYU is a conflict of interests, it's a conflict between developers who want to build higher and denser, and residents of the village who want to preserve the historical neighborhood and the park. Both sides of the conflict came up with a number of arguments defending their point of view.

John Beckman, vice president for public affairs and chief spokesperson at NYU, states that the university claims that NYU needs more space for its classrooms, dormitories, hotel, athletic and performance facilities to compete with national universities such as Yale, Colombia, or Harvard, since it has less space per student than its rivals (Berger). Here is how Beckman explains the need of NYU to expand:

> There's a reason why your kitchen isn't in a different building down the block from the rest of your apartment: it doesn't make sense, and it doesn't work. The same is true for a university: If one has to move from class to class, if one has to consult with colleagues, if one has to have access to the library between classes, or if one participates in an interdisciplinary research group, then the flippant suggestion that N.Y.U. can simply build academic space somewhere — anywhere — else becomes obvious for what it is: misguided at best, and willfully misleading at worst. "Anywhere but Greenwich Village" is not a plan; it's a slogan, and it's a recipe for harming our research, teaching, learning and the building of our scholarly community.

Another important argument Beckman makes is that NYU is going to build on the land it has owned for years, so the development is not going to harm public land. In addition to the buildings for academic needs, NYU will build an elementary school for the neighborhood and create new green and recreational space accessible to the public (Beckman). Beckman disagrees with Andrew Berman - Executive Director of Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation - that NYU 2031 will hurt the Village and asserts that NYU's presence in the Village is beneficial for the area. NYU is "an intellectual, cultural and educational institution" that attracts talented students and faculty members, Beckman agues, and it offers good jobs and helps Greenwich Village to prosper. Beckman insists that New York City will be "worse off, not better, with a less successful NYU," and if the neighborhoods like the Village prosper, the whole city will be "at the forefront of a knowledge economy" (Berger).

Berman together with CB2 argue that the proposed buildings are too tall and dense for the Village. According to Berger, "the square footage of the four buildings, the tallest of which would be twenty five floors, would nearly equal that of the Empire State Building" (Berger). The addition of thousands of NYU students and workers "would erode the character of a still quaint and offbeat city quarter," (Berger) mainly because most of the new buildings, such as a hotel, gym, dormitory – are going to be built for non-residential purposes. Nevertheless, NYU's desire to expand and upgrade is understandable and should not be neglected; however, the university should focus more on academic needs, but not on building gyms and hotels in the already dense historic neighborhood, Berman suggests (Berger). The area is already heavily used by NYU students; moreover, numerous retail spaces around the park are now NYU-oriented, such as bookstores and cafes and with the sign on the window "NYU students get a discount 10%."

Adding thousands of students and NYU-oriented stores to the area will certainly "destroy the very essence of the local neighborhood from which it benefits handsomely" (Berger).

Besides, according to the Community Board report, the height of the new buildings will negatively impact the area: they will cast shadows as far as Washington Square Park. Moreover, the report notes:

> The requested zoning would reduce by half the existing Open Space Ratio. The newly designed public spaces include walkways and pedestrian paths designed without public consultation and would replace treasured community parks, playgrounds, and gardens, reducing the amount of open acreage that provides light and air to the interior of the blocks. ("NYU 2031 Plan")

In addition, CB2 harshly criticizes NYU's intention to add a hotel to the superblocks arguing that having a hotel "should not be considered as central to the University's academic mission." There are plenty hotels in the area and it's not necessary to build a hotel just for NYU and the families of its students. The cost for having a gym for NYU in the area means that the residents of the village will lose the open space on the North Block of the Park ("NYU 2031 Plan"). There are even more gyms than hotels in the area, and thus if NYU wants to have its own gym, it should be located some place else, outside of the neighborhood. Finally, to complete the proposed development will take decades of construction that will cause continuous disruption in the area and most likely is going to upset local residents. CB2 concludes that NYU with its plan for expansion will rob the village of open space, light and air and convert city land to a private one even if the newly constructed places will be open to public.

For years Community Board 2 tried to stop NYU 2031 Plan arguing that the space where the university is going to build on is a parkland, but the court could only find an evidence that the

owner of the land - the city's Department of Transportation - temporarily loaned the land to the Parks Department and didn't intend to build there a permanent park (Dailey). The battle between NYU and CB2 was over on June 30, 2015 when New York State's highest court of appeals ruled in favor of the university, stating that "the land NYU wants to build on is not, as opponents argued, parkland, and therefore, the university can move forward with development without needing special approvals from the state" (Dailey). Thus, the neighborhood, that once achieved a legendary victory in the fight with the Power Broker Robert Moses, could not resist one private university; and now the residents of the Village are doomed to watch their unique neighborhood being redeveloped.

Greenwich Village and Washington Square Park are truly unique places. Both, the Village and the park, nurtured so many creative minds and fostered so many political and cultural movements. For decades the Village has been a home of some of America's famous writers, musicians, Beatniks, whose presence shaped the character and identity of the neighborhood. This neighborhood was not meant to become an adjunct to a university. Nowadays, the Village is already overrun with the students and the university's buildings, yet one might argue that there still can be a peaceful co-existence between NYU and the Villagers. However, what we are witnessing right now does not look like a co-existence, but rather the invasion of one private institution that is pushing everyone else out of the neighborhood.

Chapter III. Analysis. Modern Public Space.

Nowadays the idea that the public sphere is not only a social product, but also a prerequisite for a well-functioning society is one of the central ideas of urban studies. It is exceptionally important for cities to have a welcoming physical environment, where people can meet and interact and where they can learn to better understand and accept each other regardless of one's age, social status, or nationality. For decades people around the world have been gathering in urban public places where they pursued various activities often not intended for those locations. This freedom of choice, openness of public places and welcoming atmosphere all promoted the emergence of a "loose space - the dynamic appropriation of urban landscapes for unexpected uses" (Frank and Stevens 2). However, today many public places around the world, including New York City, have a corporate, planned atmosphere, interchangeable form city to city. They don't spark much activity or interactivity, and may in fact discourage any spontaneous actions. According to Richard Sennett, these "are dead public places" because they are not enjoyable, they lack authenticity and are designed not for socializing, but for consumption of goods (15). Among those places are shopping centers, entertainment complexes and privately managed urban parks. Moreover, modern city often produces inhospitable physical environments that are inaccessible to certain members of society, so called "undesirable," or marginalized groups. These are usually places where private interests successfully compete against public interests. Privatization and disneyficaton have certainly contributed to the production of "dead public places," and together with mass media and technological progress stipulated the decline of public sphere. Yet, privatization remains the main driving force behind the continuous erosion of public realm.

Privatization with its strengthening of surveillance and enforcement of rules and regulations in public places, including city parks, resulted in the production of privately owned or privately managed public places that are *controlled* places where "the essence of conviviality, spontaneity, encounter and that little sprinkle of chaos, have been stripped out" (Sennett 112). In such controlled public places, that are often secured with police officers or surveillance systems, people usually are not sure what is permissible and what is not, whether the place is open to the public or has its own special rules and norms. Thus, people tend to police themselves and limit their interactions. Mike Davis harshly criticizes controlled public places and argues that "the universal consequence of the crusade to secure the city is the destruction of any truly democratic urban space" (154). Anthony Vilder also draws attention to the fact that the cities spend millions of dollars on securing their public places – instead of focusing on the quality of physical environment – and argues that "true security often consists in publicness itself" (qtd. in Davis 4).

As Don Mitchel points out, struggles over public space "are not only struggles over opposing ideologies, but they are also struggles over the practice of democracy, the practice that is often determined in the streets, on the sidewalks, and in the parks" (7). Mitchel further argues:

> The "disneyfication" of public space advances, both marginalized people and political movements are shut out of public space, the possibility of finding spaces that can be taken and made into a space for representing the right to the city seems to become ever more remote. That is why it is necessary to oppose the usurpation of public space and its privation at every turn. (7)

Meanwhile, a number of sociologists and urban planners emphasize that *true* public places, especially public parks, are in high demand in contemporary cities, because "they embody the presence of nature in the city and are places of heavy socialization" (Tonnelat 5). In

his book Mitchell states that urban public parks "are small islands of freedom in a city under surveillance" and further argues "if those islands of freedom become indistinguishable from the rest of the city", the citizens will be completely deprived of their right to the public place and the city, because "the right to the city is dependent upon public space" (97). Losing this right means losing an opportunity to express yourself in public places, such as parks or squares, losing a free speech right: to hold a rally, to protest or perform. According to urban scholars, the most enjoyable and successful urban parks today are the places that preserved the aspect of "loose" space described by Frank and Stevens in their book. Thus, it's important to preserve those "islands of freedom" and create more "loose" public places that will eventually give the local community its identity and attract visitors from different areas of the city and all over the world. It is possible that looseness of public places might increase the chance of conflicts among the city dwellers. Yet, public places historically encompassed diversity; therefore, debates and conflicts have traditionally taken place over there, which eventually became one of the defining features of public places. Hence, no absolute agreement among the users of public places is normally expected.

Nowadays Washington Square Park remains a "loose" public place; it is open to anybody from poor to rich, form residents of the Village to tourists, from marginals to filmmakers. In addition, the park is one of the few open spaces in the neighborhood that often serves as a forum for public events and various street performances. It is a great outdoor room surrounded by historical buildings and high towers of urban renewal. Unlike other parks in New York, Washington Square is not a place to escape from city life but to enter it. It is a place to gather, socialize and observe the diversity: people are playing chess, kids are running around, musicians and other street performers are entertaining crowds with their art.

Currently the diversity of Washington Square Park heavily depends on the presence of street performers in the park, since buskers attract people of different ages and interests, the residents of the area, people from out of town and tourists. Many buskers on the Square are talented artists, and their presence adds an ambience and flavor to a community and the park itself. Even though the acoustic conditions of outdoor space are not as good as the ones of enclosed space, all the events are free which certainly makes it very appealing (Prato 152). Moreover, as Paolo Prato argues, street musicians transform urban public space according to aesthetic criteria, which contributes to the "spectacularization of urban space" (154). The "live" music of Washington Square Park also functions as a spectacular element and the musicians play a primary role in the process of spectacularization.

No doubt, the relationship between street performers and Washington Square are mutually beneficial. The park gives buskers a chance to express themselves to a wide variety of people and to earn some money, and street performers in their turn continue to attract diverse publics. The park certainly benefits from the presence of street performers, as they help to maintain its vitality and preserve its uniqueness; moreover, street artists continue to make the history of the Square. Thus, banning street performers from the park – as it happened in 2010 – could damage the cultural health of the park and destroy its social fabric. Besides, the presences of street performers in the park is another evidence that the park remains a "loose" – democratic – space, because "such artistic and cultural climate can thrive only in an atmosphere of free expression" (Sorkin, "Twenty Minutes in Manhattan" 168).

Washington Square Park today is a park that is relatively clean, its grounds are well-maintained, the fountain is working and the park's famous arch is in a reasonable condition. It seems that Washington Square Park is functioning about as well as any urban planner could

imagine. It's a welcoming, enjoyable place that engages different social groups and people of diverse interests where they all somewhat peacefully coexist. Yet, the Square and its surrounding area remain a place of conflict, a battleground where various interests compete against each other.

The struggle between the developers and the residents of the Village over the character and use of the park has been an ongoing struggle for many decades. For almost three years, from 2004 and until 2007, the residents of the Village and the Community Board 2 were fighting against the renovation plan proposed by Parks Department, which offered to relocate the fountain, to redesign a central plaza and the landscape of the park, to put the fences around the park (Bowley). The CB2 and the residents of the Village were very unhappy about the proposed renovations and some of them even "complained that their park was being violated" (Bowley). According to Graham Bowley:

> The critics were particularly upset by the centering of the fountain, which seemed to extend the park into Fifth Avenue, thus ending the sheltered feeling that they said the off-center fountain afforded. They further argued that the formal nature of the design - many likened it to Versailles - fundamentally altered the park's casual, democratic character, and as that it would no longer be a place for spontaneous performances.

The residents' frustration regarding moving the fountain and other design changes could be explained by the Villagers desire to preserve the memories and historical character of the park - the place of some of America's best-known musicians and artists. Yet, the plan for the Square's redevelopment was approved in 2007 and the park was redesigned; however, Community Board 2 could convince the court to make the fences around the park slightly lower, the Parks Department proposed, and not to put the gates on the entrances of the park (Bowley). In addition,

the residents of the Village and the park goers articulated their frustration in regards to the amount of private events that are taking place in Washington Square Park. Nowadays it happens more and more frequently when Parks Department hands out permits to the private actors or institutions to take over the whole park for a film shoot or another private event, which keeps the park closed off to the public, partially or entirely. Private events and permits bring a profit to Parks Department and certainly reduce the chance of political activities or spontaneous gathering and performances in the park. Besides, it deprives the residents or other park goers access to the public park. Private institutions should recognize the need to treat Washington Square as a more organic space rather than an event space that needs to be reserved officially. Otherwise, the park will turn into a privatized surrogate of pubic space - a programmed space where everything is planned and controlled by the city and park's officials.

Yet, the major concern of the Villagers and the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation is NYU's influence on the park and its surrounding area. Although NYU's proponents argue that even after the university contributed one million dollars toward the park's renovation, they never offered their opinion on the redesign and only asked to place the dog runs away from their library and to preserve university's tradition to hold its commencement in the park (Beckman). However, the opposition claims that the university's impact on the park and the Village is everywhere.

In the past decades, the area around Washington Square Park has gone through identity changes due to the influx of students and young professionals. Moreover, the invasion of chain stores in the Village also has an impact on the neighborhood's character: numerous Starbucks', Citibanks, Duane Reads and other chain stores displaced independently owned businesses that used to make the area unique and diverse. NYU 2031 Plan to rebuild the area could only worsen

the current situation: erecting four new buildings on two superblocks and bringing thousands of students might significantly transform the character of the neighborhood and deprive the area of its cultural value and social diversity.

However, NYU insisted that the university "should continue to concentrate its academic activities within the campus core to the greatest extent possible and that increasing the density of activities within the core improves the academic quality of the institution and enhance the neighborhood's quality of life" (Anderson). In 2014 NYU faculty members issued a report with the recommendations for what should be included in the Zipper Building - one of the proposed buildings of NYU 2031 Plan. They suggested "a mix of classrooms, performing-arts space, equal space for student and faculty housing, and student study areas, but no retail space" in the new Zipper building that will replace the current Coles gym site (Anderson). How can this new building "enhance the neighborhood's quality of life"? The proposed density of the Zipper Building and two superblocks seems unsustainable and will certainly affect the Village. The height and the mass of new buildings will darken the streets of the Village, stagnate the air, will increase the noise level, which all combined is going to have a negative impact on the quality of life in the area, but provide NYU the desired space for their so called academic needs.

Advocating for the preservation of historical buildings in Greenwich Village might seem to be elevating one group's interests above another, and one might argue that not only community needs but the University's needs for growth should be addressed. Yet, with the buildings that have gone up since NYU began its expansion in the Village, the school has proven that they are completely deaf to the community's concerns and recommendations. Besides, for forty years NYU has made promises to the neighborhood and community to improve the area and add more green space but these promises have never been fulfilled. For instance, Coles Gym

was built in 1981 and stands on the land that was given to the university by the city under an agreement. According to Folpe, this agreement had stipulations that in return for the building's rights, the university would construct an experimental elementary school - still unbuilt - and maintain a small children's playground on Mercer Street and the dog run directly in front of the Coles gym, between Houston and Bleecker streets (302). However, NYU did not keep their promises regarding the maintenance of the playground or dog run, and they never built elementary school. The university contributed to the maintenance of the dog run only once in 2007, but for the rest of the time – for thirty years – the dog run was kept alive by volunteers and members of the community. And now NYU claims the dog run and the playground as their own land, which they are going to use to construct the Zipper building. The fact that NYU contributed to the dog run maintenance once certainly doesn't make the university entitled to this land. The old Mercer Street playground and dog run are both the property of the Department of Transportation, and are not owned by NYU.

Nevertheless, Community Board 2 filled numerous lawsuits and eventually State Supreme Court Judge Donna Mills ruled that "NYU must get permission from the State Legislature for parts of the school's superblock expansion plan because it would impact strips of land being used as public parks." It looks like NYU has to go back to start planning its superblocks all over again, but history shows that the university is very good in obtaining permission for their development sites. The fact that NYU continuously makes promises to the community and the city to get zoning variances in order to access public land, and then doesn't fulfill those promises and refers to the land as its own, only shows NYU's disrespect to the Villagers and the neighborhood.

More strikingly, the university's own faculty have supported the neighborhood to oppose the NYU 2031 plan. Four hundred NYU faculty members created a NYU Faculty Against the Sexton Plan - NYU FASP - and passed resolutions against the plan in 2012 (Rosenberg). Mark Miller, a leader of NYU FASP says: "with all due respect to our colleagues who helped write the NYU 2031 Plan, this report is dubious in several ways," and further argues "it downplays or ignores key issues, offers questionable numbers, and misrepresents the Zipper as an academic building, although just a fraction of that space will go for classrooms" (Anderson).

The question that the residents of the Village and CB2 continue to address to NYU during their meetings is why doesn't the university want to expand their campus in other neighborhoods but instead is trying to squeeze into already crowded area? There is plenty of unused space in the Financial District and there are other places to rent in the Village that are only a fifteen minute walk from NYU's central buildings. According to NYU, the breaks between their classes are only fifteen minutes, which doesn't leave enough time to commute from Union Square or the Financial District, for example, to Washington Square. However, NYU already has some dormitories that are not in the immediate area and special trolleys that transport students from one location to another. The University can build more dormitories in those areas and keep its core campus for classrooms instead of putting one building on top of another in the already dense historic neighborhood. Another way for NYU to increase their space without building anything is to consider having a full day class schedule on Fridays and at least a half day schedule on Saturdays. NYU's desire to expand their campus to accommodate student's and faculty's needs should not be ignored, but the university should consider to use the space they already have more efficiently.

As noted above in response to the argument to expand its facilities elsewhere, Bekman said "there is a reason why your kitchen isn't in a different building down the block from the rest of your apartment … The same is true for a university." The difference is that Greenwich Village is not NYU's kitchen; it's a historical neighborhood that takes pride in its landmarks, its cultural and artistic movements, its architecture, and its history.

Greenwich Village is known for being a unique "urban village", the concept that Herbet Gans came up with in his study of the neighborhoods in Boston. The urban village, unlike the corporate city, that is identified with urban renewal and massive constructions, provides a different experience: it's a small independent neighborhood with its own social life and thriving community (Gans 105). To Jane Jacobs, Greenwich Village illustrates the idea of an urban village: it is a place with "intricate sidewalk ballet*"* and the intimate relationship between the strangers, local residents and store owners (135). Jacobs further argues that the diversity, the mixed-use buildings or neighborhoods and a variety of uses over time create vitality (97). The same idea can be applied to urban public places: places that welcome diverse publics, places that are shaped by different people using them, will most likely be vital, successful, and well used public places, which Washington Square is a good example of.

Some urban planners advocate that repurposing and redeveloping the New York landscape for its sustainability is a necessity considering the rapid growth of the city's population and argue that preserving the physical fabric of the city often means holding the entire neighborhood or district from progress. It's true that New York City has been tearing down and rebuilding since the nineteenth century. It is also true that destruction of a certain amount "of the city's physical fabric is inevitable or even desirable," but as Zukin points out "the city's social fabric must be preserved" (*Naked City* 145). In the case of Greenwich Village preserving the

physical fabric means preserving the diversity of the neighborhood that is currently threatened by the invasion of private university and chain stores.

Sennett is certainly right when he states that "the attempt to find a finished form is always self-destructive" because it immediately becomes a limited and unresponsive backdrop to constantly evolving societal needs and rhythms, and therefore tends toward the status of outdated relic" (205). However, Washington Square Park exemplifies a more fluid attitude towards preservation, due to its continuous and vigorous use and the ability to absorb a change, and thus it is not an outdated relic (Folpe 319). In her book Folpe describes a fate of two objects in reference to Washington Square Park: one old axe with its original parts "that is worn to a patina and hangs on the wall as a treasured memento," and another axe "of similar vintage with worn-out blades and handles that have been replaced a few times that is still in use" (319). Even though the second tool retains none of its original elements, it functions as it was intended to, and thus remains essentially the same axe. Folpe argues that the Square is a bit like that second axe: despite the fact that the physical environment of the park was not preserved, the park remains one of the most attractive, diverse and most densely used parks in Manhattan and is definitely not "a fossilized relic of the past" (321).

Even though many New Yorkers advocate for preservation of the city's historical neighborhoods, modern architecture is moving rapidly toward a time of big change adopting the strategy to build higher and more densely to accommodate the needs of the city and its residents. Yet, it is alarming that national landmarks such as Washington Square Park and its surrounding area can just be handed over to a private university for its own financial gain. Greenwich Village with its famous park has the richest cultural heritage of any of the neighborhoods in the city and just like any other historical place it needs to be recognized and appreciated, because it

represents the history of America, its identity, values, and culture. This urban national heritage should be protected from NYU's invasion and other threats that come as a consequence of various needs of the city. Preserving the cultural heritage such as Washington Square Park and other valuable buildings in the area helps to connect the past to the present and the future. Uniting several generations through cultural heritage can help people of different ages to better understand each other and at the same time can stimulate the belonging to community. By understanding the history and the culture of Greenwich Village people can gain a greater appreciation for the neighborhood's legacy and its importance. Besides, those who identify strongly with a certain cultural heritage are often more likely to help others in the community. It is a well-known fact that "continuous activism and civic involvement has characterized the Square's community through the better part of two centuries" (Folpe 5). Both arches were funded entirely by private donations, and moreover, the residents of the Square participated in many philanthropic projects and committed considerable time and money towards ameliorating the Villages social problems. Therefore, the destruction of historical buildings and monuments around the park and the attempt to change the park's character can cause irreparable damage to the cultural heritage of the city. If NYU continues to change the park "from quintessential hangout space in New York to a walk-through mall," (Bowley) the Greenwich Village together with the Square might turn into a part of a "Destination City - a city that is attractive to tourists but has lost its edge of difference, its authentic character, what some people call soul" (*Naked City* 17).

Conclusion

To conclude, in the current situation when public space is taking a new form, when the department stores and entertainment complexes become a model of public space, when private institutions are "shaping an ideal city based on consumption, where only the largest consumer outlets survive," the idea of public space, and its relations to urban community needs to be sustained (Zukin, "The Cultures of Cities" 4). However, today when our cultural milieu is so much about consumerism, it is questionable if it's possible at all to create public places where consumerism is not a driving force. In other words, it is questionable if the New Yorkers "can consume the city without destroying it" (Zukin, "The Cultures of Cities" 89). Hence, in the current crisis of public space it is very important to create more "loose" public space and to protect historical public places, such as Washington Square Park, from being redeveloped and from private institutions that are trying to take over the control of public land.

Washington Square Park, just like any other public place, will most likely always remain a place of conflict, since there always be diverse interest that are interacting there. Having a top university like NYU in a residential neighborhood can bring number of benefits to the area. It could create thousands of jobs, increase an area's cultural and intellectual capital, and bring crowds of people that are going to spend money. However, these universities could also disturb those who live around them. In other words, what universities and other educational institutions do is a great value to the world, region, and city, but not necessarily entirely in the interest of their immediate neighbors. Since Washington Square Park and NYU have been closest neighbors for decades and owe their prestige and success to each other, they need to establish and maintain favorable, not the adversarial, relationship. In addition, if at any point in the future Washington Square Park will be considered for urban renewal and new developments, it should remain two

necessary qualities of public space - accessibility and communication. Furthermore, if NYU is going to complete all the proposed redevelopment, which will diminish the amount of air, light and green space in the Village, the university should at least create something that will benefit the local community as well.

Circa 2005 the Bloomberg Administration for the first time announced their intention to move Washington Square Park's famous fountain - that has been on the same spot since the 1870's – twenty-three feet to the east so it would line up with the Arch and Fifth Avenue (Sullivan). This topic immediately provoked numerous discussions about the purpose and the consequences of the renovation. Some of the proponents of the new design advocated that shifting the fountain to the east will recreate the missing symmetrical alignment of the park. Others supported the project by arguing that the fountain has not been repaired since 1969, and was not functioning well because its structure was deteriorating; and if moving the fountain was the only way to make the Parks Department to repair it, then why not to let them do it (Finn). The opposition suggested that the fountain should be renovated without leaving its original location and pointed out that "the fountain has been in the center of the park on its east-west axis since it was first placed in 1870" (Sullivan). The arch had not simply existed when the fountain was installed, which proves that "the historic designers did not deliberately offset the fountain from the arch" (Horowitz). Besides, the residents of the Village happened to like the "quirky" design of the park which the unaligned fountain used to add to, mainly because the off-center location provided the sheltered feeling - protecting those who were gathering around the fountain from the noise and the traffic of Fifth Avenue. Moreover, the fountain was a focal point of folk music culture and played an important role in the Beatnik Riot that started a cultural revolution in 1960s.

Yet, the City proceeded with the plan and moved the fountain to the proposed site, which decreased the fountain's diameter, made the sidewalks smaller and led to the destruction of several old trees that were in the way. However, after the renovation was completed, the opponents of the project pointed out that the fountain is misaligned (Horowitz). One might argue that it's the angle from which those critics are looking or from which the photo is taken that makes the fountain look unaligned. However, many residents of the Village and its visitors confirm that when you are on the Square, the fountain does looks misaligned. What was the purpose of moving the fountain if right now it is not aligned to anything? The reason for fountain's relocation remains unclear. The only explanation George Vellonakis, the Parks Department landscape architect, gave in his interview is that "centering the fountain will make a better shot for tourist to take home" (Finn). This explanation sounds facetious. Relocating the historical fountain that is being on the same spot for over a hundred years just to please some symmetry-obsessed tourist photographers?

Nevertheless, things are still happening around the fountain, including the impromptu musical gatherings, yet the "centering" of the fountain certainly contributed to the obliteration of the memories and the history that were associated with the fountain's original locations. However, the influence of private institutions on Washington Square is more alarming than moving the fountain or redesigning the park's landscape. Private institutions are not only funding and maintaining urban parks but in return for their help are allowed by city governments to dictate what happens within these public parks. Hence, there is a real chance that with the continuous involvement of private organizations in the Washington Square Park's life, the park will become a semi-private or even private park, and eventually will turn into a pristine, sanitized, programmed space. Thus, the park no longer will be a go-to spot for actions and

events, and the very essence of the park will be lost. Even though Washington Square Park

remains one of the most vibrant and diverse parks in the city, the influence of private actors and

institutions on the park remains to be seen.

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