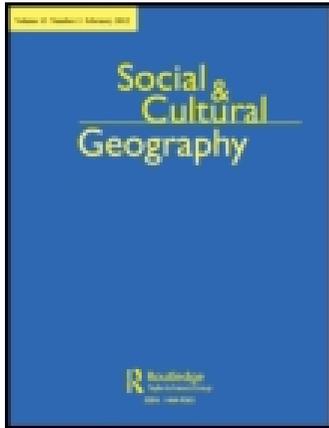


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Central Park against the streets: the enclosure of public space cultures in mid-nineteenth century New York

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Central Park against the streets: the enclosure of public space cultures in mid-nineteenth century New York

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The industrialization of New York and its rise to economic dominance brought about a major restructuring of street life and unleashed an array of contradictory everyday urban cultures. In a still under-regulated environment, the commoning of public space became a key sociospatial capital that helped the working classes resolve their reproduction in a way the elite found disturbing and far removed from the civic order they were trying to instil. This article draws on recent theorizations of the commons/enclosure dialectic to develop a comparative analysis of the cultures of public space use vis-à-vis the practices prescribed by Central Park in its attempt to reform everyday spatialities. The park is understood here as an early episode in the project of imposing new social relations through the enclosure of public conduct—a first effort to tame the urban commons and prevent the subaltern appropriation of public space. Following a preliminary discussion of the economic and social determinants and configuration of the material cultures of public space use in Manhattan, the article studies the park's strategies as a special type of enclosure, consisting not of the usurping of common land for private profit but of the mobilization of public space to shift behaviors from one regime of publicity to another.

Key words: Central Park, urban commons, urban enclosure, public behavior, regimes of publicity, public space use.

Introduction: parks and the enclosure of public conduct

Current waves of neoliberal enclosure have sparked a call to reclaim the commons, both on the streets and in academia (Hardt and Negri 2009; Klein 2001; Midnight Notes 2010; Reid and Taylor 2010). The critique of new urban enclosures and the struggle to reappropriate the commons resonate with

previous debates on the eclipse of public space, infusing the discussion with novel insights into the mechanisms that guide such extinction and how the politics of commoning can reinvigorate collective productions of space (Hodkinson 2012; Jeffrey, McFarlane, and Vasudevan 2012; Vasudevan, McFarlane, and Jeffrey 2008). Such arguments, however, would be fully developed if we adopt a broader political and temporal approach in

order to understand the governmentalities that made our urban present possible: how have these breathing, marginal spaces of everyday independence been eliminated in history and for what reasons? As Blackmar (2006) has suggested, we need to comprehend the past predicament of the commons in order to trace a genealogy of enclosure and evaluate the difficulties and potentialities of new practices of commoning.

Drawing on this approach, this article uses the commons-enclosure dialectic as a lens to probe the historical formations of public space use in mid-nineteenth century Manhattan. I present a comparative analysis of subaltern appropriations—the *commoning*—of the streets vis-à-vis the practices Central Park tried to foster in its mission to reform the everyday spatialities of the city. In a context lacking proper regulatory instruments and in the wake of economic restructuring, the lower classes produced public space as a disorderly commons. Against this background, Central Park constituted a precocious, experimental attempt to impose an alternative urban order through the production of a new regime of publicity, becoming a key reference for a whole generation of urban greening experiences in the USA and a paragon for later urban reform (Cranz 1982; Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992; Schuyler 1986). While many planners and historians have usually depicted this experience as a completed landmark in the history of American urban public space, it is more helpful to consider Central Park an open territory, an inaugural episode of a still ongoing logic: the production of urban publics through the taming of collective uses of space. The park was conceived as a *space of exception*, isolated and protected from the rough-and-tumble of the street commons so that ‘*order and propriety* [were] maintained *supreme* over every foot of its surface’ (BCCP

1859: 7). According to the official imagination, it would work as a pedagogic device, teaching visitors how to correctly use public space—a behavior the reformed subjects would subsequently diffuse across the city, transforming the tempestuous social landscape of New York. The park was not without contradictions, of course. An exploratory governmental venture, it became an arena of overlapping and often conflicting institutional and technical agendas. However, its inception generated an emerging consensus among the progressive elite and certain sectors of an inchoate middle class concerning the need to conduct working-class conducts as a fundamental moment in the production of a normalized public, a perspective that would become pervasive decades later (Boyer 1992).

But in what sense can a pioneering public space be understood as an enclosure? What strategies of dispossession are afoot in these initiatives to create inclusive public parks? While the bulk of this article is dedicated to studying Central Park as an opportunity to delve into these questions, I will advance some theoretical maneuvers in order to clarify subsequent arguments and connect my analysis to recent attempts to extricate public space contradictions. Current interpretations of the articulation between urban enclosure, public space, and the cultural formations associated to the practices of commoning can be problematized at several levels. Firstly, most analyses of public space using an enclosure perspective tend to reproduce the previous mourning for its loss, focusing on exclusionary policies and neoliberal privatization (e.g. see Kohn 2004; Lee and Webster 2006; Low 2006; Sennett 1992; Sorkin 1992). However, this approach can be mobilized to investigate wider theoretical horizons. For instance, what if enclosure logics were also operative in initiatives aimed at creating—and

not at eliminating—public space? The case of Central Park shows that institutional orderings of space can incorporate subtle, often unnoticed strategies of dispossession without privatization, using certain assemblages of public space to eradicate the practices underpinning autonomous appropriations thereof. In their attempt to shape and normalize the public, these designs adopt an inclusionary approach: they do not restrict entrance, but instead foster access in order to gain a wider influence and model the conditions under which the space is used.¹ Thus, the understanding of enclosure as a spatially driven form of dispossession should inspire the exploration of public space conflicts beyond privatization and social exclusion in order to identify the variegated practices of deprivation embedded in the state production of regimes of publicity.

Secondly, despite explicit claims to rethink enclosure beyond the Marxian focus on the conditions and means of production, most of the available case studies fixate on the crude dispossession and plunder of material resources and goods to deploy their critique (e.g. Blomley 2008; Harvey 2006; Heynen, McCarthy, Prudham, and Robbins 2007). Our understanding of the governmentalities of enclosure would benefit significantly from a more sweeping approach, incorporating a consistent consideration of cultural and the so-called immaterial commons—knowledge, skills, practices, affects, subjectivities (Hardt 2010)—and their extinction through enclosure affecting not only modes of production but also the less obvious regimes of social reproduction (Sevilla-Buitrago 2012, 2013). Unfortunately, the contributions addressing this question with greater resolution usually lack a proper spatial perspective (De Angelis 2007; Read 2003). Such an approach should help deepen our material and spatial

conception of culture (Low 1996), revealing how certain subaltern cultural formations rely on alternative valorizations and spatialities of commoning aimed at economic self-provisioning and relative social independence. Besides, at a time of unprecedented political and normative attention to issues of misbehavior in public spaces (Ellickson 1996: 1168) and amongst the dissemination of ‘zero tolerance’ politics in major Western cities (Hubbard 2004), it is convenient to revise the early history of urban public parks as a preliminary experience in the enclosure of subaltern conducts.

The focus on the relation between enclosure and the spatialities of everyday cultures connects back to public space debates on a third level. Despite the existence of an extensive body of literature on the relation between cultural formations and public space (e.g. Low 2000; Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005), most of the work carried out on the latter focuses on its macro-political role, either presenting public space as a realm of representation and disagreement (e.g. Butler 2011; Mitchell 2003; Parkinson 2012) or denying its centrality in the formation of current political identities (Amin 2008).² However, from the standpoint of the dialectic of commoning and enclosure, many of these dichotomies seem artificial: in the context of capitalist restructuring the minor, quotidian cultural practices attached to the urban commons may become a key moment in the larger constitution of political subjects. The physical configuration of public space favors particular modes of appropriation that crystallize into habits and custom; under certain economic and social conditions, these habits breed cultural commons that shape the everyday formations of public space use. The streets turn into a means to organize daily life, generating ‘breathing spaces’ that provide a

‘marginal day-to-day independence’ away from the pressures of the system (Williams 1973: 107). In resisting the advance of commodified forms of existence, the material cultures underpinning these commons acquire political meaning and everyday spatialities themselves become a bone of contention. Hence, the dispossession of subaltern commons becomes a key element in the imposition of new social orders and the consolidation of social hegemonies, and thus public space is mobilized through a particular enclosure regime to produce new behaviors and spatial practices. These embodied and often unnoticed struggles exceed the formation of the rational public sphere at the center of abundant literature on the topic, but they are central to the micro-politics of public space.

This theoretical triangle between commoning/enclosure, public space, and cultural formations can be summarized as follows: the deployment of everyday spatialities based on elementary economic needs generates cultures of street use that in turn produce public space as an urban commons. In that scenario, urban enclosure appears as a mechanism to eliminate the subaltern skills and behaviors underpinning such collective appropriations—the enclosure of public conduct. The disappearance of these forms of self-management leads to the eclipse of the social capital and informal modes of social reproduction that had formed a basis for the cohesion of subaltern communities.³ The adoption of a broad temporal perspective is helpful in pinpointing these questions. The analysis of the historical geographies of urban enclosure makes it possible to overcome the fixation on only the most obvious aspects of contemporary phenomena, showing the complexity of diverse governmental landscapes and how the strategies of enclosure have been mobilized in different regulatory contexts.

Moreover, studying the constitution of the historical commons also helps problematize current idealistic representations of public space: as is clear from this article, in the context of a class-segregated society, the commoning of the streets renders public space a precipitate of wider contradictions with potentially exclusionary features.

A foundational experience in sociospatial planning, Central Park can be seen as an early experiment to shape behaviors through planning and the ordering of space (Crofts, Hubbard, and Prior 2013). In the struggle to supply public space with content and meaning, the state experimented with new regulatory techniques so as to suffocate the conditions that made popular appropriation of ordinary streets possible. The initial project would fail in its attempt to consummate this all-encompassing strategy by itself, but its influence would be lasting. Central Park’s parable can illuminate current endeavors to disentangle the politics of public space and develop a genealogy of our urban present. If enclosure can be understood not only as an inherent condition of capitalist development (De Angelis 2007) but also as a crucial moment in the emergence of spatial planning (Sevilla-Buitrago 2012), then perhaps we should visualize the creation of nineteenth century regulated public parks as the bright side of a less prominent feature in urban history—the extinction of the everyday cultures of autonomous street use.

A global sense of New York City’s public space

In order to apprehend the social role of Central Park, we must previously understand the wider network of global articulations to which New York City (NYC) and its streets were connected. The park was, in fact, a

response to what the local elite perceived as a growing misgovernment of public space and this, in turn, was the result of a whole map of contradictions unleashed by the material shifts the city had undergone since the late eighteenth century. NYC became the leading port in the East Coast between the Revolutionary War and the 1820s, a pivotal economic space connecting the Great Lakes region and the Atlantic (Glaeser 2005). The demographic changes were not long in coming: between 1790 and 1840, the population of Manhattan had multiplied by ten and between 1840 and 1870 it had tripled again (Gibson 1998). This revolution in the scale of the city's connections and its growing integration into transatlantic networks of commerce and labor power brought about a major restructuring of the local economy, which would be subject to strong turbulence during these decades. The years of extraordinary expansion were followed by periods of depression and severe panic; social unrest mirrored those imbalances with riotous outbreaks and more sustained resistance in the emerging associationism of the working classes, fired by waves of politicized workers arriving from a convulsed Europe (Headley 1873).

These major, well-known conflicts were accompanied by other contradictions. The erosion of the old economic order gave rise to a dramatic shift in the patterns of everyday life and use of the city. These processes could, indeed, be observed in the wake of the transformations in the spheres of production, distribution, and the social organization of consumption, processes that would alter the traditional forms of social reproduction and their spatialities. The progressive expansion of labor and commodity markets disrupted the old schemes of production. Master artisans replaced the old handicraft methods with new rudimentary mass production processes,

whereby lower quality goods were manufactured by less skilled wage laborers rather than by traditional apprentices and journeymen. Attracted by the demand for this new type of workers, the waves of immigrants disembarking in the city during these decades fuelled a process that eventually unleashed a rampant metropolitan industrialization based on a new work discipline and an increasing precariousness of labor (Wilentz 2004: 107–142). This trend had two direct repercussions on street life. On the one hand, the presence of growing masses of the laboring poor coming from the Old World—especially from rural areas—which brought with them contradictory forms of use of collective space and everyday life, and non-urban modes of work, leisure, and socialization. The overcrowding and increased activity of the popular districts pushed the newcomers out onto the street, where those patterns were deployed with their full antagonistic force; the growing number of homeless persons cast out of formal labor circuits contributed to aggravating this trend. On the other hand, changes in the forms of employment and the new arrangements of domestic labor restructured the family unit, the organization of the household economy, and the daily routine. Children were no longer able to work as craft apprentices and women were obliged to contribute to the family income by taking additional jobs or seeking help from the community. Both children and women—the quintessential figures of social reproduction at that time—would become the fundamental architects of a new form of everyday life, relying more heavily on the city and its streets as an urban commons.

As regards commerce, these processes converged with the erosion of the public market system during the second quarter of the century and the deregulation of commercial activity in 1843 (Burrows and Wallace

2000: 739). The municipality left public markets to deteriorate and allowed the spread of a

burgeoning informal economy, whereby ... provisions were sold by grocers at retail out of stores or from homes, or by peddlers on the street ... [T]he changing landscape of food retailing reshaped the spatial development of Manhattan, altered the daily routines of household provisioning [and] reconfigured the everyday sociospatial relations of neighborhood life and of urban public space. (Baics 2009: 21)

The dissemination of informal market activity into the streets produced a highly complex socioeconomic topology. Scavenger children, ragpickers, hucksters, prostitutes, and so on, all of them mushroomed in the interstices of this variegated street regime (Wilentz 2004: 27).

It would be difficult to harmonize this reconfiguration of the everyday cultures of the street with a new phenomenon emerging in Manhattan at that time: the dissemination of new elite and middle-class consumption habits and the appearance of a new feminine spatiality attached to them. The economic expansion led to a diversification of supply which had to be matched by the appropriate demand. This systemic market pressure altered the traditional scheme of the ‘separate spheres’ doctrine, a customary division of social space that assigned distinct gender roles and realms to men and women, relating the former with public space and the latter with domesticity. Activities associated with consumption were one of the few opportunities for women to venture out of the home and into the streets, and the unrelenting requirement of markets would widen this gap (Bondi and Domosh 1998). But, as we will see, despite the proliferation of new, ‘feminized’ elite consumer spaces, the streets that the rich and the

poor had to share—and that middle and upper class women had to traverse while shopping—still traced a map full of offences against decorum (Domosh 1996: 37–44). The tight Victorian regulation of women’s activities and representations collided with the system’s contradictions deployed in the disorderly geographies of public space use.

By the 1850s, when Wall Street became the nerve center of national finance, a new generation of the privileged demanded a place of their own in the city. Indeed, the making of the Manhattanite bourgeoisie was, amongst others, a spatial process in which certain locales and spatialities played a key role, shaping class identities and demarcating class boundaries (Scobey 1992: 204). But this aspiration to a new material culture of the street—made of fine clothes, scripted gestures and other fashionable delicacies—would not be easy to achieve: ‘[t]he overwhelming impression the city left on the minds of its upper-class citizens was one of incomprehensible chaos ... permanently threaten[ing] encounters with its most undesirable inhabitants’ (Beckert 2003: 47). The attempt of the bourgeoisie to establish refined codes of conduct and transfer them to the street through new performativities of public space was futile. Although the elegant New York could perform the ritual of giving itself up to a ‘mighty sacrifice to solemnity’ with ‘strict precision’ and ‘sacred gravity’ (Foster 1849: 11), these ceremonies of representation could always be contested by polite transgressions (Domosh 1998) or fulminated by ruder presences in space. In her *Letters from New York*, Lydia Maria Child recalled one of these memorable moments:

[A] man attempting to pass an old woman in a crowd, cried, “Get out of the way there, you old Paddy.” “And indade I won’t get out of your way;

I'll get right *in your way*," said she; and suiting the action to the word, she placed her feet apart, set her elbows akimbo, and stood as firmly as a provoked donkey. (Child 1845: 167)

The rescaling of New York's economy had sown the city streets with contradictions that embarrassed the local elites, incapable of matching their economic success with a new urban order, conspicuous enough to rival its European equivalents. A middle class in formation, eager to demarcate the boundaries with the lower orders, also regarded these phenomena with anxiety. The new police force, established in 1844, could perambulate the popular neighborhoods and repress the most flagrant cases of wrongdoing; the 'socio-spatial bubbles' of Ladies Mile and the emerging Fifth Avenue could provide a temporary remedy for promenading. However, these measures were insufficient. More ambitious sociospatial enclosures were needed, not only for an effective 'polic[ing]' of the boundaries of "Society" (Scobey 1992: 203) but also to shape and regulate popular behavior.

The street commons of Manhattan

The intensification of activities in the streets of Manhattan during the first half of the nineteenth century produced a gradual opening of their meaning and content. Within that fleshy meshwork of paths and events, the dissemination of spontaneous processes of spatial appropriation bred an unruly world in which the popular classes used public space as a material and social resource to palliate the growing precariousness of their everyday lives. In spite of the ongoing functional specialization, the nerve centers of the city still maintained an extraordinary blend of activi-

ties (Scherzer 1992: 25). More importantly, the changes in the city's productive and commercial structures described earlier led to an increase in heterogeneity and intensity in using public space, to the delight of writers, journalists, and the budding *flâneurs* of the city. In his *Doings of Gotham*, Poe saluted a city 'thronged with strangers' where 'everything wears an aspect of intense life,' while Whitman's *Song of Myself* chanted 'the fury of roused mobs,' the 'talk of the promenaders,' the 'living and buried speech ... always vibrating here.' However, as other less illustrious authors recalled, Manhattan was also a place full of filth, noise, and chaos. The periodicals and urban guides systematically complained about the poor state of the public spaces of 'the dirtiest city in the Union,' with its narrow, crooked streets, bursting at the seams with 'fetid nuisances,' ashes, mud, and street-cries (Bellows 1861; Greene 1837: 170).

But there were other, more profound contradictions embedded in the functional and social fabric of public space. The urban content of the streets was composed of a thick superimposition of strata, ranging from plain uses such as transport, strolling or access to buildings and shops, to other, less evident activities, which nonetheless had a strong physical and symbolic presence. More importantly, in the absence of an effective regulation of the uses of the streets, this accumulation of meanings took place in a regime of informality from which not even the most elegant areas were able to escape. Even the showy A. T. Stewart's first department store was surrounded by hucksters and peddlers (Stansell 1982: 313). Besides, street vending was by no means a static activity; hawkers regularly moved to upper-class residential areas to offer their products. It was usual, for instance, for groups of butchers to lead newly acquired livestock through these neighborhoods,

stopping before homes to find out if wealthy customers would like to order part of the animal (Burrows and Wallace 2000: 475). Along with more conventional products, the streets were home to other types of goods, commodities and characters, each of them with their particular voices and spatialities—newsboys, patent medicine men, vociferous preachers, scissor grinders, Punches and their tormented Judies, and so on. The elite witnessed this sociospatial cacophony impatiently: even the joyful organ grinders would soon be called into question with several attempts to prohibit their activity during the second half of the century (Accinno 2010).

Of course, these reactions pointed to a much more clamorous conflict than the shrill tunes of street musicians. In the side-walks of Manhattan, '[h]igh and low, rich and poor [mingle] in true Republican confusion' (McCabe 1872: 133)—'all go the same road and appear upon the same level. Social inequalities are, like the avenue itself, Macadamized' (Foster 1849: 46). Despite the ongoing residential segregation, Manhattan still lacked a complete social division of space. Not 200 yards from perfumed shops on Broadway were the worst areas of the city where 'the air was fetid with the stench of human and animal waste' (Wilentz 1979: 128). It is easy to imagine the range of anxieties with which the local bourgeoisie and an embryonic middle class faced this public rubbing of shoulders. The upper classes had to bear the sight of ragged boys and young prostitutes when they left their cultural 'bubbles' after recitals and exhibitions (Child 1845: 23) and the growing sensationalism of a press that depicted Manhattan as 'the capital of American crime' filled the everyday with news of the latest outrages on the streets. The alarm triggered by these phenomena rendered street life a key target of the emergent reform movement.

Of all the phenomena that questioned the spatial culture the elite were attempting to consolidate, two were especially excruciating: the pervading presence of children on the streets and their exposure and that of women to the expanding sexual contours of public space. After 1845, NYC public space was 'in large part a children's world,' where they could work 'on their own, away from adult supervision' (Stansell 1982: 312, 316); the police saw the little laborers as 'idle and vicious children ... who infest our public thoroughfares,' so degraded that 'it is humiliating to be compelled to recognize them as a part and portion of the human family' (Matsell 1850: 58, 62). This situation overlapped with the overt sexualization of the public space of the city (Dennis 2005) at a time when prostitution flourished in the city center and explicit guides and flash papers were 'forced almost into the very dwellings of our citizens [and] thrust into the very face of ... young lad[ies] who ventured out for the purpose of taking a walk or making a purchase' (New York Sun 1842)—children and youths were usually involved in this burgeoning market niche, either as prostituted girls or as newsboys hawking the latest erotic weeklies. All in all, these elements contributed to a constant representational erosion of the social order the elite was trying to consolidate, which had the family—with its highly restrictive codes for women and children—as one of its central constituents.

The idea of the home as an enclosed and intimate realm—the spatial correlate of the family in the bourgeois imagination—was also contested, especially in working-class neighborhoods where the private–public divide was often blurred by an array of everyday practices. 'Notions of domestic privacy seemed entirely absent, as people circulated continually between the streets and their own

and each other's lodgings' (Stansell 1987: 42). Toward the middle of the century, an incipient uneven residential development became evident, in which upper class neighborhoods increasingly removed non-residential activities while working class areas mingled all sorts of land uses. Time limitations and the cost of collective transport forced laborers to live near the workplace—the rampant metropolitan industrialization was reshaping the urban structure in successive waves of spatial creative destruction, doing away with the old precincts and releasing new communities formed along class and ethnic lines (Scherzer 1992: 36–38). Workers came to view these spaces as a particular working-class place, identifying the neighborhood and its institutions as their own social realm, a territory that would foster the formation of a specific metropolitan working-class culture.

However, over and above identity-related aspects, the main sources of place attachment were the material and social resources offered by the neighborhood and the street. They gave workers the chance to complement their domestic economies and overcome difficulties and, eventually, to discover common interests with other neighbors and organize themselves around community and labor issues. These material and social capitals gave rise to a social reproduction that was partially independent from the market, escaping institutional attempts to subsume everyday life. For men, 'workplace and neighborhood life were most intimately connected They regulated the labor market in their neighborhoods through ethnic networks of family and friends' and '[relied] on groceries to sustain their families through a strike' (Bernstein 1990: 77 and 78, 105 and 106). Saloons and taverns were also fundamental material, cultural, and political resources: there, men arranged informal labor agreements and

exchanged valuable information, asked for credit and cash loans, plotted riots, discussed the next election and, of course, drank, gambled, celebrated, and idled the hours away (Stelzle 1926: 48). Yet, it was women and children who obtained the most benefit from the neighborhood. Working-class neighborhoods were essentially feminine mutual aid communities, 'crucial buffers against the shock of uprootedness and poverty, ... created ... out of a sometimes boundless emotional energy, a voracity for involvement in the lives of others' (Stansell 1987: 55, 62). Women used the neighborhood as a resource to satisfy basic everyday needs, a work that 'knitt[ed] together the household with the world of the streets' (Stansell 1987: 49). The street crept into the home and, vice versa, domestic features poured out onto the streets in the form of laundry and quarrels vented outdoors. The porosity between public and private spaces and between the homes themselves that the reformists found so trying was the spatial fruit of a reproduction based in part on mutual dependence among neighbors.

The use of the city as a commons was even more obvious in the activities of children, especially in the case of street scavenging. On the streets, garbage, demolished houses, open packets and barrels became 'a ready market' whose 'avails [were] carried home as the earnings of honest labor' by 'these gatherers of things lost on earth ... these makers of something out of nothing.'⁴ Chips, ashes, broken glass, wood and other materials, tea spilled from sacks, loose cotton, and so on were taken home, peddled to neighbors, or sold to junk dealers. The imagination of children could go far beyond that: in 1859, a social investigator found a small boy who caught butterflies and sold them to canary owners to make ends meet (Stansell 1982:

314). Hogs and other animals, street dwellers until well into the nineteenth century, made themselves at ease, foraging among the filth and refuse of the streets. In a peculiar urban version of the rural commons, their owners used them as an informal supplement in the household economy (McNeur 2011). This practice was especially widespread among squatters. Even as late as 1864, several *New York Times* articles mentioned that 20,000 outcasts enjoyed the right to free pasture for cows, goats, and pigs in squatter settlements (New York Times 1864a, 1864b).

Whether as an element in the margins of the informal economy which to a great extent made the commercial and industrial success of the city possible or as a central factor in the formation of the neighborhood community, control of the streets was a fundamental sociospatial capital that allowed the working classes to make do and secure their survival. Through their self-management of public space, the laboring poor resolved their social reproduction in a hostile environment with a degree of relative independence with respect to the markets and wage labor. But that partial autonomy, that ability to appropriate public space, generated a whole geography of contradictions that the alarmed upper classes found more and more disturbing. This is the assemblage of spatial practices against which Central Park will be imagined.

Central Park and the taming of public space use

These material and cultural disorders, aggravated by labor agitation, the long wave of riots and gang wars from the 1840s on, and the 1850s economic crisis (Boyer 1992: 69; Ware 1990), would provide new momentum to the Park Movement discourse, making public

parks not only an opportunity for urban embellishment and sanitary improvement, but also a governmental device for re-establishing urban order through the production of a new, normalized public. While the official narrative had it that all classes and ethnicities would have their practices and habits reformed through the experience of the park (BCCP 1864: 35 and 36), it was the working class that became the prime target in the re-education of public space departments. An agenda that would come of age only decades later was emerging here in a highly experimental and often improvisatory fashion. The formation of this approach was all but monolithic. In a period of deep social and political transformation, the initiative became an arena of overlapping sociospatial ideologies, institutional agendas, and class strategies. The discourses about the park blended old disciplinary police regimes and Utilitarian perspectives with anticipations of future positive environmentalisms, ruminations in the Transcendentalist tradition, Jeffersonian anti-urbanism, and new urban reform strategies (Bernstein 1990: 148–161; Boyer 1992: 220 and 221; Nicholson 2004). The project turned into a battlefield in which several agencies and parties—the State Legislature against the Common Council, the Board of Aldermen against the Mayor, Whigs/Republicans and Know-Nothings against Democrats, the opposition within the Democratic Party Tammany and Mozart Hall factions, not to mention the inner antagonism of commissioners, technicians, etc.—struggled to demarcate their prerogatives and impose their idea of a new regime of publicity.

This conflicting situation would eventually hinder the development of the plan and the achievement of its goals. However, especially during the inception of the project, this bundle of discourses would condense around a

consensual vortex: the need to preserve order within the park and make sure that such a delicate governmental venture did not become ‘a huge bear [sic] garden for the lowest denizens of the city’ (New York Herald 1857). Invoking Jeremy Bentham, Frederick Law Olmsted—Architect-in-Chief, Superintendent and, along with Calvert Vaux, designer of the park—emphasized the park’s utility ‘to weaken the dangerous inclinations [of the] lawless classes of the city,’ exerting ‘an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control, and temperance’ upon them (Olmsted 1971: 96). In this way, the park would contribute to the long-term strategy of ‘fusing the people of differing [backgrounds] into a homogeneous body’ (BCCP 1864: 36), a horizon that would secure the endorsement of the elite and galvanize the imagination of particular strands of a burgeoning middle class, forever anxious about its mingling with the lower classes. If the acquiescence of the former was indispensable for the institutional sustainability of the initiative, the ‘middling sorts’ would play a key role as a supporting class in the materialization of the use regime imagined for the park.⁵ Though this heterogeneous social bloc envisioned the scheme in diverse and sometimes opposing ways, here I will focus on the most spatially sophisticated, innovative, and influential conceptions—the foundational schemes articulated in the Board of Commissioners’ early reports, the writings of Olmsted and their impact in the early years of the initiative.

Central Park constituted a first attempt to tame the rough-and-tumble of the streets through an enclosure regime conceived to eliminate the processes of spontaneous appropriation of public space and to educate the users in a pattern of heteronomous spatial practices. Olmsted explicitly expressed that logic at an early stage of the project, when

pondering on the need to create a physical enclosure for the area.

It is desirable that visitors to the Park, should be led to feel as soon as possible, that a wide distinction exists between it and the general suburban country, in which it is the prevalent impression of a certain class that all trees, shrubs, fruit and flowers, are common property ... A large part of the people of New York are ignorant of a park, properly so-called. They will need *to be trained to the proper use of it, to be restrained in the abuse of it*, and this can be best done gradually ... before it shall be thronged with crowds of unmanageable multitudes of visitors. So long as the Park remains uninclosed it will be difficult to draw a *distinction between it and the adjoining commons*.⁶

The building of a material boundary was in fact a minor, pragmatic aspect of a much deeper enclosure logic. In this strategy, the physical divide was just a condition of possibility for the deployment of a governmental territoriality aimed at repressing the commoning of the city streets and imposing codes of use and experience monitored by the state. An interesting dialectic was at play here. Central Park would function as a space of exception, physically and legally distinct from other public spaces. But, at the same time, this sociospatial laboratory should work as ‘something more than [a] mere exception from urban conditions’ and it should foster ‘the formation of an opposite class of conditions; conditions remedial of the influences of urban conditions’ (BCDPP 1872: 79). As with other elements of urban reform at that time, but with a much wider scope, the park should serve as a catalyst, radiating change to ‘the city as a whole’ (Olmsted 1971: 66). Although there was an early, concerted effort to extend the regulation of the park to its immediate surroundings (Rosenzweig and Blackmar

1992: 257), the initiatives to subsume the entire urban organism under an expansive network of parkways and park systems were long in coming. Rather, it was through the new public the park was producing that its influence would be subsequently disseminated: the visitors would maintain and propagate the new behavior throughout the streets, just in the same way any reformed subject was expected to do after leaving other moral institutions. More importantly, the park's strategy implied not only a spatial projection, but also a temporal deferral: as the constant focus of the commissioners and designers on children revealed, the beneficial effect of the park would be delayed in time, for youngsters would 'be likely in after-life to keep up the habits they had formed at the Park' (BCCP 1867: 35).

The design for Central Park was articulated in a series of spatial moments and techniques that conformed an emerging spatial rationality: the institutional definition of an orderly content and meaning for the park through a series of spatial imaginations and representations; the distribution and designation of these contents and imaginaries to specific locales, individuals, and social groups in a rudimentary precedent of zoning; the translation of these assemblages of place and ideology to elaborated codes of use and ordinances that regulated spatial practices in the park; the introduction of elements to visualize, monitor, and, eventually, enforce desirable uses or abolish undesirable departments.

On countless occasions, the commissioners expressed the important role assigned to the production of order in the Central Park project. Olmsted reminded in 1870 that

[t]he difficulty of preventing ... disorder in a park to be frequented indiscriminately by such a

population as that of New York, was from the first regarded as the greatest of all those which the commission had to meet, and the means of overcoming it cost more study than all other things. (Olmsted 1971: 95)

Even the populist Mayor Fernando Wood—known for his leniency toward the working class—would create a special police body for the park in the first move of his ephemeral local board of commissioners before the State assumed control of the initiative. As one of Olmsted's biographers has put it, the park 'needed to be protected against the public' (Martin 2011: 166). The best way to do it was to create a *new* one, to breed and normalize that public, making—as the Park Police Captain H. Koster suggested—'homogeneous the inclination, manners and action of an incongruous people' through 'police regulations.'⁷ The spatial production of a new public through new institutions was indeed the materialization of one of Olmsted's early governmental visions. Even before joining the project he had urged the state to create 'places ... for *re-unions*, which shall be so attractive ... that the rich and the poor, the cultivated and *well-bred*, and the sturdy and self-made people shall be attracted together and encouraged to assimilate' (Olmsted 1854).

The Park Movement pioneers had dreamt of a democratic park, free from policemen (Downing 1848: 155), but the situation on the streets and the wave of riots and strikes from the late 1840s soon swayed the debate in favor of their presence on Central Park's grounds. In fact, Olmsted would play a key role in the implementation of this police regime. He regarded the task of governing the uses of the park as his most important duty—above design, as Calvert Vaux reproached Olmsted in a 1864 letter (Olmsted 1990: 183)—and he himself as 'one of the few men

then in America who had made it a business to be well informed on the subject of police organization and management' (Olmsted 1882: 23). The police scheme deployed in the park constituted a large-scale strategy in which vigilance was merely the last link in the chain. The elements preceding it were, in fact, less obvious, more complex and innovative, and entailed more risk, as shown by the high degree of anxiety the Commissioners showed when they were introduced: the imposition of forms of amusement for the production of a 'general gayety' required a 'delicate discrimination' and 'sound discretion' (BCCP 1861: 99, 101). The Commissioners wondered 'whether the rules requisite for the maintenance of the Park in a condition such as will gratify a cultivated taste and operate as an *educator of the people*, will meet with cheerful acquiescence' (BCCP 1862: 37, emphasis added). In that sense, space itself should be mobilized in this pedagogical attempt prior to the enforcement of ordinances and surveillance on the park grounds. The material configuration of places should serve as a secondary agency, a governmental detour to distribute and conceal the exercise of power. Transferring the regulatory logic to design itself, the natural and orderly beauties of the park should work 'by the mere eloquence of their silent teachings,' as 'effectual appeals to sustain ... the necessary regulations for their preservation' (BCCP 1864: 29).

This requirement would oblige Olmsted and Vaux to apply a sophisticated method with a highly experimental strategy that extended beyond the original 1858 Greensward plan. In a 1864 letter to Vaux, Olmsted speculated about the connection between the general design and the '[a]dministration and management of the public introduction to and use of the park,' considering '[t]he relation ... vague, but intimate; dependent upon the

fittingness of the design for an easy, safe and convenient habituation of the public to the custom desirable to be established in it' (Olmsted 1990: 153 and 154). Eight years later, in a general report for the recently created Department of Public Parks, the landscape architects still continued to analyze in depth the effect of different physical arrangements on the visitors' behavior and their influence on the global experience of the park. The concept was not all that different from the one used to devise it. First, the establishment of a public space regime that was essentially differentiated from the rest of the city so that the place could be subject to close scrutiny: Olmsted and Vaux mocked at the idea, suggested by some critics, that the park should function with the freedom of the streets (BCDPP 1872: 76 and 77). Then, the designers established a distinction between the different areas of the enclosure depending on the desired experience; channeled the flows of visitors, separating them according to their mode of travel or uniting them all to foster encounters and social mingling; reserved certain spaces for strategic activities and groups—mainly women and children, who were often converted into the favorite subjects of designers—and blocked access to others; created wonderful vantage points for visitors to admire the scenery; laid out special areas for activities that came into conflict with the park's program—places for practicing sport or enjoying drinks—in such a manner that those sites could easily be subjected to surveillance, and so on.

The different spaces in the park were thus encoded in the design, associated not only with a specific function but also with certain users, the ideal practices they should deploy in those spaces and with a set of behaviors and principles that would be absorbed through the experience they provided. Olmsted and Vaux's layout mobilized basic design units suffused

with ideological values that, in the architects' conception, enabled the production of places with a specific kind of agency. Here, two dominant mentalities of the period came together: a historical regime of material culture that fused environment with social behavior and an architectural practice that assigned moral meaning to built form. The result was a precedent for later forms of zoning, with a set of places with proper names that would be soon publicized in park guides and newspapers: the Promenade, the Terrace, the Ramble, the Children's Lawn, the Ladies Pond, the Dairy, the Sheep Meadow, the Playground, etc. These locales were envisioned to work as mechanisms for the saturation of place's content and meaning, in order to block the chain of appropriations that bred the multiplicity and self-management of the streets out of the openness of conventional public space.

Significantly enough, these devices were unevenly distributed across the park and reflected the preexisting reality of the still underdeveloped grid plan of the city. To the north, amidst a rural setting of farms and incipient suburban cottages, the park was more of a sylvan, undifferentiated character. The social program was denser and more clearly recognizable in the southern half of the enclosure, where most of the aforementioned enclaves were located, closer to the entrances from the downtown. Despite Olmsted's calls to preserve the coherence of the Greensward plan, the area would soon condense an unsystematic patchwork of places, reflecting the diverse ideologies at play in the park. Much to the chagrin of Olmsted and Vaux, their method of deploying an archipelago of specialized functional enclaves actually eased and channeled the meddling of emerging governmental and reform agencies. However, even if sometimes opposed to the designers'

ideal of passive recreation, most of these unexpected interventions would only be implemented if they conformed to the park's overall moral horizon. As a paradigmatic case, after years of debate and contrary to the designers' original ban, permission to play on the grounds was initially issued only to school children, 'dependent upon [the] good standing of the pupil' and under the supervision of their teachers 'to secure [their] proper behavior . . . while at the Park' (BCCP 1868: 113 and 114)—the experience would be 'an inducement to regular attendance at school and to diligence in study' (BCCP 1867: 36).

In any case, the park project was too risky and ambitious to be entrusted exclusively to these loose sociospatial experiments. The first ordinances for the government of the park, which were just as innovative but more coercive, were passed in March 1858, in a pioneering attempt to dictate a comprehensive regulation of the use of public space, intended to secure an experience free from the disturbances that, in the eye of the upper classes, ruined the streets of the city. The regulatory framework operated in different fields, placing the same punitive focus on aspects which were, a priori, heterogeneous (BCCP 1860: 17–19, 1861: 106–109): forms of access and opening hours, presence of animals, preservation of safety, conservation not only of the material integrity of the park—turf, trees, constructions, etc.—but also of its image control in enforcing the uses assigned to each space or behaving in a decorous fashion. The ordinances also included specific measures to prevent the proliferation of activities that were frequent in conventional public spaces. Peddling and hawking, fortune telling and games of chance, mendicancy, fireworks and balloons, musical instruments, flags and banners, indecent acts or language, military or civic parades, filthy persons—all were explicitly banned from the park. In spaces used for strolling, these

requirements even extended to prohibiting people from stopping in some situations. Other measures indirectly prevented opportunities for socialization such as those that prohibited issuing invitations to passengers to enter carriages or those forbidding chatting with park employees and guards. Besides, there was a concerted effort to disseminate the new regulatory regime: ‘the ordinances [were] published in the newspapers, and brief abstracts of them posted frequently about the grounds’ of the park (BCCP 1861: 99).

A special group of park keepers was entrusted with the task of ensuring the enforcement of those rules, ‘cautioning visitors against disobeying the laws, ... interrupting and remonstrating with those engaged in doing so, and in case of need ... causing their arrest’ (Olmsted 1973: 431). The emphasis was mainly on using park keepers as educators who would ‘respectfully aid an offender toward a better understanding of what is due to others, as one gentleman might manage to guide another.’⁸ However, the guards had authority as police officers and were subject to military drills and discipline; their daily activity was meticulously programmed and rigidly controlled, with severe punishment in the event of absence or negligence (Taylor 2009: 289). Although, in general, the number of arrests dwindled during the 1860s, the inauguration of the park included an especially strict application of the regulations, with sentences of 30 days in jail and fines of \$50 (Department of Public Parks 1870: 11), equivalent to almost 5 months in wages for an average male employed in the clothing industry (Wilentz 2004: 405).

Conclusion: the limits of state enclosures

A few years after opening the park, it appeared that, on the whole, the mechanisms for the

enclosure of conduct deployed in the initiative—the inducement of certain space uses and behaviors through place design, normative regulation, and on-the-ground guidance, surveillance, and punishment—were producing the desired effect. Although the number of visitors per year increased, arrests gradually diminished; apparently, the exemplary measures of the first years had brought the desired effect. No doubt, the growing middle-class audience played a key role in this early trend, normalizing a pattern of refined deportment that was very much in accordance with their will to emulate the elite and delineate the boundaries with the lower orders (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992: 225–229). Periodicals and guides proclaimed the success of the park to the whole nation, and Olmsted boasted about the results obtained in lectures throughout the USA:

No one who has closely observed the conduct of the people who visit the Park, can doubt that it exercises a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and most lawless classes of the city. (Olmsted 1971: 96)

Nonetheless, the hidden reality was much more complex. On the Board of Commissioners, Olmsted was always complaining about the lack of the necessary resources in surveillance tasks. The number of park keepers was not increasing at the same pace as the number of visitors (Taylor 2009: 292). The situation gradually worsened, especially after the city regained control of the park in 1870. Soon afterwards, the commissioners already observed ‘the impatience of visitors with regulations, and laxity of discipline in enforcing them’ (BCDPP 1872: 15). In the 1880s there were five times as many arrests as there had been in the 1860s; ‘more than

90 percent targeted some form of improper behavior, primarily disorderly conduct, drunkenness, vagrancy, or violations of park ordinances' (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992: 327 and 328). Decorum was gradually abandoned as the presence of the working classes in the park increased; to the chagrin of the elites, young people from the upper classes adopted certain subaltern habits in their 'excesses,' not the other way around. In his *Spoils of the Park*, Olmsted (1882: 24 and 25) lamented that prostitutes were seen seeking their prey in some secluded and sylvan areas while others served as lodging for great numbers of gypsies and tramps, who made ends meet by selling flowers and vegetables taken from the park. As a noteworthy example that the commons were reappearing within the park, many owners drove their goats into its grounds 'to browse the shrubs and girdle the young trees' (Olmsted 1973: 432). The pretension that the lower orders would imitate the conduct of the educated classes was in vain: not all the poor people entering the park stopped to admire the handsome carriages; some threw rocks at them instead (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992: 223). The park's civil significance was open not only to this everyday contestation of the democratic community the shared experience of public space was supposed to engender, but also to more radical political eruptions. On 13 July 1863, the first crowds participating in the Draft Riots—the bloodiest popular urban disturbance the US had yet seen—met at Central Park (New York Times 1863a); the park workmen who joined the demonstrations formed 'the best organized, and ... most dangerous and destructive of the bands,' with one observer suggesting that it was the park gang that began the rising (New York Times 1863b). Despite the ban,

demonstrations broke out in the park several times later (Bernstein 1990: 229).

On the whole, these transgressions and violations may have been a minor aspect in the everyday regime of the park, but they point to at least two facts: the incapacity of the state enclosure to actually close off the dissemination of certain sociospatial practices, and the pervasiveness of an open spatial conflict in which each class tried to impose its own territorial practices. Some authors—most notably Rosenzweig and Blackmar (1992)—have described the original project as an initiative by the elite for the elite. But, even in a peculiar fashion, the aforementioned evidence confirms the democratic vistas of the official discourse: Central Park, the commissioners and politicians declared once and again, should be 'the favorite resort of *all* classes' and especially 'of those whose interest[s were] intrusted to [the commissioners]' keeping—the poorer classes' (BCCP 1857: 78, emphasis added). Of course, this does not mean that the park lacked a class perspective. Quite on the contrary, the park aimed to consolidate a reformed production of space by which an emerging social bloc incorporating 'progressive' fractions of the elite and an embryonic middle class could shape a new regime of publicity: the poor's re-education would deprive them of the sociospatial capital underpinning the 'unruly' commoning of public space and the middling sorts would find a new arena to define their position in society through the reinvention of elite conducts; as a result, the bourgeoisie would be relieved of the disturbances that hindered its hegemonic attempt to turn the streets into an elite representational space. However, reality would soon complicate this grand scheme, converting the park into a new arena for class struggle in the form of a collision of antagonistic material cultures of public space

use. Olmsted and Vaux had imagined new spatial practices radiating from Central Park to the rest of the city. After several years, the culture of the park was not disseminated beyond its boundaries, but quite the reverse; it was the commons of the streets that slowly penetrated the park's enclosure.

The relative failure of the park revealed the need for more consistent institutional agendas and the limits of the spatial policies and socioenvironmental imagination of the epoch. To make them truly effective, it was necessary to build broader governmental interventions. On the one hand, the Central Park experience showed that the spatial regulation of social order through the production of monitored places had to be part of a set of wider, more ambitious urban policies that were capable of providing solutions not in easily managed areas—suburban domains soon surrounded by upper-class residences—but in the site where the problem originated: in the heart of working class neighborhoods. On the other hand, the irregular attendance of workers and their families throughout the week indicated that any concerted effort to regulate the spatial basis of urban social reproduction through public facilities should be backed with other initiatives aimed at bringing about an effective realm of leisure and free time: that is, the strategy had to be connected to labor and social policies. The enclosure of working-class spatial capitals had to be at the same time more site-specific and diffused across a wider network of class-oriented public facilities covering other dimensions of daily life. Such an approach was developed during the next few decades with programs for small parks, playgrounds, and housing reform in popular neighborhoods, and the reduction of working hours and other actions to improve everyday life (Boyer 1992: 233–

251; Rosenzweig 1983). Many things would change in the debate on public space—more ambitious and precise planning strategies transformed the approach to urban structure, park location, design, and management in the coming years. But the association of parks with social control and the regulation of the public remained. Concealing a strategy of dispossession in a state effort for the provision of welfare, Central Park had set the agenda for many of these initiatives, for the first generation of public parks in the USA and for a long-lasting planning tradition that would soon come of age in the Progressive Era.

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Notes

1. For a contemporary example of this strategy in New York City, see Madden (2010).
2. As made clear in this article, Amin's (2008) argument is problematic: the production of public space as a depoliticized realm of civic becoming he identifies in contemporary cities was, in fact, the epitome of the nineteenth-century bourgeois approach to sociospatial order.
3. Jacobs (1961: 138) provided an early attempt to associate the formation of social capital with the existence of neighborhood networks.
4. NYC police magistrate John Wyman's 1830 letter and New York Mirror article from 1831, quoted in Stansell (1987: 50).
5. However, the preeminence of upper class members in the local Board of Consultants and the state Board of

- Commissioners (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992: 96–98) leaves no room for doubt about the leading role of the elite in the project conception. Pipkin (2005) finds a deeper influence of middle class groups in later parks, which is consistent with Blumin's (1989: 13) hypothesis that the middle class was only fully formed after the Civil War. See also Goheen (2003).
6. Olmsted's report in the Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of Central Park, 13 October 1857, published as an extract in the New York Tribune (1857), emphasis added.
 7. Quoted in Rosenzweig and Blackmar (1992: 327).
 8. F. L. Olmsted, quoted in Burrows and Wallace (2000: 795).

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Abstract translations

Central Park contre la rue: La clôture des cultures de l'espace publiques à New York au mi-19^{ème} siècle

L'industrialisation de New York et son ascension à la dominance économique a entraîné une restructuration de la vie de quartier et a déchainé un étalage de cultures urbaines quotidiennes contradictoires. Dans un environnement toujours sous-régulé, la transformation de l'espace public en biens communs devint un capital-clé socio-spatial qui aida aux classes ouvrières à résoudre leur reproduction d'une façon que l'élite trouva inquiétant et loin de l'ordre civique qu'ils essayèrent

d'inculquer. Cet article fait usage des théorisations récentes du dialectique communaux/clôture pour développer une analyse comparative des cultures de l'usage de l'espace public en vue des pratiques imposées par Central Park dans une tentative de reformer des spatialités quotidiennes. On comprend le parc ici comme une première épisode dans le projet d'imposer de nouvelles relations sociales à travers la clôture de la conduite publique – un effort dans un premier temps d'appivoiser les communaux urbains et prévenir l'appropriation subalterne de l'espace publique. Suivant une discussion préliminaire des déterminants et des configurations économiques et sociaux des cultures matérielles de l'usage de l'espace publique à Manhattan, l'article analyse les stratégies du parc comme un type spécial de clôture qui ne consiste pas en l'usurpation des terrains communs à but lucratif privée mais plutôt la mobilisation de l'espace publique pour faire déplacer les comportements d'un régime de publicité à un autre.

Mots-clefs: Central Park, communaux urbains, clôture urbaine, comportement publique, régime de publicité, usage de l'espace publique.

Central Park contra las calles: el cercamiento de las culturas del espacio público en Nueva York a mediados del siglo XIX

La industrialización de Nueva York y su ascenso al dominio económico produjo una profunda

reestructuración de la vida de la calle y desató un contradictorio abanico de culturas cotidianas urbanas. En un contexto todavía infrarregulado, la comunalización del espacio público se convirtió en un capital socioespacial clave que permitía a las clases bajas resolver su reproducción de un modo que la élite local consideraba perturbador, muy alejado del orden cívico éstas intentaban inculcar. Este artículo se apoya en la teorización reciente de la dialéctica de entre lo común y el enclosure para desarrollar un análisis comparativo de las culturas del espacio público frente a las prácticas prescritas por Central Park en su intento de reformar las espacialidades cotidianas. El parque se entiende aquí como un episodio temprano en el proyecto de imponer nuevas relaciones sociales a través del cercamiento de las conductas públicas – un primer esfuerzo para domesticar los comunes urbanos y evitar la apropiación subalterna del espacio público. Tras una discusión preliminar de los determinantes económicos y sociales y la configuración de las culturas materiales del uso de espacio público en Manhattan, el artículo estudia las estrategias del parque como un tipo especial de enclosure, consistente no en la privatización del espacio público, sino en la instrumentalización del espacio público para transformar los comportamientos de un régimen de publicidad a otro.

Palabras claves: Central Park, comunes urbanos, cercamientos urbanos, conducta pública, régimen de publicidad, uso del espacio público.