

# Loose Space

Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life

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## Chapter 2

# Found Spaces

### *Freedom of Choice in Public Life*

*Leanne G. Rivlin*

In the panoramic peasant scenes depicted in the works of Peter Bruegel the Elder, the sixteenth-century painter, and in William Hogarth's paintings of eighteenth-century street life, the vitality of the public spaces and their many different functions is displayed. The public arena has long contained marketplaces, vendors of various kinds of merchandise, entertainers, children playing, rituals and celebrations, casual and arranged meetings and a much enjoyed activity—gazing at the passing scene. After the development of designed spaces for public life, especially marketplaces, commons areas, squares and plazas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and parks in the nineteenth century, many of these activities occurred in settings specifically designed to accommodate them. However, some of these same activities and others, spontaneous and *ad hoc*, occur in "found spaces," places intended for other uses that people have occupied to meet their public life needs. By looking closely at contemporary found spaces and their uses and users, we can discover much about public behavior and come closer to understanding what people are seeking in their use of the public domain.

The research on found spaces that provides evidence for this analysis of public life began in the mid-1980s, during a time when there was considerable dissatisfaction with public spaces. Architects, landscape architects, planners and users criticized their design and management for their failure to meet people's needs, for their commercial rather than human qualities, for their non-use, misuse and abuse (Carr *et al.* 1992). New York City, for example, experienced a plague of "bonus plazas" following the city's "incentive zoning" passed in 1961. During the 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s bland, barren, windswept plazas were built in many parts of Manhattan such as Sixth Avenue (Avenue of the Americas). They were attached to high-rise office

buildings whose developers received permission from the city to increase the bulk or height of their constructions if they provided these outdoor areas. Incentive zoning of this form spread to other urban areas where similar plazas were created. The plazas were considered threats to public life for their increasing privatization of public space (Whyte 1988; Kayden 2000).

Although bonus plazas still exist in New York, many have been modified under the guidance of William H. Whyte who offered an alternative plan, adopted by the city in 1975. This required that developers providing privately owned public space in return for more floor space include specific amenities that Whyte advocated, especially seating surfaces such as the edges of planters and low walls and benches. The city also has allowed developers to provide indoor atria and concourses rather than the outdoor plazas which were more difficult to monitor and maintain. In fact, Whyte (1988) believed that managers of buildings that included bonus spaces were more concerned with excluding certain types of users than with issues of aesthetics. Found spaces offer alternative to these problematic spaces and to public parks.

## Found Spaces

Found spaces are a neglected area in the study of public spaces and public life yet they constitute a large portion of the outdoor urban places used by children and adults. They contrast with tight spaces (Sommer 1974) that are heavily programmed places with extensive rules and prescribed ways of being used. In the case of bonus plazas, many have limited resources available to users. Found spaces, a term that I have used to distinguish them from sites designed as public spaces, offer a sense of discovery and serendipity that is special to their functions (Rivlin 1986).

It became clear in my observations of public spaces and public life that the conventional public places designed to accommodate people, such as parks, plazas, squares, and playgrounds, were not the only settings used by people for their leisure-time activities. The other outdoor public settings are "found" in the sense that users locate and appropriate them for uses that they serve effectively but which they were not originally designed to serve. The found nature of these spaces contrasts with the planned nature of other public spaces and together they form the outdoor settings used by people. Found spaces offer alternative places for public life since their uses spring from a complex matrix of needs brought to them by users. We see people in found spaces all the time—neighbors chatting on a street corner, a vendor selling things on a city block, children playing in an empty lot. These activities do not differ dramatically from those occurring in spaces designed for leisure activities, but they do differ in their origins, their diversity and often in the physical qualities of their sites.

Although found spaces can be seen in many local neighborhood areas, people often travel a distance to reach them. They can become a favorite place to be alone or simply the location of a special street vendor selling fruit. The spaces meet the needs of people in a casual manner. Unlike designed spaces, it is the users themselves who locate and program found spaces although the traffic of the passing

pedestrians and performances of street entertainers are qualities that can contribute to making the site a found space. Performers also are drawn to areas with potential audiences since they rely on donations for their work.

After the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, a number of found spaces appeared in Lower Manhattan. Some of them displayed efforts to locate missing people, with names and photographs placed on walls, construction sites and outside hospitals. Others were memorials with flowers, flags and diverse mementos—silent tributes to a tragic loss. People passing by stopped to look at the displays, and to add their own contributions, sharing the sadness and the power of the event.

Primarily, found spaces are places that enable people to exercise their freedom of choice (Proshansky *et al.* 1970), allowing them to be active pursuers of their own interests. Rather than being captive audiences, passive consumers in a designed world that mandates what happens in a site, freedom of choice offers a different kind of opportunity. It allows people to be "cognizing and goal-directed organisms," making active attempts to satisfy their needs in their "interactions and exchanges" with the physical environment (*ibid.*: 174). As a result, people make an effort to organize the environment so that it maximizes their freedom of choice. The freedom allows people to manipulate the environment and to add resources to it, which are ways they can create opportunities for privacy, deal with density, reach out to others to form a social environment, and satisfy other personal needs.

Freedom of choice is at the core of people's ability to discover possibilities in the environment and thereby to make use of found spaces. Although this capacity may develop as the individual matures, it is especially evident in pre-school children who have not yet been socialized to filter out their desires. One example observed in the study of found spaces was a group of three children playing at the edge of a parking lot outside a restaurant. They had discovered a corner where the asphalt had broken, exposing the earth below. They were digging enthusiastically using sticks (found tools) in a tiny area containing what Nicholson (1971) has identified as "loose parts." These are elements within a site that are amenable to manipulation and change and have the potential to lead to creativity and discovery. This is the essence of found spaces: people finding possibilities in available public spaces and appropriating and adapting them for their own purposes.

Another useful perspective on found spaces comes from the concept of "affordance" expressed in J. J. Gibson's (1979) work. As the components of environments change, affordances emerge from the changing nature of the environment and the opportunities opened to people observing these settings. Gibson viewed affordance as cutting across "the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior" (1979: 129). From the affordances offered through perception, people pick up visual cues that suggest possible uses of settings, which can vary across perceivers. Affordances enable the discovery of possibilities, an important dimension of public space that helps to satisfy people's needs.

## Identifying Found Spaces

The study of found space grew out of research on public space that led to a subsequent book (Carr *et al.* 1992) and to my curiosity about this alternative form of public life. There were two stages to the study: first, a survey was undertaken to identify specific places, and then a focused study was undertaken of a selected number of them.

In 1984, survey forms were sent to 80 environmental psychologists and urban planners who lived in New York City. They were asked to provide the locations of found spaces, if they knew of any. The criteria for these spaces were described: (1) the space had not been designed with its main function as a public space, a place for public activities; and (2) people in the space were involved in one or more activities such as resting, eating, watching, talking, reading, writing, contemplating, playing games, sports or other forms of recreation. The 30 surveys that were returned identified 84 different places in New York City that qualified as found spaces (Rivlin and Windsor 1986). The kinds of places mentioned ranged from a forbidden area of a garage where children delighted in playing to street corners, building and store fronts, sidewalks and intersections where people gathered.

Prior to selecting places for in-depth study, we visited a number of the sites to identify their physical features and to observe how they were being used. Some were segments or strips of sidewalks; some were isolated from other areas and uses; and others were "spillovers" from places receiving steady or heavy use such as restaurants, shops or clubs, where people were lingering outside. Others were steps in front of public buildings and stoops or stairs in front of residences which formed natural amphitheaters for observing the urban or neighborhood scene. There also were islands or squares, often parts of intersections that were geographically set off from the surrounding space. These were appropriated for selling things or hanging out.

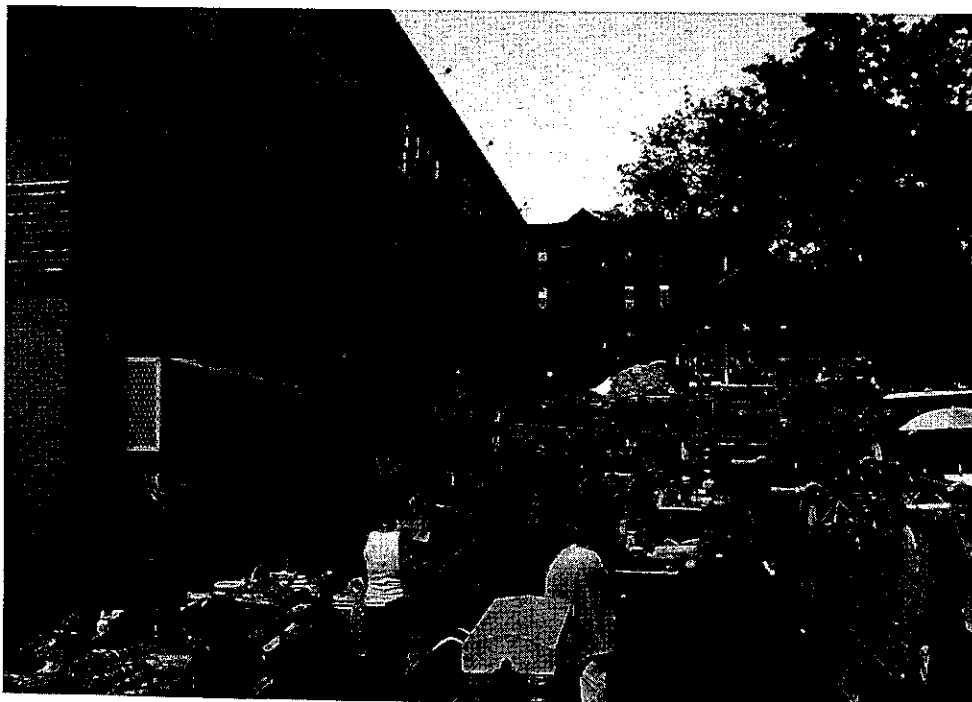
Fences or low walls appeared in a range of settings, offering an amenity that could be used in unusual ways. The fence or wall around a school or park provided a convenient place to hang merchandise to be sold or was a comfortable backdrop for vending booths. Low walls became sitting ledges that enabled people to rest and watch, eat, read and linger in the site. There were places with greenery or water in areas with beaches, waterfronts, abandoned piers, or community gardens created out of empty lots, all of which attracted users for their "natural" elements. Some places had historic or artistic elements, public art, sculpture, or monuments, drawing attention to the area's potential as a public space, and marking that space as special or distinctive.

Times of use also differentiated the spaces that were nominated. Some were places of weekday use, generally during lunchtime, in the location of office buildings. Others were largely used on weekends when recreational crowds in residential, entertainment and shopping areas populated the spaces. There were some spaces that functioned all week long although rarely at the same level of density during every time period.

Eleven places were selected for focused study from the 84 sites that had been nominated. An effort was made to cover the range of sites that had been identified in the surveys. They were located in two of the boroughs of New York City—Brooklyn and Manhattan. Two of the places selected were staircases in front of grand public buildings: the New York Public Library located between 40th Street and 42nd Street on Fifth Avenue in mid-Manhattan, and the main post office on Eighth Avenue between 31st and 33rd Streets on the west side of Manhattan.

Four places were identified as “perching places,” where people lingered to wait for friends, spend time, or look at the passing scene. One was in a Brooklyn neighborhood, largely residential, outside a medical building. Two, in Manhattan, were outside churches: St. Thomas Church on Fifth Avenue and 53rd Street in an active business area and Trinity Church in lower Manhattan with a cemetery adjoining a church that had public art. One site in Manhattan’s Columbus Circle was a place where people lingered near a sculpture located there.

Two sites were identified as “spillover” places, with some people inside buildings and others standing outside. One was a sidewalk area adjacent to the northernmost building of the World Trade Center, with office workers and tourists present. The other was a variety of sidewalk locations in the East Village in lower Manhattan. The remaining three sites were places where vendors were present. One was a weekend flea market set up in the playground of an elementary school on a shopping street in the Park Slope, Brooklyn neighborhood (Fig. 2.1). Another was a pedestrian bridge, a walkway that crossed a highway in a Brooklyn residential area. The third was a weekly crafts fair along the 42nd Street fenced border of Bryant Park in mid-Manhattan.



2.1  
Flea market at  
Brooklyn  
elementary school

All the sites were studied by informal observations with field notes and formal interviews undertaken with occupants. The steps of the 42nd Street library were divided into sections and observed using a time sampling procedure that produced behavioral maps (Ittelson *et al.* 1970) that identified the kinds of users and their activities in different segments of the steps. This site was studied over a two-year period and formed an in-depth case study.

The kinds of people interviewed varied according to the nature of the site. Interviewers approached vendors and their customers in places where selling and buying took place. In other places we identified "users," people who came to the space to spend some time. Street entertainers performed in a few places but they were rarely disturbed for interviews. In some places, such as the steps of the New York Public Library, all types of users were present. Within each user group interviewers were told to make an effort to represent the different kinds of people present in terms of age, gender, and clothing (conventional, casual and unusual or disheveled). Interviewers were instructed to select roughly the same number of males and females. However, males were the predominant users of most sites. An exception was the Brooklyn elementary school flea market where women outnumbered men (60 percent of those interviewed). Unlike the other sites that were studied, the flea market was a weekend event. Observations of the library steps, an individual case study, also identified more male users than female.

## Uses of Found Spaces

Passing time was a popular use observed and described in the interviews. People were waiting for someone or watching the passing parade of pedestrians. The central locations of the sites near major urban crossroads or heavily trafficked areas made them particularly popular for these activities.

Most selling and buying as well as looking over the goods for sale took place where pedestrians could easily see the display of items and stop to investigate them. However, in one place, on a pedestrian bridge in Brooklyn, the buying and selling was more of a neighborhood amenity. Street performances by musicians, magicians and mimes also drew users' attention and were especially popular on the sidewalk in front of the steps of the New York Public Library.

Eating and drinking was another common activity in many of the sites. At times the food was purchased at the found space from nearby vendors but these places also attracted people carrying their own food who sat, leaned, or stood while consuming their lunches and snacks.

Socializing in a found space included casual chatting as well as intense involvement with another person or a group of people. In some areas the chance meeting with a friend or neighbor or casual conversation with someone nearby led to longer interactions. These activities were observed at the neighborhood flea market, the neighborhood street corner, and the steps of the New York Public Library.

## Qualities of Found Spaces

Findings from the content analysis of the interviews, the informal field notes and the behavioral maps for the library steps demonstrate that found spaces have multiple, overlapping qualities. First, they serve people's varied needs offering comfort, a place to rest and the opportunity to be outdoors. For some, going to the site fit in well with other planned activities for the day so that they slipped in a visit, sometimes scheduling it in advance.

The reasons given for coming to the sites ranged from time to reflect to those involving engagement with the ongoing scene. Although the explanations were not that different from those for designed areas such as parks and plazas (Carr *et al.* 1992), they were offered for a diversity of places and each site generated its own pattern of reasons for their users' presence. This is an important consideration when addressing the question of why these particular sites were used rather than more conventional settings.

Found spaces offer an openness that appeals to people, one that is casual and spontaneous and where they find possibilities that are not available in conventional sites. Unlike other public spaces such as parks and bonus plazas that have lists of rules for their use, found spaces offer relative freedom. Their open-ended qualities such as edges on which to sit or lean supported a range of different uses. Areas large enough to set up tables were appropriated by vendors to sell things.

Generally, found spaces are located in convenient places, often at crossroads. They require small investments of time and effort to arrive there. However, not all the users we interviewed came from the local area. Some people had traveled from distant places, and the found spaces became a valued part of their trip, a resource available for them. In the case of found spaces in Manhattan, some of the visitors were from other boroughs, suburban areas and other states. They used the proximity of found spaces such as the steps of the library or the post office as an opportunity to rest or have something to eat before heading to their destinations.

In some places, particular qualities of the site had drawing power. The weekend flea market at the school in Brooklyn was a definite attraction for many local residents and others who learned about it in the course of shopping in the area. People enjoyed meeting neighbors there as well as the serendipity of discovering the different merchandise that was available each week. The central location and the amphitheater created by the cascade of steps at the New York Public Library made this site a favorite space. Local workers, occasional visitors and tourists enjoyed sitting on the stairs, watching the passing pedestrian scene and the street performers when they were there.

The anonymity described by Westin (1967) as a component of privacy is present in public places, including found spaces, especially on the library and post office steps. The assurance of anonymity is a powerful factor influencing the kinds of behaviors seen in some found spaces. People could go there and sit in a sea of strangers, unknown to others. We observed people deeply engaged in their own



thoughts, with bowed heads in their hands, a few quietly crying. They were able to engage in these very personal behaviors because they had a sense of privacy amidst a crowd.

People also experienced the entertainments of the street which ranged from street performers to pedestrians moving along. People-watching was an activity that the urban critic William H. Whyte greatly valued. He advocated for the provision of ample public sitting places which could be benches or the tops of planters or low walls that were wide enough for sitting (Whyte 1980). The Danish urban designer, Jan Gehl, also notes the importance of people-watching and points particularly to the activities of construction workers who draw the attention of both children and adults (Gehl 1987).

Found spaces can be occupied for varying lengths of time. The research identified a range of times people spent in the places. Some stopped by for a few minutes to rearrange packages or other belongings or to rest, while others remained for the better part of a day. These alternatives are also created by the open borders of found spaces and their availability for use at any time of day. This freedom of use draws people to sites that become some of the many resources of the city.

Found spaces stimulate open-mindedness, another consequence of having options. This can lead to diverse uses as people creatively take advantage of available street furniture—steps, walls, flat surfaces—to accommodate their needs. In some cases the built portions of a site open up possibilities to hang things or to put things down. A fence around a building became a display space for the sale of used clothing. A flat surface was used as a seat or a table for having a meal, or a space for rearranging papers. A sculpture can become a leaning post for tired walkers, as well as an aesthetic experience for people in the site and for pedestrians walking by. People bring things to found spaces—food, reading and writing materials, radios, items to make their stays there pleasant and interesting, also expanding what can be done on the site.

The flea market on a neighborhood shopping street in Brooklyn is a found space that began on weekends with people bringing things they wanted to sell and hanging them on the outside of the fence around the playground, along the sidewalk in front of an elementary school. After a precedent was established for using the site for selling things, the Parent Teacher Association of the school invited vendors into the play area for a small fee that went towards funds for the school's arts program. The vendors could bring their own tables or use the play elements as display areas. This has been a successful, weekend market since 1982.

Found spaces offer people freedom of use and freedom from intrusion. The combination of the possibilities to do things and the absence of rules make these sites appealing to people, much like the empty lot for children's play or the street corner for casual conversations. For vendors, the particular location, whether a heavily used pedestrian street or an open stretch of sidewalk near a cemetery, offered a place that could be temporarily altered by opening up a folding table or by hanging things on a ledge. This transformed the space into a small bazaar that appealed to a

number of people who liked the convenience of this form of shopping as well as the low prices of the merchandise.

Found spaces provide freedom of choice (Proshansky *et al.* 1970). People generally look for particular opportunities to do what they need to do, searching in very quick and automatic ways for sites that maximize their choices and select the ones that offer them alternatives. From interviews with users of the library steps, the free entertainment on some days (with voluntary contributions if they were so inclined), the available seating if they wanted to rest and the general view of the passing pedestrian scene made the site appealing. In contrast, designed spaces such as bonus plazas had a tighter set of restrictions that could be imposed by management (Carr *et al.* 1992). In Greenacre Park, a small, vest-pocket park in Manhattan, managed by a private foundation, users were restricted from feeding pigeons and from dozing, rules enforced by the supervisors who were present.

Finally, found places were viewed as safe, an essential requirement of public spaces (Rivlin and Windsor 1986; Carr *et al.* 1992). Given the multiple threats to public life, including various forms of violence, crime and harassment, the opportunity to spend a lunchtime or afternoon at a site demanded that the place be free of sources of personal abuse. For women, whose access to public life has been subjected to multiple challenges, safety in public places is central to their public lives (Franck and Paxson 1989). The choices offered by the library steps reveal some of the elements that support public safety.

2.2  
Steps in front of the  
New York Public  
Library

## The Library Steps: A Closer Look at Found Spaces

The steps of the New York Public Library face Fifth Avenue between 40th and 42nd Streets in Manhattan (Fig. 2.2). They are part of an architectural landmark, a major research library in the city. The two marble sitting lions that flank its entrance are notable examples of New York City's public sculpture and evoke affection from many people.

The white marble neo-classical building, designed by Carrere and Hastings and built on the site of the Croton Reservoir, was completed in 1911. The library now has two kinds of resources. One is a public circulating library in a building across the street on Fifth Avenue. The other, in the main library building, consists of a number of major research collections available for use in the library itself. The library also regularly mounts exhibitions in various sections of its building. These two functions account for some of the traffic up the stairs. Bryant Park is behind the library; at the time of our research it had some serious problems, including drug dealing. There were occasional spillovers of this activity onto the rear, side areas of the library steps.

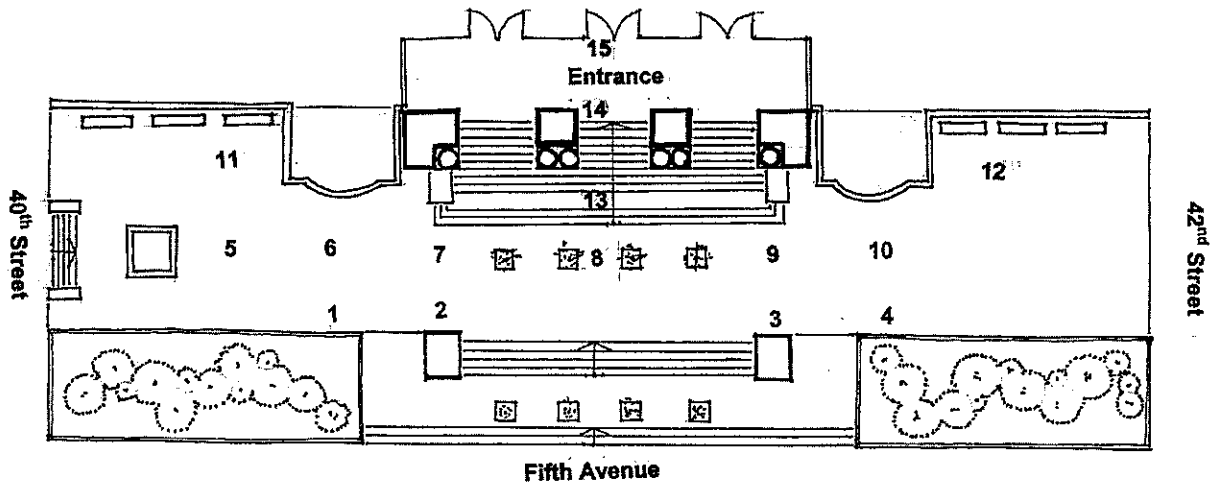
The library steps consist of a series of segments, each one containing steps and a landing (Fig. 2.3). The lowest segment has three steps and a small flat area with a stone bench on either side. The marble statues of lions flank either side of the entrance where five steps lead to a large terrace that has both a central section and



side sections. Flowering plants and other greenery decorate the front and back edges of the terrace. Most of the steps are in the section leading up to the entrance of the library, in a series of 3 steps, 11 steps and 6 steps, each one separated by a small landing: After the period of our observations a kiosk was placed on either side of the large landing. Noontime observations there in 2005 found no kiosks but the plateau was covered with moveable chairs and tables which were filled with people eating their lunches.

We studied the library steps more closely than the other ten places because it contained a varied collection of found spaces and an interesting mix of people. We divided the site into 15 different sectors so that detailed observations could be made of the users and uses in each portion of the steps (Fig. 2.3). Observations were made on weekdays between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the temperature fell within a tolerable range. One set of observations was completed in July and August, the other between November and early December. Interviews with users were undertaken during both these time periods.

Different densities, different activities, and in some cases different types of users were observed in different sections of the steps. On some days the areas along the street (areas 1 and 2) were filled with a crafts fair which attracted many people. At other times street performers, generally mimes, magicians and musicians, drew large audiences. The landings at the top of the upper stairs (areas 13, 14, 15) leading to the library entrance, also showed high levels of use. It was an excellent



viewing post for the panoramic scene below. When asked why they chose the places where they were positioned, people mentioned that they were trying to be in the best position for looking at what was going on. Other areas drew fewer people and they tended to be in less central portions of the site (areas 11 and 12), where the activities were less visible than other portions of the site. It was in these sectors that we observed a few instances of drug dealing.

2.3  
Plan showing areas  
of observation on  
the New York  
Public Library steps

Analysis of user types by their clothing revealed that the majority of users, 65 percent, were dressed in sports clothes, casual dress, with 33 percent in conservative clothing (suits and ties and a similar style for women). The remaining 2 percent were construction workers, street people and a few police officers, the latter using the steps while on a break. The kinds of people observed covered the range likely to be found in any midtown business area and they co-existed peacefully on the library steps.

When the 15 sectors of the steps were examined for differences in types of users, we found that more conservatively dressed people than other clothing types occupied the most central space (area 8). There was a spillover of this user type into the adjoining areas on one side (area 10). The peripheral and side areas (areas 11 and 12) drew casually-dressed types as well as small numbers of unusually-dressed persons, some in the worn clothing characteristic of some homeless street people. The casually and conservatively dressed people occupied the more visible areas of the site, having selected, according to interviews, places where they felt comfortable (Fig. 2.4). In the majority (98 percent), these two groups positioned themselves in the central areas although they sometimes had to wait for a preferred spot to be available. They were largely regular users, coming from local office buildings and were dressed in ways characteristic of those places.

When we looked at what people did on the site, other patterns emerged. Activities recorded on the steps were influenced by the weather, by planned events and by the presence of street performers, vendors, and people handing out flyers in support of particular causes. Crafts fairs and performers affected the location and



2.4  
**People sitting on  
New York Public  
Library steps,  
mostly office  
workers eating  
lunch**

types of behaviors observed as well as the number of people on the site. The most frequent activity recorded in all areas of the steps was observing the scene, highest when street performers were present. Looking at objects occurred when there was a crafts fair and was restricted to the display tables. Talking and pedestrian movement were also frequently observed, with pedestrians mainly walking on the terraces and up the steps. Conversations were observed on the steps where people were sitting together or leaning against the walls.

The predominant activities on the library steps were passive ones—looking at the passing scene, watching activities taking place, and less frequently, reading, writing, sleeping, sunning, contemplating and listening to a radio. People used the physical attributes of the site to pursue these activities, with steps on which to sit and columns and walls against which to stand and lean.

Despite their infrequency, the more active behaviors offered an indication of what can occur when people are given the freedom to play out their lives in a public territory. Some were enthusiastically engaged in conversations, lunching together, often from bags brought to the site, sometimes purchased from the local vendors who sold frankfurters, sodas, pretzels, chestnuts and other New York street food. Transactions with the vendors on the pavement in front of the steps were regular activities, as were street performances. Less frequent were people feeding the pigeons, playing their own musical instruments, and photographing the scene.

In the interviews, people were asked to identify the origin and the final destination of their visit to the library steps. Most were coming from work, with others

coming from their homes or hotels, shopping or entertainment, school, appointments, or were messengers delivering packages. This variety underlines the ways the steps function as a lunchtime destination for local workers, as a landmark building interesting to tourists and as a stopping point for people on their way to other parts of the city. Most had come from the immediate area or within easy walking distance but others had traveled a distance to reach the steps.

In the 1990s, after our data collection, food kiosks and chairs and tables were placed on both sides of the top portico, transforming these sites into busier and less private areas. It is interesting to speculate whether the kiosks were added to the side areas to discourage the drug-dealing we had observed there. The freedom of use offered by found spaces may also attract drug dealing and other illegal activities. However, the research on found spaces identified little of this, actually restricted only to a few observations on the library steps. This contrasts with Nager and Wentworth's (1976) study of Bryant Park which found that the abundant vegetation there at that time made the park a delightful respite, screening out hectic mid-Manhattan. However, the physical qualities that attracted users also led to persistent drug dealing that discouraged many local people from using the park.

Most of the people interviewed on the steps had very positive feelings about the site (83 percent). Set at a major crossroads in Manhattan, the steps drew passers-by and local workers in the vicinity, many of whom went there on a regular basis. The site enjoys a dual status as an urban landmark building and an office workers' amenity; in both its roles it attracts large numbers of users, even in the colder months. The users of the library steps found the space to be comfortable and safe, qualities they stressed as being very important.

## The Found Space Freedoms

The 11 different sites studied illustrate the ways that found spaces offer freedom of use and in the process meet people's needs. Found spaces have impacts on people, some quite obvious, others more subtle. Based on the catalogue of found spaces and observations and interviews in the subset of 11 sites, it is clear how they served the needs of users. We could easily observe the obvious ones, for example, opportunities to sit down and rest, but interviews uncovered strong feelings about the sites and the conveniences they offered. They served these needs with minimal commitment on the part of users since most of the spaces are close to workplaces and homes, becoming regular parts of people's lives. Many are located at the intersection of major streets in dense parts of the city. They fit into people's lives in an easy, casual manner and may not be considered to be important until something threatens their use. Managers of spaces that are designed for outdoor leisure activities can learn much from the popularity of found spaces and provide greater freedom of choice in their sites.

Found spaces offer a form of freedom in public life, freedom to enjoy, to find a sanctuary, to engage with others or to be alone. This freedom emerges from the

reality that the sites are chosen by users and serve functions that people desire in their public lives. Adapting Gibson's (1979) term "affordance," there are two interacting sources of affordances in found spaces: the alternatives offered by the setting and those perceived by people who are able to imagine uses that are possible. The affordances of places are aspects of a site that are viewed as adaptable and amenable to change and are available for particular uses. The fences around spaces can be seen as restricting entry or as good places to hang or lean items for sale or display. People's open-mindedness and creativity are required to identify the possibilities offered by the physical qualities embedded in a site.

The freedoms of found spaces include freedom to engage with others, to retreat, to do what people need to do and to do it at times convenient for them. They illustrate the spatial rights that Kevin Lynch (1981: 205–207) defined as integral to control, especially the "right of presence," "use and action," "appropriation" and "modification." They enable people's freedom to engage in activities and freedom from intrusion and threat.

Found spaces offer opportunities for people in cities to find, among other qualities, the peace and solitude that others search for in wilderness areas (Stankey 1989). In found spaces people are able to create invisible boundaries that appear to partition spaces. In places such as the steps of the library or the post office, people reported that they were able to screen out the sounds of traffic and their close proximity to others. Users of these sites regroup their resources in ways that suggest the availability of a sanctuary that offers a form of urban solitude that is possible when people look for it. In contrast to many designed public spaces such as the bonus plazas in the midtown of Manhattan, found spaces can supply this essential aspect of urban life because they do not have restrictions and rules that shape what can and cannot be done. They offer a freedom that expands public life possibilities for people and, in the process, help them personalize cities and customize them to fit their needs. They open up possibilities for creative uses of diverse sites. In this sense they contribute to people's place identity (Proshansky *et al.* 1983), allowing them to endow the public realm with personal meanings that are invisible to others, and in the process, weave a web of familiar urban areas.

The perception of safety expressed by many users reflects the very nature of found spaces—their centrality within residential and commercial neighborhoods and their frequent adjacency to highly trafficked spaces. The traffic and visibility around them offer the protection of "eyes on the street" that Jane Jacobs described (1961), something that is not always available in parks, plazas and malls.

Found spaces are open spatial niches that support two opposite possibilities. They can be stimulus shelters (Wachs 1979), safe havens in the midst of urban intensity, offering respites to regroup resources and to rest. At other times found spaces are stimulus inducers, sources of entertainment and distraction. A single site can be both a stimulus shelter for some people while serving as a stimulus inducer for others. One person may be deeply engrossed in the passing scene or engaged in conversation with a companion while another person, nearby, is lost in thought. An

individual may go to a site frequently and find the opportunities for different activities at different times. These spaces enable a range of services and relationships, some of which may be available in other public spaces, but without the immediacy and easy accessibility of the found space.

The spontaneity and casualness of use make the qualities of found spaces difficult to translate into principles for designed spaces. Found spaces are at once simple and complex. Their simplicity comes from the basic human needs they serve—to rest, to nourish oneself, to relax, to retreat, to engage with other human beings, all functions that we heard our interviewees express. But they also are complex in their physical qualities and their evolution, in their affordance qualities and the ways they fit into the urban mosaic.

Further studies are needed on found spaces in other cities. This extended research could provide additional clues, including cultural ones, to their functions. In the end, the networks of freedoms that enhance the publicness of the found public realm could be seen more clearly and the poetics of public life could truly emerge.

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