Street Poetry: Everyday Performance in Budapest's Erzsébet tér

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Abstract

This project consists of an urban ethnography focused on performative dialogues in Budapest's Erzsébet tér**.** This public square, located centrally in Budapest's 5th district, can be seen as a meeting point for the youth of the city and is a distinctively urban space, home to a diverse range of people and social activities.. Most relevant for this, are those practices that could be considered performative and are most often physical and creative in nature. Among the street performing subjects include bartenders who juggle cocktail shakers, skateboarders, and groups of musicians. By dividing the square's space into four sections, the purpose of this paper is to explore the different performative dialogues that emerge from the diverse uses of space in this square.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When walking the streets of Budapest's 5th district, it is easy to run into one of the several public squares to be found in this region of the city. There is Vörösmarty tér with its designer shops and outdoor cafes or Szabadság Tér with its quiet, tree-lined paths and last standing Soviet monument. There is also Erzsébet tér; one of Budapest's most centrally located green and open squares. Including a skate park, basketball courts, and plenty of unobstructed space for leisurely activities, it has also become a central meeting point for the youth of the city.

Erzsébet tér, named after Queen Elizabeth, the wife of Habsburg Emperor Franz Joseph, has had more than one name in its history dating to the Hapsburg Empire. Also at one period a cemetery, this space has held the names Stalin Square and Engles Square as well before returning to its original name of Erzsébet tér in 1990 (visitbudapest.travel).

Today, despite its park-like character, Erzsébet tér, is surrounded by busy streets and one of the main metro stations of Budapest. The square's central walkway receives foot traffic from commuters, students, and other residents throughout the day. During warm weather especially, Erzsébet tér fills up with diverse segments of Budapest's population lounging in the open areas or engaging in more active pursuits. For the youth, it is prevalently a social space. Local Hungarian Novak Tamas puts it most clearly in an interview stating, "We can meet with people here. It is a place to make new relationships."

Where some young people come to the square primarily to meet and socialize, others engage in practices that stand out more noticeably in public. Relevant for this

project, are those practices that could be considered performative and are often physical and creative in nature. Amongst the performing subjects include bartenders who juggle bottles, skateboarders, and a group of improvising street musicians. More specifically, this project looks at the dialogues that emerge amongst the square's users through engaging in performances with others. These dialogues are primarily emerge amongst younger generations of Budapest with most subjects studying at a university or were seen to be a similar age group as university students.

By focusing on diverse performative practices, the space of Erzsébet tér is presented as a specifically urban space where the concept of *difference* lives. In this way, the activity of the square is representative of the heterogenic nature of urban spaces, where Erzsébet tér's open space takes on specific meanings and uses depending on the user. By studying the performers of the square, I'm mainly interested in exploring the elements of performance that are embodied and the stylistic dialogues that manifest through the primarily physical interactions between like-minded performers. In doing so, Erzsébet tér is presented as a space where the impersonality of urban interactions is let go of, to be replaced with a social environment that is site to boundary crossing dialogues unlikely to emerge in less central and open public spaces. This project also intends to shed light on the interactions that step outside of the rational and predictable and instead are more representative of creativity and innovation found in the embodied practices of everyday behavior.

The main ethnographic findings and analysis of this project is broken down into four spatial narratives. These spaces include the basketball court, the skatepark, the pedestrian walkway, and the green space that exists in between these other spaces. Each

of these sections is home to different movements and ways of behaving with specific dialogues emerging in each section as well. At times the regions are looked at from a distant perspective to grasp the movements of the space as a whole. In other cases, individual performers take focus and are presented as symbolic of their region displayed in ways of performing and interacting with other users in their space.

The immediate section that follows is a chapter entitled “Setting the Stage” aimed at providing a background of conceptions of public space in contemporary urban theory. Following this section is another theoretical chapter aimed at contextualizing the types of everyday performance relevant for my project. The following chapter looks at my field methods utilized in studying the square’s performers and a brief description of the photographic element of this project. The remaining sections of the paper are devoted to the spatial narratives focusing on the unique performers and performances that make their home in Erzsébet tér.

Chapter 2: Setting the Stage: Public Space in the City

Central to my project on Erzsébet tér is the use of public space. This chapter is aimed at providing a background on the conceptions of spatial use from social scientists who have primarily focused their attention on bodies and urban space; a topic of current relevance according to Christian Schmid in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*. He writes, "The 'spatial turn' has taken hold of the social sciences and questions of space are accorded a great deal of attention. In essence, this is linked with the combined processes of urbanization and globalization: at every scale new geographies have emerged (Goonewardena, Kipfer, Milgrom and Schmid 2004:27). Before highlighting more current views on the production at space, it is first important to look historically at spatial conceptions in the social sciences.

For ethnographers, the idea of space has traditionally been looked upon as a stage like structure that actors move upon. In this view, "the stage" is conceived as fixed and unchanging as a "whole in which everything is related" (Pandya 1990:775). Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1912) is known differently for perceiving space as a social construct that can be divided into areas for different uses and values. Likewise, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Durkheim describes the notion of time similarly to space as a fundamentally social construct that lies in separation from space.

French philosopher and social scientist Henri Lefebrve merges these conceptions of time and space to be mutually related and manifested socially. In doing so, he does not view space or time to exist universally as epistemological starting points. Space, rather than existing on its own, is very much looked at as a social construction that is brought into view through practice. On this topic, Christian Schmid writes, "Central to Lefebrve's

materialist theory are human beings in their corporeality and sensuousness, with their sensitivity and imagination, their thinking and their ideologies; human beings who enter into relationships with each other through their activity and practice" (Goonewardena et al. 29).

Here emerges the idea of public space, where actors in their physical presence can play a role in sculpting social space. Where public space is a representative staple of democratic societies, conjuring up images of a square or forum accessible for all citizens to interact, Lefebrve brings the bodies or "corporeality" of citizens to further attention. Sophie Watson echoes this idea in *City Publics* stating, "The public is not just about 'talk', it concerns bodies and their micro-movements. To put this another way, bodies and public space are mutually constitutive" (Watson 1994: 6).

Furthering this idea, Lefebrve (2004) also developed a theory and book entitled *Rhythmanalysis* as a means of exploring the patterns of the body in relation to space and time primarily in the city where industrialization and modernization has greatly affected the daily routines of city dwellers. Important in this case, is how the natural rhythms of body tending to work on cyclical time meet with rhythms of society which are often mechanically derived and linear in their production. In city squares, this is relevant in examining how the particular openness of a space can affect the routines and patterns of city dweller's daily lives often transforming rhythms of work schedules and commercial activities into patterns of movement that are more creative and leisurely in nature (Lefebrve 2004).

Also studying the effects of modernization on daily life, Richard Sennett's text entitled *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* looks at the

transformation of public space in Western cities that has resulted in a neglect of the body. He shows how the spatial relations of bodies play an important role in how people will see and interact with each other. Sennett writes, "Today, order means lack of contact," remarking on the effects that car culture has had on public areas where space has become measured by how quickly one can get through it (Sennett 1994:21).

If car culture is partially symbolic of the removal and homogenization of public space in the city, then walking, in a different way, brings the "publicness" of urban space back into view as referenced by Franco Moretti in Rebecca Solnit's book *Wanderlust*: *A History of Walking*. Moretti writes, "What distinguishes the city is that its spatial structure is functional to the intensification of mobility: spatial mobility, naturally enough, but mainly social mobility" (Solnit 2008: 176). City squares and parks can be seen as important in this view as easily accessible meeting points that are often centrally located where social interactions can play out in public.

In this way, the ideal of public space is conceived as a realm where a variety of lifestyles can be accommodated. When considering the size, density, and heterogeneity of urban areas, characteristics of the city outlined by Louis Wirth (1938) in *Urbanism as a Way of Life*, a public square can become a place where the protective layer of individuality or anonymity brought about from the overstimulation of the modern city can be lessened. To reference Elijah Anderson's "Cosmopolitan Canopy," a public square can serve as a space where city dwellers "can relax their guard" differently than on a street or in a subway where strangers tend to be avoided (Anderson 2004).

In the book *Landscapes and Power in Vienna*, Robert Rotenberg studies the open spaces and gardens of Vienna by examining the subset of knowledge that city dwellers

gain from lived experiences through inhabiting these types of public spaces. Writing of this work, Setha M. Low states, "He elaborated his idea by documenting how these spaces have become a spatial template of urban symbolic communication" (Low 1996:401). As will be further discussed, symbolic communication in the case of open spaces can often arise from the body in its enunciative function. This can be related to Lefebrve's theory on space, as well, where meanings that are generated through specific spatial uses often go against intended uses for spaces showing that pedestrians themselves often play a key role in defining a space and exploring the possibilities for opportunities of practice.

Indeed, this unpredictability of spatial use is often what makes urban spaces so dynamic in the way that density or lack of space can also force city dwellers to use space creatively. Jane Jacobs builds upon this idea on the use of sidewalks in her influential book entitled *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* written in 1961. During a time when the term "sprawl" could be used to identify the development of American cities, Jacobs championed the compact nature of more traditional city neighborhoods. Good city planning for Jacobs exposed itself in the intricate makeup of a busy sidewalk with its spatial use likened to a dance or ballet. On this topic, Jacobs writes, "This order is composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art-form of the city and liken it to the dance…The ballet of a good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one place is always replete with new improvisations" (Jacobs 1961: 110).

Perhaps this is the ideal of what public space in the city can function as, but most of the literature today focuses on the erosion and disappearance of public space in

replacement of commercial developments and city policies that may not always have citizens' participation in mind (Mitchell 2003). If public space is balanced between principles of freedom and control, as outlined by John Dixon in an article on street drinking, the idea of public space as an inclusive sphere may be losing grip in the city by becoming replaced with spaces of "homogeneity and control" (191). Budapest's Erzsébet tér stands out in this case, as a site where difference still lives, and city dwellers from several backgrounds can engage in a variety of practices that brings the ideal of public space into visibility. In this way, elements of performance are able to manifest themselves in a number of ways on the part of square users and will be the topic the next chapter providing further background for my project.

Chapter 3: Performance of the Everyday

The term performance can carry several connotations depending on its context and can refer to events ranging from a staged rock concert to street theatre. This chapter is aimed at situating the performances relevant for my project within a discourse that examines performances that are in line with the everyday. In this case, the explicitness of performance varies but is most often directed at physical acts engaged in movement where asserting a distinct style can become a primary vehicle for expression.

In line with the activity of an urban square, anthropological views of performance can cover a wide spectrum of action. According to Robert Bauman, "A performance may range, in principle, from the completely 'novel' (spontaneous invention) to the completely fixed (a traditional religious rite). Nearly all performance lies between these extremes" (Frith 1996: 207).

From a more sociological point of view, the work of Erving Goffman (1959) can be cited as one of the first to define social interactions within "theatrical terms" as described by Kristian Versluys in *The Urban Condition*. The self, for Goffman, is defined as a performed character adopting different roles depending on the situation and in this way, breaks with romantic ideas of a more independent self (Meyer, Versluys, Borret, et al. 1999:378). Rather than viewing performance-as-role playing, the performance relevant for my project aligns itself more closely with performance art in the way that performers *subjectify* themselves while using their body as a site for narrative and feeling.

At its base, in any case of performance, lies a communicative process that it is dependant on an audience capable of interpreting performance and being able to producing meanings from it. In *Performing Rites*, sociomusicologist Simon Frith

elaborates on this symbolic process in further discussing performance art. He states, “Performance art is a form of rhetoric; a rhetoric of gestures in which by and large, bodily movements and signs dominate other forms of communicative signs, such as language and iconography” (205).” When looking at the subjects of Erzsébet tér including skateboarders and basketball players, this view of performance aligns most closely with the physical, but heavily symbolic nature of the activity.

When breaking down the performance of the body, a more structural framework can be adopted as well. For this, it is important to distinguish between concepts of *performance* and *performativity*. Where performance is usually backed with a learned, conscious system of movement, such as a form of dance, performativity points to more unconscious gestures and postures that arise in social interactions. In an article on global break dancing, Halifu Osumare writes, “Everyday bodily gestures become embodied social identity forming the often unconscious performativity of social practice (Osumare 2004:39). At the same time, these two notions are not separate from each other. Performativity, rather, can expose itself through more explicit forms of performance. This can be tested by distinguishing, for example, how someone from Japan may break dance differently than an American. The concept of place or geography in this case can seep through performance and written upon the body.

Osumare also links performativity with the habitus, a Bourdieuian term, in demonstrating how the unconscious gestures that define performativity are habitual and are very much engrained in the body. The author does not, however, mention the concept of hexis, another term used by Bourdieu that is specifically addressed as the embodied counterpart of habitus and could be applied more appropriately with physical

performance (Bourdieu 1991:13). When considering the globally recognized activities of my study, including skateboarding and basketball, the concept of performativity is useful in considering how the same type of performance may manifest differently depending on the place and social context of the performers. In the urban environment, it is also interesting to consider the interaction of people from different backgrounds when sharing a performative space and the type of cross-cultural dialogues that can emerge from such encounters.

This is where the concept of style becomes relevant. Style in the case of everyday performance can only emerge through the act of comparison; by noticing what makes one performer stand out from another with cultural background certainly playing a role in this process. In the chapter on basketball, I demonstrate how someone playing for a school or university tends to play more structured basketball than a player who is more associated with "street basketball" often playing with a more personalized style. In this case, it is through the body that these differences become exposed.

To address performances that are more in line with the everyday, it is also relevant to mention the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) and his book entitled *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Here, Certeau takes on the issue of urban walking. Certeau is interested in the way that the city is navigated through practice that involves a way of operating which is often forgotten or concealed by forms of rationality. More concretely, he is looking at spatial practices like walking that allow users the ability to improvise within the space they have available. In doing so, he states, "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to statements uttered" (Certeau 1984). In other words, the city is conceived as a type of language in this case, and the act of

walking is a method of speaking that language and very much likened to informative speech.

But if walking is representative of the language of the city, then what do other ways of navigating city space represent? This question points to the diverse activity of an urban square often involving movement that rests quite explicitly outside the practical and rational. To elaborate, there are several other spatial practices that lend themselves to improvisation and still exist within the everyday. Many of these take on the image of performance, such as skateboarding. Is it plausible to liken these more performative ways of operating to a less informative way of communicating, in replacement for something more abstract and creative. For instance, could these acts of performance in an urban square be more representative of a type of street poetry? And can the body serve as a poetic device capable of being read by those observing? In the chapters that follow, much of the ethnographic material is aimed at exploring these alternative forms of movement to better establish their place and meaning within the square and further investigate ways in which creativity can enter into the everyday and manifest through performance and performative dialogues.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Apart from less structured visits before the month of April, my fieldwork consisted of visiting Erzsébet tér for roughly half of the days in April and half of the days in May. The lengths of the visits varied, but usually ranged between 2 to 5 hours. Important for my project was visiting the square at different periods of the day in terms of the transformations that the square often takes. As fieldwork progressed, however, I planned most visits around late afternoon and into the early evening when the square was most crowded and lively in terms of performance, especially in the case of the skate park.

Being a similar age to most of the subjects, I shifted between an insider and outsider mentality in terms of navigating the square and approaching relevant subjects for my project. In this way, there were times when I tried my best to go unnoticed and let performances unfold without intervening. I would often take up seats on benches on the perimeters of the square providing for a more outside view of the square's action in these cases.

The other extreme took place on the basketball court where I more directly undertook participant observation in the form of street basketball. On the court, I spoke very little about my ethnographic work, but rather threw myself into pickup games often trying to hold on to significant events while also having to play defense and concentrate on the game. It could be mentioned that the idea of this project started on these basketball courts in the fall when I came to play and ended up learning a lot about the square and city from other local students who also used the court.

Most often, fieldwork, consisted of a combination of observing and interacting with my relationship with a group of bottle juggling bartenders providing a good

example. I first approached Oliver, the standout performer of this group, and spoke briefly about my project and asked him if I could photograph him while performing. After learning that Oliver frequents Erzsébet tér on a daily basis, I began to approach him more frequently to ask about his technique and show me a couple moves. Many casual conversations and encounters started this way by using photography to spark conversation.

Outside of the square, I conducted four structured interviews primarily with students outside of CEU who have used the square frequently in their past. I also took many more general visits to Budapest's other squares to better understand what makes Erzsébet tér stand out amongst other public spaces in the city.

Photography also added a primary component to my field methods. I used more distant, panoramic shots of the square as an attempt to document the square's sense of place that can very much change on a day-to-day basis as previously mentioned. I mostly used these specific shots on a practical level when writing to recall specific days and events.

Shots directed at more specific subjects were also utilized in capturing performance in action using this technique most prevalently in the skate park region of Erzsébet tér. In an article on anthropological photography, Carol McGee writes, "A photograph may tell the story of how its maker moves; here, the story is personal. In either instance, a photograph reveals how people connect with, and belong to their cities" (McGee 2007: 110). To accompany the written spatial stories, photographs of subject's performances are also filled with meanings and can be read and interpreted in a more

visual sense. These photographs are featured in the upcoming chapters of each region of the square providing my main ethnographic findings and analysis.

Chapter 5: Erzsébet tér‘s Green Space

The green space of Erzsébet tér makes up the largest and most open region of the square. This area consists of a spacious lawn sparsely populated with tall, shady trees and separated in the middle by the pedestrian walkway. It is site to the widest spectrum of performative activity in the square. Ranging from frisbee throwers to drum circles to a faction of the Occupy Movement, this space embodies what could be called a theatre of the everyday. The green space is also used by nearly all segments of Budapest's population including students, couples, homeless people, and tourists. Especially on warm days, this area fills up with people lounging amongst friends or engaging in more active pursuits. Differing from the skatepark and basketball court, there are very little structures or guidelines that influence behavior here. This space, and focus of this chapter rather, is an attempt to analyze the especially innovative, boundary crossing, dialogues distinct from the rest of the square and also very unique to Budapest's public space in general.

Before highlighting more explicitly performative activities, it is helpful to touch on those who use the square for more leisurely and relaxing purposes. Indeed, the art of "hanging out," is practiced thoroughly by many visitors of the square especially later in day. In Figure G.1. below, groups of young people can seen seated in cloistered circles amongst friends.

Figure G.1: Young people in Erzsebet ter

Often these less active groups may be having something to drink or smoking from a water pipe. Performance is not explicit in these cases, with some of these groups intentionally keeping a low profile. But upon closer inspection, there are ways of taking up the space through gesture and pose that point to maybe not outright performance, but certainly hints at meaningful public displays of the body. This can be witnessed one way in the greeting rituals that accompany the many meetings that take place here. When meeting with friends, some young people offer traditional handshakes or kisses on the cheek. Others, however, use more streetwise handshakes, highlighting different levels of intimacy between park users. On the same token, some groups stay tight in their circles of friends with no intention of socializing with others groups. Other square users, however,

can be seen skipping from group to group in the green space sparking up conversations with multiple circles like the young man standing on the left in figure G.1 greeting his friend with a pat on the back.

On most afternoons in this area, bartenders frequent the square and can be seen juggling bottles and cocktail shakers amongst the less active groups of loungers. This group of bartenders is quite noticeable, flipping bottles and cocktail shakers in ways that turn the standard practices of drink preparation into a performative art. Among the most accomplished bottle flippers in the square is, Oliver, who frequents Erzsébet tér almost every afternoon to practice. During the evening, Oliver bartends at a local pub, but he uses the square during the day to train for bartending competitions that focuses on the bottle tricks that he performs. He uses this square to practice because it allows him to perform his moves more freely than at the bar where he works. This points to the fact that some performances, like Oliver's, are not finished products but very much aimed at goals outside of Erzsébet tér. The square's space, in this case, becomes a means or avenue for the development of specific skills.

He can be seen in action in the photograph below labeled Figure G.2, juggling four bottles at once in a shady region of the square. Upon asking him to break down his moves, Oliver demonstrated the basic flips with the bottles and then showed how these moves can be improvised and made more elaborate adding extra spins and using his elbows to balance and flip them into the air.

Like other activities in the square, there are dance-like motions that accompany this act of bottle flipping, supported by the fact that almost all the bartenders wear headphones when practicing. When asked about the role of music in this activity, Oliver

states, “The music is very important because it helps me keep the time…I mostly listen to progressive house music because of its repetitive beat.” Keeping this element of electronic dance music in mind, Oliver at his best, often mimics the moves of the seasoned clubber who waves glow sticks in sync with the rhythm of electro music. When several performing bartenders are present in the green space with similar martini shakers and electro music, an element of club culture does appear to enter square. In this way, glimpses of lifestyles

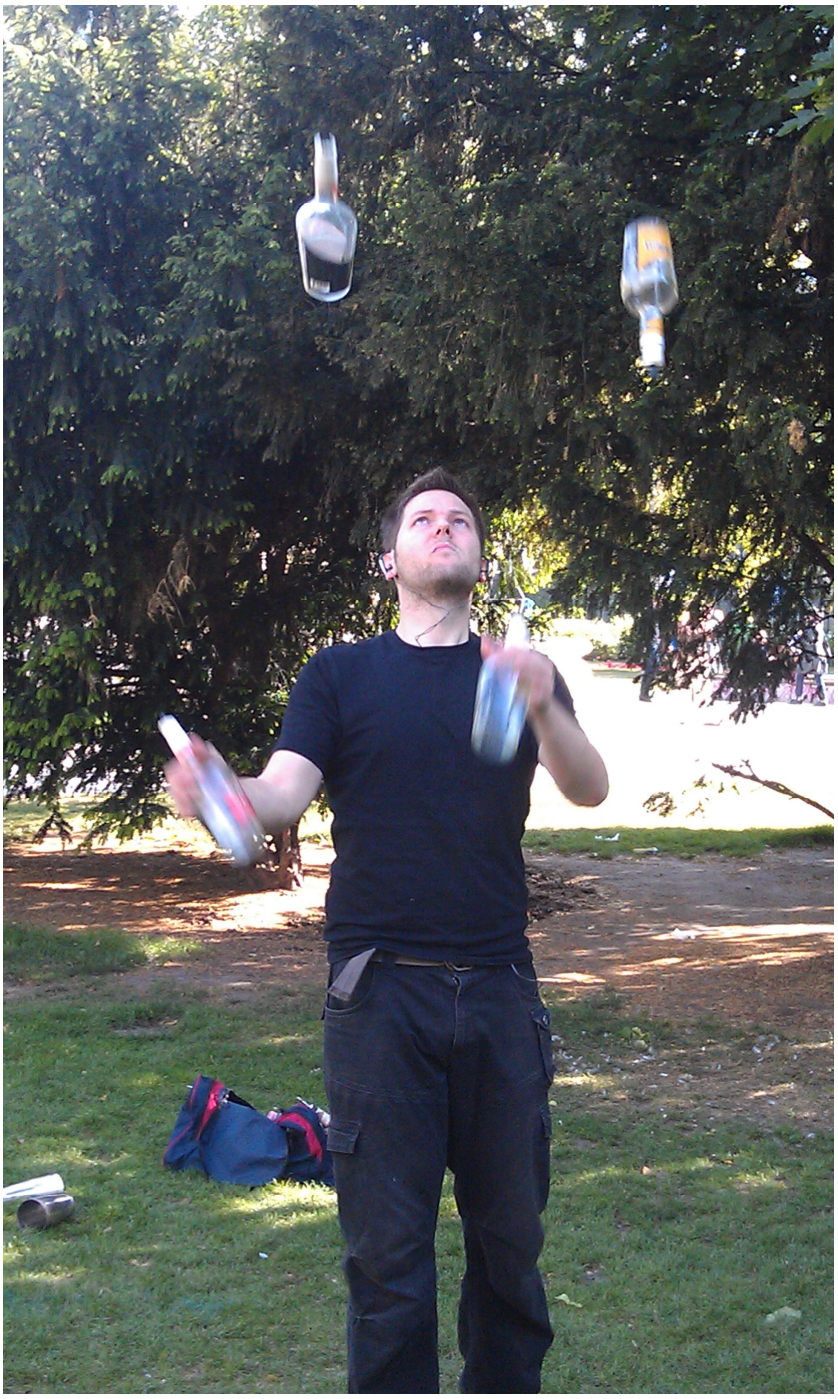

Figure G.2: Bartender performing

that extend beyond the square's perimeters are capable of exposing themselves through the act of performance; through a more revealing projection of the self than is routinely

seen on the pedestrian walkway or on a typical city street. To reference Georg Simmel, the anonymity and blasé attitude that is characteristic of pedestrian life in the modern city is frequently abandoned in the green space, where young people can be found sparking relationships, not for reasons of business or even recreation so much, but very often through the desire to create and perform with like-minded people (Anderson 2004:14). Indeed, the bartenders can often be seen crowded around Oliver, watching his technique, asking questions, and trying to mimic his performance. So rather than finding classes or watching videos on this rare, but performative activity, bartenders come to this public space to improve their skills and share their talents with others.

The bartenders are not the only ones creating unique dialogues in this specific space. One especially revealing event taking place here sparked on a late Saturday afternoon at a particularly crowded time in Erzsébet tér. Young people positioned themselves in all areas of the shady green space on this hot, spring day making it difficult to even find a place to sit. Taking up a spot on a bench near the skatepark, my attention was caught this afternoon by a group of young black men who were spotted hovering over a group of local students strumming guitars. When I came closer, I heard one of the standing men propose in English that, “We would like to make a freestyle for you” inferring that they wanted to spontaneously create raps or “spit rhymes” while the guitarist played. After acquainting themselves for a short while, and learning that the young black men were visitors to Budapest, the Hungarian guitarist began to finger-pick blues chords, in a repetitive, head-nodding rhythm.

By this point, many other people left their own circles of friends to see what was going on while the freestyle session began. A stark contrast from the electro music

listened to by the bar tenders, the rappers took off into vocal cadences created on the spot, all five of them, rhyming for about a minute each before "passing off the mic" to another making sure each person displayed their skills while the local student kept time on the guitar. When finishing, the group received applause from those who caught sight of the performance and the young men shook hands amongst their fellow collaborators.

In this situation, cross-cultural barriers were broken between groups who, in other circumstances, may not have even met each other, let alone perform together. Unlike many young tourists in this square, who can be seen passing through on walking tours or asking locals about Budapest's bars, this group sparked a much different relationship using hip-hop, a globally recognized music form, as the medium of their artistic dialogue. In doing so, they created hip-hop in its purest form: unrecorded, spontaneous, and symbolic of a youthful energy that emerges in the green space of Erzsébet tér on more busy and lively days like this Saturday in April.

The idea of a "cosmopolitan canopy" brought forth by American sociologist Elijah Anderson comes to mind in this situation, and can be used as a term that frames much of the activity particular to the green space. Writing of an indoor food market in Philadelphia called the Reading Terminal Market, Anderson sees the "cosmopolitan canopy" as a public space where the general "wariness towards strangers" indicative of the modern city is lessened and people are more freely able to approach others in a way that a street or bus stop wouldn't allow. Anderson writes, "There remain numerous heterogeneous and densely populated public spaces within cities that offer a respite from this wariness, settings where a diversity of people can feel comfortable enough to relax their guard" (Anderson 2004:15). Where food can be considered the magnet of bringing

diverse people together in the case of Reading Terminal, the bar tender and freestylers in Erzsébet tér utilize *performance* as a means of communicating and meeting new people. In doing so, these groups are to able create smaller, more exaggerated "cosmopolitan canopies" within the larger canopy of the square as a whole.

This is not to say that all inhabitants of the square are able to abandon their "stranger" or "other" identity upon entering the space. It is the green space, in fact, that is occupied by the some of the most marginalized groups in the city. Parallel to their socioeconomic-position, homeless people and Roma communities tend to occupy the literal margins or perimeters of the square in the areas closest to the surrounding streets. Often seen lounging amongst their possessions, these groups belong to the space differently than most young people. On weekday mornings when elementary students use this area for their school's gym class, the kids can often be seen dodging homeless men in their games of soccer. When sitting on the benches of the perimeters to do fieldwork, it was also not uncommon for a homeless person to reach into a garbage can near the bench to look for something to eat. These types of encounters serve as a reminder of the heterogenic make-up of the square's users, extending beyond that of a more homogenous bourgeois leisure space, where it is quite possible to come face-to-face with those in very different socio-economic positions. What might serve as a stage for some to practice and perform, can often serve a much different role for those in more marginalized positions.

Certainly, there could have been other performers mentioned in this chapter on the green space as well. The "ghettoblaster" with his large speaker built into his backpack that can be heard blaring techno music while he parades through the square at night or the "slackliner" who attaches a tightrope between two trees and engages in a balancing act of

trying to walk across. The green space offers a testament to ways of behaving in public that most clearly represents a deviation or an escape from the predictable and rational in replacement of a spatial use that can open doors to creative dialogues of public performance.

Chapter 6: The Pedestrian Walkway

When exiting the Deák Ferenc tér Metro Station and emerging onto the premises of Erzsébet tér, the entrance leads to a wide promenade running diagonally through the square onto the other entrance located off of Október 6 street. As the focus of this chapter, this area will be referred to as the pedestrian walkway and also includes the Danubius Fountain in the very center of the square. This space is presented to be more representative of an urban street scene in terms of its on-the-go pedestrian life providing the observer with only a brief and fragmented glimpse of those passing by. In this way, the space is used primarily as a means to get through and on to another destination very much affecting social interactions and sometimes lack of social intersections between walkway users and other inhabitants of the square.

Keeping in mind its close proximity to the central metro station, the walkway receives heavy foot traffic from commuters and students especially during earlier hours of the weekdays. The space is not only used by walking pedestrians either. During my month of fieldwork, I witnessed bikes, motorized scooters, unicycles, skateboards, ripsticks, segways, and even more forms of personal transportation that city dwellers use to maneuver around modern day Budapest. All methods of transportation, it is worth mentioning, that are distinct from automobiles in allowing users to remain in closer contact when navigating their routes through the city.

In terms of movements as a whole, the walkway serves as a rhythmic constant or metronome one could say in its consistent state of activity often receiving foot traffic when the surrounding areas of the square may be largely empty. At the same time, the walkway also corresponds to work schedules and other matters of daily life, creating waves of busy activity. Throughout the day, the freedom of movement in the walkway's space is routinely reduced and opened back up again depending on the hour. If imagining that a city could breathe, its lungs could very much reflect the space of Erzsébet tér; taking in the cities' inhabitants and releasing them in a continual flow that is symbolic of the walkway. It might be worth noting that London's Regent Park was built with this same "park-as-lung" mentality in the 19th century as a means of accommodating crowds of "freely moving individuals" (Sennett 1994:324).

On weekends, however, the more set rhythms of the week are often blurred with a less predictable flow of foot traffic during the day. The speed and character of pedestrian walks can change on the weekends as well, when the act of walking itself in public areas, can take on the image of performance. Writing of Italian cities, New York dance critic Edwin Denby was struck upon visiting Italy by the theatrics of their main street promenades. He writes, "The community strolls affably and looks itself over. The more grace they show, the more the community likes them" (Solnit 2001:179). Perhaps this is more reflective of Mediterranean culture than Central European cities. Or maybe it is that every city walks differently. In the modern Western metropolis, walking is often seen as an opportunity to "get lost in the crowd" and keep a low profile, rather than been seen an opportunity to stand out. In

her history of walking entitled *Wanderlust*, Rebecca Solnit writes, "Urban walking has always been shadier business, easily turned into soliciting, cruising, promenading, shopping, rioting, protesting, skulking, loitering, and other activities" (Solnit 2001). When putting these views together, walking does seem characteristic of the language of a city, as Certeau would suggest, with different types of walking corresponding to different ways of navigating the city.

The idea previously mentioned by Edwing Denby of a public audience that "looks itself over," seems most relevant in the case an open public square. This frequently takes on a twofold process in Erzsébet tér that involves the walkway and the benches that line it. The photograph below labeled P.1. displays a typical scene in the square where a large group of young friends gather around the benches spilling out into the walkway's space. Susan, a student in Budapest, remarked in an interview, "I notice that there are always young people lined up on the side…Chatting, doing whatever young people do and I usually avoid them or walk around them because they're usually blocking the path." In this case, the walkway appears as a contested space on a condensed and micro level with different youth groups often positioning themselves in intentionally visible locations near the walkway. With this, Susan goes on to say, "The whole point of people coming here is for young people to see and be seen."

Figure P.1 : The Walkway

The region of the skate park is relevant on this topic as well, with the activity of this area often bleeding out into the walkway particularly near the fountain in the center. The regions of the square are not bounded in this respect with practices often straying from the regions of their ascription. For example, the biker in Figure P.2. is pictured in the front of the west entrance of the pedestrian walkway. Standing on the back pegs of his bike, he is shown spinning the bike fast enough to remain balanced on one wheel. While the biker's act appears graceful in its free-styled rotations, he's not in control of the bike's movements like he would be riding it normally. This element of unpredictability juxtaposes with activity of the walkway just steps away from his performance. In this case, the walkway is representative of that which is routine and habitual. Most pass by the biker, without taking notice of his performance, even at times, when he often comes close to hitting them. Similar to talented street musicians who are often ignored, everyday

performances often become lost in the routes of pedestrians; lost in predetermined trajectories that largely neglect the spontaneous and unexpected. Squares like Erzsébet tér offer opportunities where these lines of behavior can unravel themselves sometimes quite literally in the case of a spinning bicyclist throwing off guided and predictable ways of operating.

Figure P.2: Bikers doing tricks

Given the constant state of motion on the walkway, dialogues between square users are not as easily created in this region, unlike the green space where people linger and are more likely to approach strangers. Differing from Elijah Anderson's

"cosmopolitan canopy," where the blasé and indifferent attitude of city life is temporarily lifted, the pedestrian walkway often retains an image of anonymity similar to a busy sidewalk where users' routes offer little in the way of interaction.

This particular space of the square, more than others, also maintains a divide between youth groups and older generations of the square's inhabitants. Where the skate park is clearly a youth dominated area in its uses, the walkway is much more split between the old and the young. At times, it even becomes a site of performance for older generations. In the area surrounding the fountain, salsa dancing is held as a free public event advertised on Facebook and held once each month. Speakers are set up in the square while about thirty couples dance to salsa music with others watching nearby. There are no teachers present but most dancers are versed in basic steps and some display more accomplished moves. With mostly middle age couples taking the stage in this scenario, young people are mainly seen sticking to the sidelines, assuming the position of an uninterested audience and separating themselves from the action. Unlike the often spontaneous acts of performance on the part of youth groups, the more structured and preplanned nature of the salsa dancing may contribute to young people's lack of interest.

Later in the evenings, however, young people gravitate toward the same space and are likely to be gathered around a university student referred to as the "ghettoblaster." The "ghettoblaster" can be heard before he is seen, with a powerful speaker built into his backpack from which he blares underground electronic music. Using the Danubius Fountain as a meeting place, he and his followers socialize near the fountain and parade through the walkway and onto other streets of the city as well.

When looking at the ideological dilemma of public space, concerning the negotiation between principles of freedom and control, the activity of the "ghettoblaster" seems to be symptomatic of pushing the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable behavior (Dixon, Levine, McAuley 2006:188). While his performance may not represent an outright form of deviance, he could be seen as a public disturbance to others nearby, perhaps largely depending on one's music preferences. Indeed, he plays at a very similar volume as the salsa dancing, but the late night spontaneity of this act gives "the ghettoblaster" and his followers a more subversive edge.

It could be said that the walkway remains the most contested area of Erzsébet tér caught between the movements of a street and that of an open square. In this way, performance here is equally fixed between the anonymity of urban walking and the theatrics of more open public space. It is perhaps this position of in-betweeness that prevents more collective dialogues of performance from arising here like in the green space. What stands out on the walkway are more fragmented views of performance; of acts in motion that are only partly recognized and in some cases, stay under the public radar entirely.

Chapter 7: The Basketball Court

Located on the southwest corner of the square, the basketball court of Erzsébet tér can be seen as the only area separated from the rest of the square. Fenced off from a road on one side and the green space on the other, this court is primarily site to pickup games of basketball and to a lesser extent football games. It is similar to the skate park in remaining a youth dominated area with many university and high school students using it after school or on the weekend. Apart from local Hungarians, the court is also used by many international students as well. The interaction of players from different backgrounds provides the main substance of this spatial narrative, focusing on the court's stylistic dialogues developed in these games.

To begin, the distinctions between more official games of basketball and what can be considered "street basketball" must be accounted for to better contextualize the activity in Erzsébet tér's court. Basketball affiliated with a school or university is representative of a more structured style of play. The games are organized ahead of time, led by coaches, and refereed by officials who enforce the rules of the game. Organized basketball also tends to be more reliant on basic skills, where teamwork overrides the skills of the individual.

Street basketball, on the other hand, is much less structured. Commonly associated with urban areas, street basketball is often played in outdoor playgrounds or squares, where players from a neighborhood can compete and display their skills in a public setting. These pickup games, spontaneously organized by the players present on the court, give way to a more personalized style of play.

The goal is not only about putting the ball in the hoop, but exists more in how one gets the ball into the hoop. This gives way to a greater freedom for stylistic play, especially found in ball handling, as is often enacted by players in proving their skills to a public audience. In his article entitled **"**Inner-City 'Schoolboy' Life," author Raymond Gunn fits basketball into certain "codes of the street," where growing up in the Bronx, one way of proving yourself amongst peers included, "How good one's 'moves on the court' were (how well one could play basketball, particularly with finesse)"(Gunn 2004: 64). The playground exists here as a cultural domain outside of the school and private sphere where different codes are enacted by youth groups and tested amongst each other through physical performance.

The film Hoop *Dreams*, a sociological documentary following the basketball careers of two high school students from Chicago offers an insightful glimpse of two very different basketball worlds. In this film, William Gates and Arthur Agee, both teenagers from the housing projects of Chicago's inner city are recruited by a private high school in the suburbs because of their basketball talent. William excels at St. Joseph's both in academics and on the basketball court. Arthur, on the other hand, does not adjust as easily to the suburban environment and more structured basketball. His coach remarks, "I can see the playground in him," referring to his skillful, but less orthodox, style of play (James 1994). During his sophomore year, Arthur transfers from St. Joseph's to a public school near his home in the city, while William stays at St. Joe's and goes on to play at a university level. Relating to Erzebet ter, *Hoop Dreams* highlights how a certain socio-economic and geographic

environment can affect a style of play and how these different methods of practice are negotiated when players from diverse contexts meet on the court.

One particular game played in Erzsébet tér on a Saturday afternoon in April stands out as a case that appropriately highlights the dynamics of a pickup game on a city court. This game started when I was asked by Kiri, a local Budapest student, to play against him in a one-on-one game. After realizing that I was an American, he jokingly stated that "I can't say no," or back down to the challenge on what can be considered his "home court." Too soon to accept this challenge, we were approached by other players also looking for a game. One of the players identified himself as having half Austrian and half Persian descent while the others ended up being local Hungarians.

Unlike Erzsébet tér's skatepark users, who perform individually, basketball players must interact with eachother more directly during the game. This interaction is enacted physically, and often unconsciously, in reading the moves of other players or making the first step against a defender. Verbal communication is important as well in establishing the game's structure. In our game, disputes broke out after one player was suspected of committing a foul. The Austrian exclaimed,"This is street basketball. So I don't care," referring to the more physical and tough nature of the game without referees. Other rules were negotiated as the game went on with Kiri having the main input based on his familiarity with the courts and codes of Budapest's streetball scene.

In terms of performance, Kiri took center stage as well exemplifying the performer *par excellence* of street basketball. He can be seen with the ball in the

photograph labeled B.1. below wearing a University of North Carolina jersey. Also In line with other performances in the square, experienced ball handlers, like Kiri, bring rhythm into their game. Steps are synchronized and move alongside a beat pounded out between the ball and court. Kiri took this movement to another level and stood out in this game as especially performative because of his overtly stylistic moves en route to the hoop. He could be seen spinning, juking, crossing, and faking in ways like no one else on the court. Like a jazz artist in concert, Kiri improvised his performance on the spot, making fluid transitions between each move and the next, while at the same time, making sure to never repeat himself either.

Figure B.1: The Basketball Court

With moves similar to those in the *And 1 Mixtapes*, I asked Kiri after the game if he had seen any of these films that follow some of America's best streetballers. To this he replied, "I've seen them, but I'm not interested in the *And 1 Mixtape*. I want to make my own style." Kiri is perhaps representative of players who intentionally deviate from structured basketball in assertion of themselves as "street" orientated players.

If Kiri's style is more reminiscent of the moves in the *And 1 Mixtape,* then my style would align itself more with the film *Hoosiers* following the basketball season of a small high school team in rural Indiana. A fellow mid-westerner, I was trained in no-nonsense, fundamentals basketball where teamwork and unselfish play were the values to be upheld on the court. This contrast of styles between Kiri and I became more apparent when our one-on-one game recommenced following the game that was previously described.

During this competition, Kiri stuck to his dramatic ball handling, dribbling the ball in between his legs and even in between my legs at times. He danced around the perimeters of the court utilizing these moves until I fell for one his fakes allowing him an open lane to the hoop. I handled the ball quite differently, making quick drives to the center of the court and pulling up for jump shots. More so, I ran after loose balls, played hard defense, and did everything else that might prevent me from embarrassing myself in front of the crowd on the benches who were quite aware of my foreign status at this point. Kiri ended up beating me by two baskets and after the game, I went to shake his hand and he embraced me in what I would consider to be a "bro hug" with one hand clutched in mine and his other arm

wrapped around my back. We spoke a bit more after and game and surprised me by handing me a flyer for an upcoming Christian rock concert.

Perhaps the basketball court is the easiest region of the square for an outsider to mingle in with locals simply through the act of competing. To put it directly, I don't have to know Hungarian to understand what is happening on the court, but can easily incorporate myself into the social sphere by demonstrating that I'm able to play. Certainly the global popularity of basketball plays into this as well exposing itself symbolically with Kiri's North Carolina jersey. But more so, this is a distinctly heterogenic space where players can test representations of how someone from America or Vienna actually plays the sport rather than watching foreign players on television. In this way, the court holds the opportunity for potential stereotypes or misconceptions to be demystified in replacement for direct engagement with "the other" through everyday competition.

Chapter 8: The Skatepark

From the top of St. Stephens, the movements found in the skatepark of Erzsébet tér particularly stand out from the more congested streets and boulevards outside of the square. One can see the stop and go, automobile derived rhythms of the streets replaced with a quite different production of space; one determined by more cyclical routes and continuous patterns of movement. Even the shrill of skateboards sliding against metal rails or "grinding" as it is called can be heard from this distant view. Visually, each skater can be seen carving out his or her own performance using the park's ramps and rails while managing to avoid other skaters at the same time. When looked at as a whole, the skaters from this view create a unique order and appear like electrons swarming a nucleus. In this way, destinations are sought out not in any linear sense, but the same space, rather, is traversed and re-traversed in unpredictable routes. A closer view of the skatepark's activity and background of skateboard culture allows this re-imagination of space on the part of skaters to become more clear.

Although skateboarding has it roots in a suburban setting, with moves originating from surf culture, the crossover to the urban terrain brought a different element into the sport where often forgotten about city spaces were used in innovative ways. On this topic, author Fabrice Le Mao writes, "Skateboarders explore urban space in a way that often surpasses the most imaginative ideas of urban designers" (Le Mao and Fennetaux 2004: 6). Similar to the urban sport of parkour, or free running as it can be called, skateboarding takes what may

commonly be seen as obstacles to the walking pedestrian, and uses these obstacles as opportunities or sites of potentiality to work their moves.

Lefebrve's theory on spatial representation is helpful here in distinguishing skateboarders' production of space from that of other pedestrian activities. Skateboarding can be situated within his conception of *representational space*; also referred to as lived space. This spatial conception is representative of that conceived by everyday users who are presumably conceived to be passive. If Certeau were to identify this space, he may call it the "room left to consumers in which they improvise their art," referring to already planned out courses of action that users choose and improvise from (Certeau 1984). *Representations of spaces*, on the other hand, points to space conceived by city planners and scientists. According to Walter Prigge "This is the dominant space in any society or (mode of production)" (Goonewardena 2004: 52)

Skateboarders are unique in this relationship to the dominant because they enact an appropriation of space that often subverts the intended purposes of much rational urban planning. Rather than choosing routes already planned, skateboarders are very much creators themselves reflecting a different way of relating to architectural space. Given this more direct engagement with the terrain, physical space becomes overlaid with symbolic meanings that are created in practice. In doing so, skateboarders actually create a "super-architectural space" that exists, according to Iain Borden, not as a thing, but as a "production of space, time, and social being" (Borden 2001: 89).

Because of their symbolic use of structures and objects, Prigge writes that representational space, like that conceived by skaters, "Can tend towards coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs" (Goonewardena 2004: 53). This is important because it points to the unique codes and dialogues that skaters create invoking a sense of place that differs from the rest of the square.

In the case of an urban skatepark, this system of communicating becomes especially interesting because skaters come from various skating backgrounds and all must conform to similar patterns of movement when using the park. In the case of Erzsébet tér, however, this order is complicated by the fact that it is commonly occupied by not just skateboarders, but bikers and rollerbladers as well. Although they coexist within the space, they also perform with a range of different routes and speeds. Even more differentiated than the modes of performance are the skill levels of those present in the skatepark, with very young beginners and more experienced veterans of the sport often occupying the space at the same time.

It could be said then, that urban skateparks, with their diverse set of users, also become spaces for specific social interactions. On the use of skateparks, skateborder Andrew Petrusky states in an interview, "You go to the skate park even if you aren't good, but rather to associate with others who are there." Erzsébet tér's skatepark can particularly be seen as a congregation space for skating culture in Budapest, where not only skills are performed, but elements of a lifestyle are socially enacted as well. "Growing up in the suburbs," Andrew states, "It was hard to find people who cared about skateboarding let alone the conditions for skateboarding. Urban areas create a center for the culture. It could said that the

skatepark functions like a theatre for skating culture, as a site, not just for practice but as a platform that allows skaters to contextualize their style and mode of performance in relation to others.

The performer/audience relationship in this case is one that is particularly interchangeable. For this performance of the everyday to work, it must rely on what Simon Frith would call 'an audience of performers**,**" or peers capable of interpreting performance within this social sphere**,**"(Frith 1996: 206). The audience in this case primarily consists of other skaters taking a break. In the photograph on the next page, labeled A.1, the audience of the skate park can be seen lined up on benches that form the perimeters of the skating area on both sides. Some can be seen resting with their BMX bikes, highlighting their inclusion in the social sphere.

This photo also points to the system of learning that skaters can enact through engaging in their own "folk ethnography" of the social setting, primarily by watching the other skatepark performances. This potential for learning remains particularly public, open to those watching and largely dependant on the enunciative qualities of the body in providing a basis for learning.

Figure A1: Audience of the skate park

On the days, where the order or etiquette of park's activity becomes more structured, most skaters can be seen lined up on the starting ramp and one-by-one set off to a different section of the park to perform a trick or a series of tricks. At times when skaters follow these more disciplined patterns of movement, it becomes easier for those watching to focus in on an individual's performance. In some

instances. the skater may land an innovative trick and receive a round of claps from those who caught site of the move. More often though, skaters lose contact with the board and in some cases fall hard to the concrete. There is indeed a physical risk involved in making the activity in the park quite unpredictable.

In more restrictive areas of cities, skateboarding takes on an even more subversive public image, not unlike that of a graffiti artist in the way they both deviate from expectations of rational public behavior. On a more symbolic level, both the skateboarder and graffiti artist leave their mark upon space in a personalized style. According to Karen Jaehne, "Part of the fascination with the 'lively arts' of graffiti and rap music derives from the spontaneity of their expression. Such art cannot be collected; it must be witnessed—catch as catch can" (Jaehne 1984). But unlike the graffiti artist, the skateboarder makes only temporary inscriptions onto the space with the body serving as the main poetic device. In attempting to capture this visual poetics of performance, photography can be used to freeze performance in midair offering a more detailed look at body positionings and elements of style.

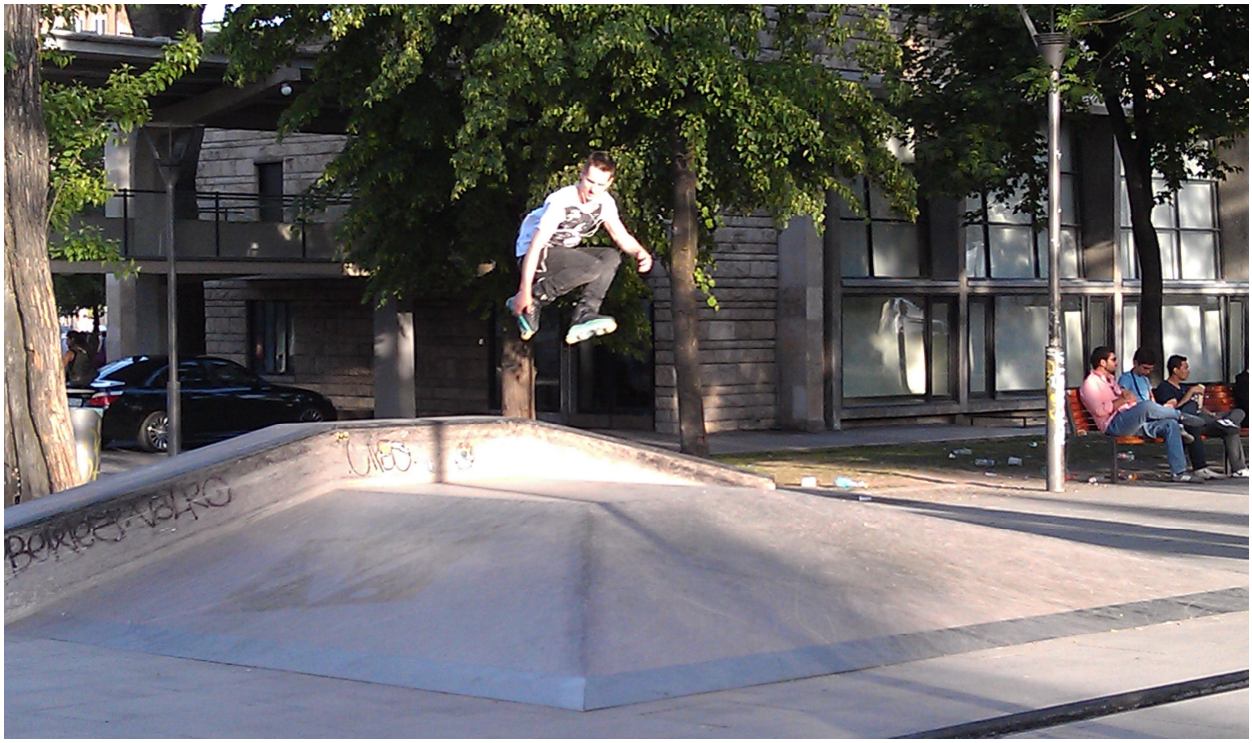

Figure S.1

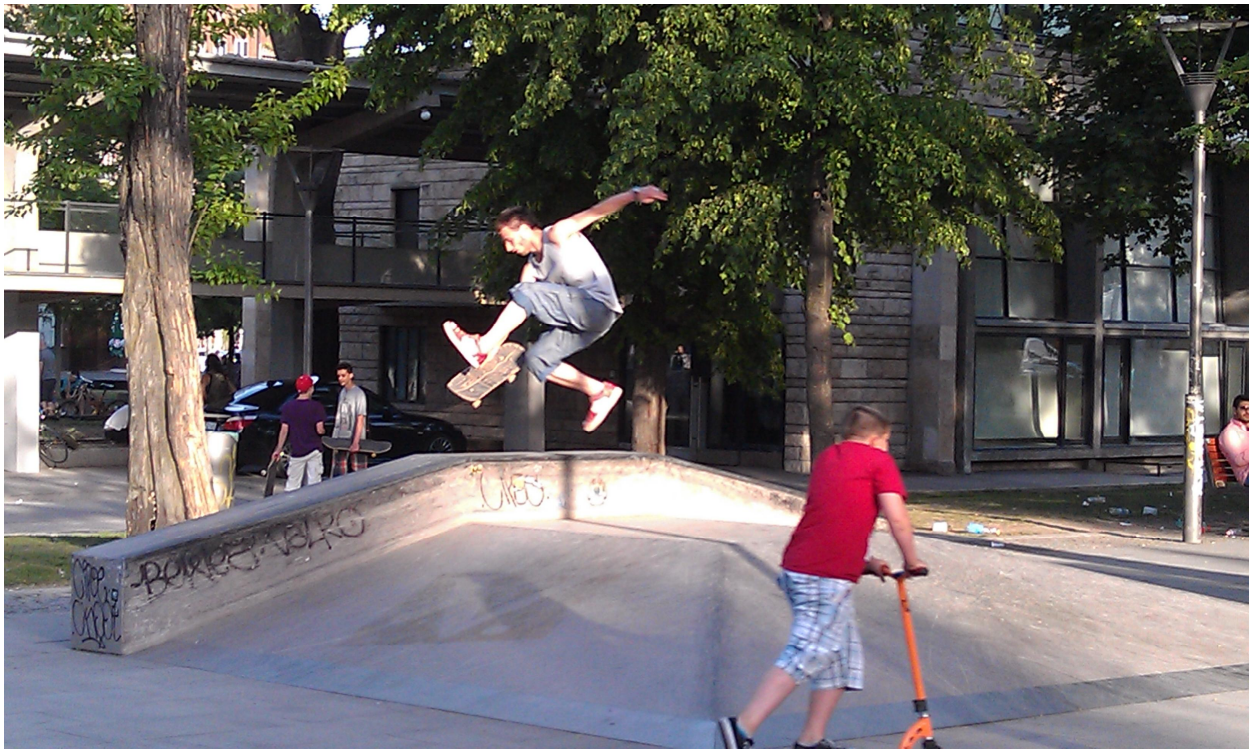

Figure S.2.

Figure S. 3.

The three photographs included above were shot from the same spot focused on the park's main ramp that was previously mentioned. Each person is different in what he rides including rollerblades, skateboards, and bikes. They each use the ramp differently as well, positioning their airborne bodies in a way of both performance and pose.

The rollerblader in Figure S.1 is especially unique here, in the fact that his mode of performance, the skates, are connected to his body quite directly allowing him a greater freedom of movement. Indeed, the experienced rollerbladers of

Erzsébet tér often appear effortless in their navigation of the park and can be spotted weaving amongst skaters with a fluidity and grace unlike the others. The biker, on the other hand, is allowed the least amount of freedom in this respect, for he must keep the bike with him at all times. The skateboarder rests somewhere in between on this issue. The photograph S.2. features the skater's one hand on the board and the other extended in the air similar to a bull rider in a rodeo.

There are different levels of improvisation that become available to those seeking to test the boundaries of a given space with their board or skates. When looked at as a whole, they enact in a process of spatial use, where the skaters themselves play the dominant role in sculpting a social space and where opportunities for asserting creative action in public opens up for skaters. Up close, their micro-movements expose the more symbolic level of their actions. Erzsébet tér's skatepark, with its central location, creates a hub or theatre for this activity where locals and non-local skaters can engage in this process together, creating a scene of innovation and performance unmatched by the rest of the square.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

As a whole or unifying process, Lefebrve described the city as a work—as an *ouvre* envisioning it as a collective project where new modes of inhabiting and living can come into view. Describing this "right to the city," Lefebrve states, "This right is related to objective needs, needs that any city should be structured toward meeting; 'the need for creative activity, for the *ouvre*, the need for information, symbolism, the imaginary and play" (Mitchell 2003:18). The city, in this case, is largely conceived as a work of art. Following this line of thought, a new perspective can be drawn on the importance of everyday performance exhibited in public space. In other words, it shows that creative activity plays an important role in city life; that performance of this nature have meaning.

When looked at as a whole, the performances that take place in Erzsébet tér create a lively urban scene; one that is indeed artistic in nature and carved out from the diverse spatial practices of the square's users. These types of scenes are able to breathe life into a city's public spaces in the way Erzsébet tér buzzes with youthful energy that is unmatched by Budapest's surrounding public spaces. This can be seen as symbolic of successful urban planning where public space becomes an exciting place to not only observe, but to participate in. In this way, I view everyday performance to be contagious public behavior. When other people are creating and engaging in practices that exist outside the predictable and rational, the outside observer can receive a glimpse of a very different type of public behavior that still exists within the everyday. In doing so, new opportunities can open up for exploring

the potential of a given space in producing dynamic performances where creative and innovative dialogues can take root and flourish in the contemporary city.

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