

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to use my role as a public art advisory committee member for the Schuylkill River Park Development Council to elucidate the public art process at a particular place in a particular moment in time: Schuylkill River Park, Center City West, Philadelphia, 1996-2000. In so doing, I seek answers to questions that have significance within the anthropology of the built environment, in particular, the social production of space. The questions include: How does society produce the built environment? What roles do history and social institutions play in generating the built environment? What is the relationship between space, power, and politics? (Lawrence and Low 1990: 455). Public art is just one aspect of the development of Schuylkill River Park (SRP) and cannot be isolated from the grander development plan. In fact, as I will argue, in order to best understand contemporary public art, I must place it within a wider urban context. The specialized discipline known as “public art” includes a myriad of practices and approaches to making and siting art outside conventional art spaces, such as museums and galleries. Public art takes on many guises, including outdoor sculpture, community murals, earth art, site-specific art, amenities such as park furniture and paving, billboards, and even performance. While public art would seemingly be an ideal place for discussion within recent debates on representation, public culture, postindustrial cities and identity, it has been relatively isolated from these critical perspectives.

Public art selection processes should not be isolated events removed from the everyday life of urban residents, although they usually are. However private, they are still part of the complex web of social processes that bring together artists, arts organizations, art professionals, government officials, developers, planners, and, occasionally, local residents. The public art process lends itself to discussions of the role of art in the urban environment—providing a rare meeting of often atomized groups (Babon 2000: 111). The public art process “forces” those in charge of the planning process to articulate their conception of urban space and art’s location within it.

Public art has been, what Kim Babon has referred to as, a “blindspot” in the social scientific analysis of urban space and social processes. Unfortunately, as she contends, we have missed an opportunity to examine how people frame and create urban space. As Babon explains, “public art is an excellent place to begin analysis of the complex processes which inform, perpetuate, shape, and destruct

urban environments” (Babon 2000: 112). The various interests that converge in the public art process represent different agendas and interests with often conflicting visions about how art should be sited in the urban context. The struggle between these actors is often hidden behind the closed doors of bureaucracy (Babon 2000: 112). The only evidence that a discussion took place is usually its end result—art “plunked down” in a plaza. Yet, the location of a work of art in urban space is created by organized activity among art world professionals and various other players. From the perspective of those wishing to contextualize artistic practice, public art does not end with the creation of the work of art. Since public art is placed outside the museum and gallery context and in the space of cities, it becomes subject to discussions about the control of urban space. Thus, this dissertation examines how public art is integrated with the design of urban space and places public art within the context of the social production of the built environment.

But to fully comprehend public art, it must be situated within larger macro-level processes and socio-political contexts. Since public art is a part of the urban landscape, I must examine how the urban landscape is produced by placing public art within relevant social scientific approaches to the urban environment. From there, it is possible to locate public art more concretely within urban processes and its relationship to space. In the case of the research site, SRP, there is a plan to develop a so-called under-utilized urban space, creating a waterfront park, in which public art is just one part. A former site of industry, the land along the banks of the Schuylkill River has been slowly acquired by the City of Philadelphia and re-zoned for recreation. While some of this area has been developed, much of it has not and simply “waits” for the investment of capital. As the industrial might of contemporary cities wanes, such as the erosion of industry along the Schuylkill River, new strategies are explored and implemented that have consequences in space. The proposed development of SRP is just such a strategy.

The Research Site and Urban Context

The Schuylkill neighborhood parallels the Schuylkill River from about Locust Street to the north and Fitzwater Street to the south. The Schuylkill River shore creates its western boundary, while 24th Street, between Bainbridge and Locust Streets, serves as the neighborhood’s eastern border. Grays Ferry Avenue, originating at an angle at South and 23rd Streets and leading southwest, parallels the Schuylkill River, following its elbow-like bend. Grays Ferry Avenue also serves as the neighborhood’s eastern border since

it logically follows the sinuous river rather than the existing street-grid pattern. SRP, as it currently exists, begins at about Pine Street and continues to Spruce Street, paralleling the Schuylkill River. The development plan is to extend the park north to the Philadelphia Museum of Art at Spring Garden Streets, linking Center City with the Fairmount Park bike path. Thus, a river esplanade will be created, complete with landscaping, public gathering areas, public art, and, eventually, private concessions (see Figures 1, 2, and 3, below).

The neighborhood to the south and east of the park was originally settled by Irish immigrants in the middle 19th century—a distinct river-oriented settlement that combined workplace and residence in close proximity. Vestiges of the Irish community, which formed in the 1830s, remain as the area was once the center of Irish ethnic segregation and the largest community of Irish in the city (Clark 1980; Burstein 1981). What began as a port facility in the early 19th century, became later a center of manufacturing, before turning into a transportation hub for the great department stores around World War I.

What currently constitutes SRP was created fairly recently—in the late 1970s. Originally the site of coal distribution, cattle slaughter, and many kinds of manufacturing, the Schuylkill River banks, from about South Street to the falls at the Water Works, near the Philadelphia Museum of Art, were industrially active, although the site of horrendous environmental exploitation, until after World War II. Plans to transform the river banks were first articulated by John Fredrick Lewis in 1924, who later provided funding for the creation of a Center City Plan of which SRP figured prominently. During the 1960s, Philadelphia acquired land purchased from industrial landowners, or by the Redevelopment Authority through eminent domain, and, over time, from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, community volunteers worked closely with government officials and landscape architects in planning and developing parts of the park. In 1992, the era of development by volunteerism ended when community resident, John Randolph, established the Schuylkill River Development Council (SRDC), a private, non-profit, development corporation, whose goal was to orchestrate and finish the development of the park.

Current users of the already-developed section of the park are white local residents from the surrounding neighborhood who walk their dogs in the park and tend plots in the community garden, during

warmer months. During summer days, white male sunbathers can often be seen lying on the grassy areas of the park. Local residents assume these men are gay. The basketball courts are used by African American youth and young adults who live a number of blocks away in neighborhoods to the south of South Street. White youth from both the vestigial Irish ethnic community and more affluent Center City, can often be seen playing with African American youth—integrated games are much more common than they were in the past when Irish youth “owned” the park in the late 1970s and early 80s. The undeveloped sector of the park is a more marginal space, attracting homeless people, gay cruisers, and fisherman. Areas used by gay men are further differentiated by race. Homeless people have been observed living in shelters in the open space near Locust Street, as well in more clandestine quarters underneath the Walnut and Market Street bridges. Occasionally, mountain bikers, usually white males, can be seen using the trails that unofficially connect the park with the Fairmount Park bike path.

There are a number of different visions regarding the development of SRP, both historical and contemporary. Edmund Bacon’s original Center City Plan, made public in 1964, called for the development of high-rise apartments towers for moderate and high income tenants sited at the terminus of Lombard Street on the Schuylkill River banks (27th and Lombard Streets)—similar to the I.M. Pei Towers built in Society Hill during the redevelopment of that neighborhood. Neighborhood residents welcomed Bacon’s plan and used it as the alternative development scheme when Bell Telephone began planning to develop the site for a large telecommunications switching station in the early 1970s. They argued that the new residences would breathe life into the park. The apartment buildings never materialized, but the Bell building did. The latest vision for developing SRP, as proposed by SRDC, includes, landscaping, public art, a riverfront esplanade, boat, bike and skate rental facilities, as well as restaurants and other concessions. Tourism and entertainment representatives envision much more elaborated “landscapes of consumption,” to borrow a term from Sharon Zukin (1995 and 1996), that include a hotel and entertainment facilities. Neighborhood residents fear that their quality of life will be threatened by new development—especially traffic and large amounts of people entering SRP and its neighborhood from out of town. Thus, while we can only speculate on the manner in which the development of SRP will proceed, people’s hopes and fears

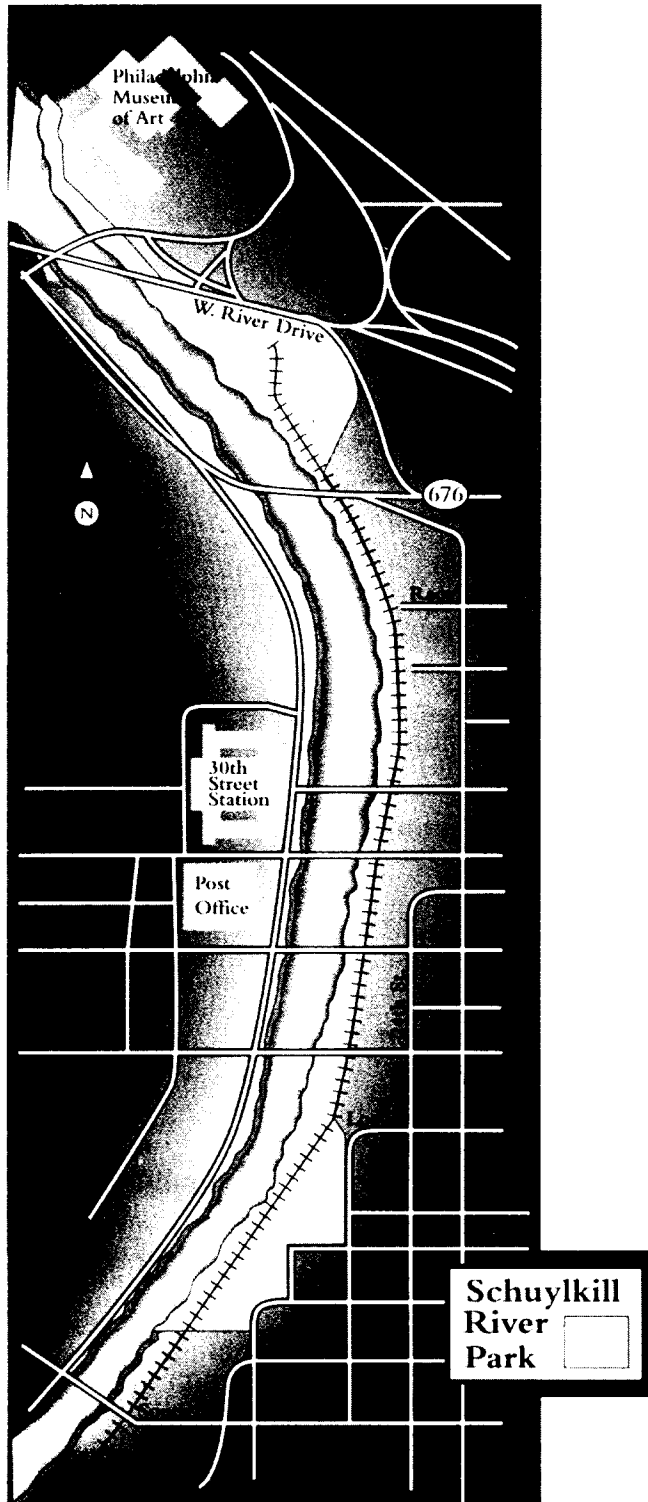


Figure 1. Schuylkill River Park

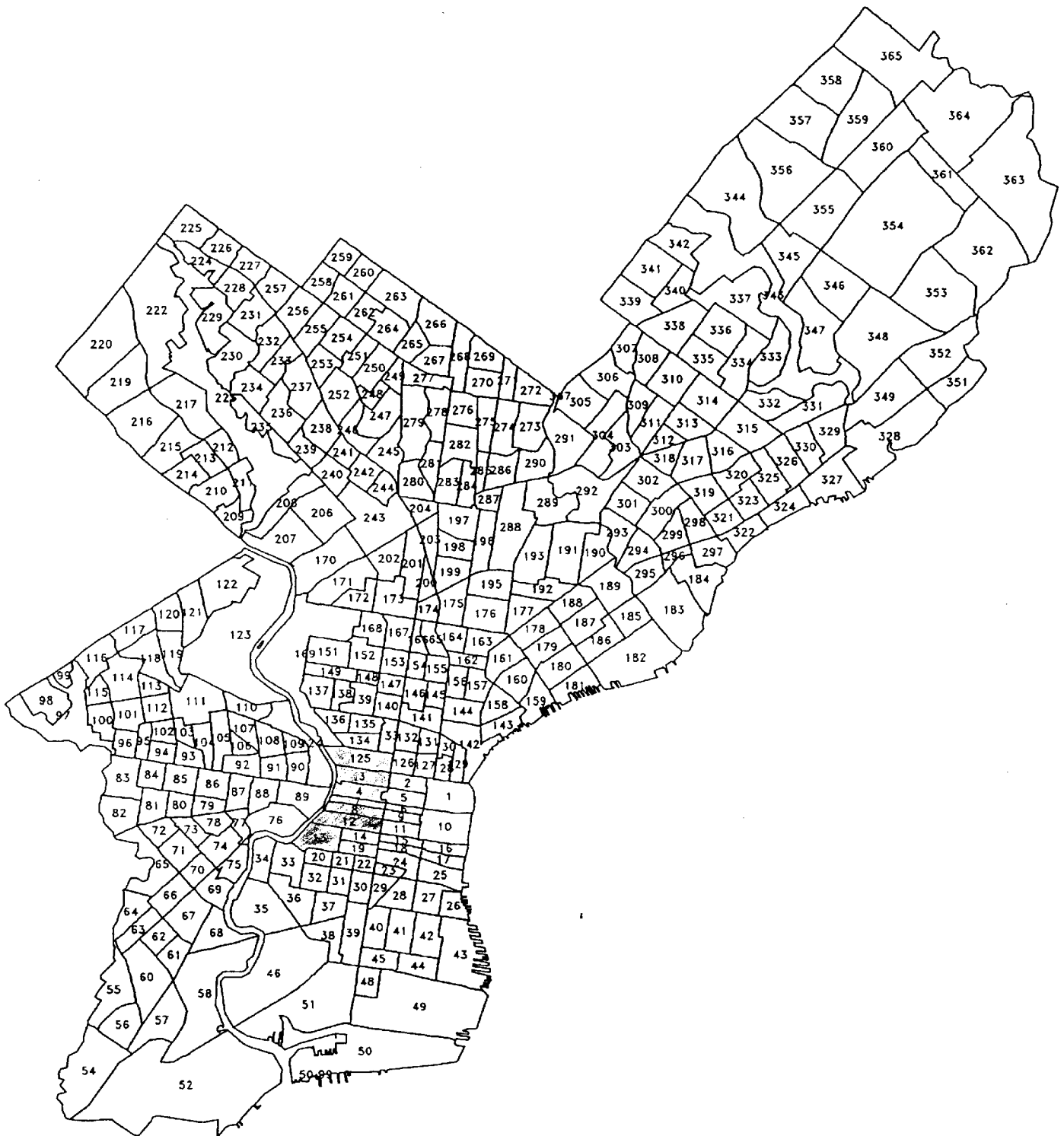


Figure 2. City of Philadelphia census tracts with Schuylkill River Park tracts outlined and shaded

regarding the outcome of the park have been articulated at various moments in time, including the present, and can be ascertained through ethnographic analysis.

The contemporary Philadelphia urban context must also be taken into account in understanding the development scenario for SRP and the directions that it may take. SRP has been envisioned by some, including, of course, SRDC, but also the Pennsylvania Economy League and the Greater Philadelphia Tourism and Marketing Corporation, as an important strategy in economically developing Center City, Philadelphia. Despite obstacles that limit the possibilities for economic growth including poor relative location (Washington D.C. and New York are the mid-Atlantic region's primary transportation hubs), lack of a clearly defined region in which to serve, competition with neighboring cities for tourist dollars, and difficulty in forging the public-private partnerships necessary for investment in the city (Goode and Schneider 1994), the recent economic "boom" and the leadership of former Mayor Edward Rendell has forged some optimism for the city. This is especially pronounced in bricks-and-mortar development with over thirty major projects (including SRP), totaling over one billion dollars in construction costs, underway or complete since 1997 (Ferrick 1997). The tourism and convention industries have also been making headway, not only due to the construction and renovation of buildings for hotels and the expansion of the Convention Center, but because of marketing campaigns, as well. In addition, while most of Philadelphia has been suffering steady population decline, Center City's population has been increasing (Gorenstein 1998). For the first time in at least a decade, there are waiting lists for Center City apartments. Since 1998, five former office or industrial buildings have been converted for residential use and five more are planned for conversion (Gorenstein 1998). A former industrial building, for example, was recently renovated as a luxury apartment building near SRP.

Contributions to Anthropology and Theoretical Background

The chief contribution this dissertation makes to anthropology is within anthropological studies of the built environment—the study of the symbolic and social production of urban space and planning (Lawrence and Low 1990; Low 1999). In particular, my study of the public art selection process and development of a Philadelphia urban park focuses on the social production of space, an area that Lawrence and Low argue is the most promising since it does not take the larger context of social institutions and

history for granted (1990: 492). While it is impossible to analyze the actual built environment of SRP, including public art, since the park is still in the planning stages, it is possible to extrapolate from my experience in working on the public art advisory committee, in interviewing local residents, in attending various meetings, etc., the direction development in the park might take and the manner in which SRP's built environment might appear. In focusing on public art and the development plan for an urban Philadelphia waterfront park, I show how public art and urban development are inextricably linked. I also examine how change in the Philadelphia urban economy has direct consequences in the way landscapes are developed—former industrial landscapes are supplanted by landscapes that are purported to offer leisure-based services to both Philadelphians, as well as tourists.

Through my role on a public art advisory committee, which permitted access to the ways in which a Philadelphia development corporation envisions the development of a park, and the ethnographic investigation of how local residents view that development, I elucidate the contested nature of urban space. This contributes to the ethnography of conflict over planning practices that anthropologists such as Lisa Peattie (1987) have undertaken in Third World Latin American contexts. I offer a North American urban case study. Like Peattie's, my study of the multiple interests involved in the development process resonates within and contributes to both urban anthropology and the anthropology of the built environment.

My analysis of the intersection of public art and urban development of SRP adds to the growing discussion of the postindustrial city within urban anthropology, particularly how cities repackage or “imagineer” themselves in the wake of economic changes (Rutheiser 1996 and 1999). As the industrial base of major cities such as Philadelphia declines, they must redefine and restructure themselves economically to stay viable. The development of SRP is one example of the ways in which cities create new opportunities in order to survive. SRDC seeks to develop a former industrial riverfront for recreation, tourism and consumption, integrating public art and landscape design in the process, as a means to economically revitalize Center City, Philadelphia. In focusing on the development of a contemporary Philadelphia riverfront park, I contribute to the anthropological literature on the revitalization of waterfronts as sites of tourist destination and leisure, undertaken by urban anthropologist R. Timothy Sieber, who has focused on Boston (Sieber 1991 and 1993).

The “imagineering” of cities implies both a shaping of images, as well as “real” built forms. Urban anthropologist Charles Rutheiser uses this term—a term he appropriates from Walt Disney—to describe the influence of the programmed, totalizing environments of Disney theme parks on urban space, as well as to elucidate “the activities of all of those cultural producers who create the discursive fields in which the practice of urban redevelopment and revitalization are conceptualized, discussed, and turned into facts on the ground” (1999: 322). Rutheiser applies the imagineering concept to Atlanta’s quest for a new identity surrounding the 1996 Olympics. My attention to the rhetoric of Philadelphia city boosters such as the SRDC, the Pennsylvania Economy League, the Greater Philadelphia Tourism and Marketing Corporation (gleaned from an SRDC sponsored symposium entitled “Spotlight on the Schuylkill III” that I attended as a public art advisory committee member), other individuals in the tourism trade, and *Philadelphia Inquirer* articles focusing on the rebirth of Philadelphia during the 1990s, demonstrates the viability of Rutheiser’s examination of the discursive image of the ascendant city and contributes to this literature.

While Sieber addresses the effects of the postindustrial economy on waterfronts in particular, urban sociologist Sharon Zukin examines its wider urban ramifications which precipitate “landscapes of consumption” and “symbolic economies” (1995 and 1996). While Zukin may not be an anthropologist, she is relevant to the discipline for her interest in the impact that social and economic change has on cities, symbolic examinations of urban space, and her use of ethnography in studying the urban. Zukin, utilizing a hybrid framework that fuses postmodern theory’s emphasis on representation with Marxist political economy, articulates a relationship between images and the production of urban space (Zukin 1995 and 1996). Her “landscape of consumption” is driven by what she calls a “symbolic economy” in which museum exhibitions, public art, gourmet food, and the notion of lifestyle marketing play increasingly important roles in urban economies. Similarly, Christine Boyer investigates the industrial edges of our cities which have recently been redeveloped for tourism and consumption (Boyer 1994). In examining the rhetoric of Philadelphia city boosters at SRDC’s “Spotlight on the Schuylkill III” conference, in which SRP’s development was envisioned as a leisure landscape aimed at tourists that included martini/cigar bars, hotels, an entertainment center, and restaurants, Zukin’s arguments prove highly resonant. My research

adds to the growing interest within urban studies, including anthropology, on the landscape of the postindustrial city.

My dissertation also exemplifies the continued relevance of Laura Nader's call, over thirty years ago, for anthropologists to "study up," that is, to make sense of the "facelessness of a bureaucratic society" in which decisions are made by elites behind the closed doors of power that direct "the everyday aspects of our lives" (Nader 1974: 288). In my case, the elites are the public art advisory committee, the Philadelphia development corporation administering this committee, and the urban boosters in both the local government and private tourism industry. The "everyday aspects of our lives" are the taken-for-granted processes of a park's development and public art selection. As I will argue in the forthcoming pages, SRDC's "facelessness"—its failure to inform and interact with neighborhood residents regarding public art and development of SRP, its failure to offer residents a voice—stands in even greater relief to the far-away corporations and large-scale industries that Nader asked anthropologists to investigate since SRDC had no reason to ignore people literally on its doorstep. The cliché, "out of sight out of mind" may apply to the manner in which consumers and the body politic are envisioned by corporations and government, but in the development of a local park by an organization *in the neighborhood*, it remains a poor excuse. By sitting on a public art advisory committee and examining the public art process of a Philadelphia development corporation, I contribute to the idea of "studying up," albeit in a more intimate context.

Finally, my research contributes to the anthropology/sociology of art. I take Howard Becker's notion of art worlds as my point of departure. In *Art Worlds*, Becker examines art as a collective activity, a process by which the complexity of a cooperative network makes art happen. In his sociological approach, art is a multi-authored product, and the interest for social scientists is not the work of art itself, but the art world that brings it into being in the first place (1982). As a member of a public art advisory committee, I had the opportunity to observe and participate within a public art world, and this dissertation reflects not so much an analysis of works of art, but an analysis of the events behind the "closed doors of bureaucracy"—before the art comes into fruition. This was the result of practical reasons as well: the public art projects for Schuylkill River Park (SRP) have yet to be created or installed.

Dissertation Organization and Summary

I begin by stepping away from the research site and into the theoretical context that best frames the development of SRP. In Chapter 2, I examine theoretical contributions within a number of disciplines regarding the built environment—some of which I have already discussed in the section above on contributions to anthropology and theoretical background. While the meaning of SRP's built environment is impossible to ascertain as the park has yet to be developed, I can still analyze the dynamics, processes, and discourses which converge in forming an image of what the park might look like. Explorations of the social production of the built environment have been developed by thinkers who wish to focus on the social, political, and economic forces that produce that environment, and, conversely, the impact of the socially produced environment on social action (Lawrence and Low 1990: 342). Much of the recent work within this area is technically outside the field of anthropology, in such disciplines as geography, sociology, and even philosophy. However, Lisa Peattie's study of the planning process in Ciudad Guayana (1987) is a nascent example of the anthropological interest in the social production of space. David Harvey's geographical Marxism (1985 and 1989); Foucaultian studies of power, space, and disciplinary technologies (1975 and 1986); and Lefebvrian social-spatial dialectics (1976, 1979, and 1991) informs the theoretical terrain. Setha Low (1999) borrows from these conceptual frameworks and offers an ethnographic component. Sharon Zukin (1995 and 1996), Christine Boyer (1994), and R. Timothy Sieber (1991 and 1993) connect contemporary urban landscapes to changes in the urban economy. They contribute to my research by enabling me to frame the development of SRP within the shift from the industrial to a service-based economy and the ramifications of this shift on the built environment.

Chapter 3 provides further context to my research by critically examining the field of public art over the last thirty years, with special attention paid to public art and redevelopment and the proximity of the word "public" to the word "art." Since the 1960s, works of contemporary art have increasingly left the hallowed halls of the museum and have become present in urban areas: in city centers, on or near government buildings, in corporate plazas, parks, schools, hospitals, and public transit stations, among other places. With urban renewal came the realization that International Style architecture, devoid of ornamentation, created barren urban landscapes (von Moschzisker 1958). Percent-for-art programs were

developed to encourage both private and public development to set aside usually one percent of a building's budget for art, counterbalancing the perceived ugliness of the environment. According to some critics, percent-for-art programs, due to labyrinthine bureaucracy and decisions made by committees that "water down" potentially interesting artistic ideas, have created impotent public art (Phillips 1988). Public art is often commissioned by private developers and is complicit in repressive urban planning strategies, either endorsing irresponsible development and community displacement, or serving as a diversion, distracting attention away from a contentious site (Deutsche 1996b; Phillips 1988). The idea that public art plays the role of a public relations agent for redevelopment, underscores the ideological ramifications of the term "public art." The "public" of public art is an ideological construction, an imagined community realized in order to satisfy the needs of particular interests.

However, to portray public art as a monolithic entity that is in collusion with capitalistic urban planning practices is to misrepresent a complex and contradictory practice. Recently, those with more critical attitudes have entered the discourse. Within the last ten years, the "public" has come under scrutiny and is now being conceived by some as a negotiation dependent on a community's definition of itself rather than a static concept applied from without (Lacy 1995). Public art is therefore conceived in terms of a process by which artists and a participatory audience come together and create a public. Two recent projects are explored in Chapter 3 which utilize this approach, "Culture in Action," a 1993 Chicago public art project, and "New Land Marks," an ongoing public art project developed in Philadelphia by the Fairmount Park Art Association. I conclude with the observation that public art in SRP lies between the extremes of the ideology of private development, related in the first half of the chapter, and the hopes of a community and site-sensitive public art, discussed in the latter section of the chapter. The arguments presented in Chapter 3 highlight the relationship of the production of urban space to the production of public art, contextualizing public art within wider development strategies. As I will argue in Chapters 5 and 6, one of the chief flaws of the development and public art process in SRP has been the underexploration of community. In these chapters I offer an ethnographic exploration of the different community interests of the SRP neighborhood, as well as a projection regarding the imagined communities that SRDC sees as potential users of the park.

Before such issues are related, however, background must be provided on the urban historical context of Philadelphia. Chapter 4 brings us closer to the research site by examining three interconnected topics: the history of Philadelphia's built environment, the redevelopment of that environment at critical moments in time, and how public art is integrated within these issues. Since both public art installation and the latest proposed phase of development in SRP have not yet occurred, we need to also look at the contemporary economic and built environment context in order to see what direction development in the park might take. Thus, a contemporary urban context is provided as well. Chapter 4 relates a very abbreviated history of the integration of public art and urban development in Philadelphia; examines economic reasons for industrial decline and the strategies manifested within the built environment to overcome these hardships; and presents contemporary solutions, located within bricks-and-mortar development, but also tourism, for example, to combat the problems Philadelphia faces into the 21st century. This chapter also provides contemporary context that serves as important background in understanding the development of SRP and the possible directions it may take

Chapter 5 provides context on the neighborhood in which SRP is situated and the development of the park from the 1970s to the present. It draws from historical resources and ethnographic research—mainly participant observation through my public art advisory committee role and interviews with neighborhood residents. Information gathered by attending SRDC's "Spotlight on the Schuylkill III" symposium also forms some of the basis of the research related in this chapter. Chapter 5 not only provides important site context, but an overview of the different visions regarding the development of the park.

Chapter 6 examines the public art process utilized to select projects for SRP. As a member of the public art advisory committee, I was heavily involved. This chapter draws from my position as a participant observer, and presents an analysis of the events leading to the selection of public art. The public art plan was implemented in two phases by the advisory committee, which was composed of representatives from SRDC, the Delta Group (a landscape architecture firm, whose director drafted a masterplan for the park in 1967), and community leaders and representatives from the Philadelphia arts community. Independent curator and neighborhood resident, Julie Courtney, directed the public art selection process. The role of SRDC, through the guidance of Courtney, was to oversee the project, participate in outreach to

communities, assist in the selection of artists, and to present the art plan to the community adjacent to the park and to the public at large. Unfortunately, the latter never happened and the neighboring communities have had little or no input in the public art process nor in the overall development plan. The public art selection process provides an opportunity to analyze the ways in which arts professionals and planners articulate, or fail to articulate the role of art in public space, the community for public art, and the nature of the selection process itself. I also offer an elucidation of the public art selection process as collective activity using Becker's art world model (1982). Finally, Chapter 6 outlines the proposals offered by the selected artists for the park: Mierle Laderman Ukeles and the collaborative team of Stacy Levy and Winifred Lutz.

In the conclusion, I offer a synopsis of the central points of my argument: public art must be contextualized within wider urban processes, including how urban redevelopment (and by extension, public art) is used as a tool to economically revitalize ailing urban centers; the public art process is an under-recognized opportunity for ethnographic analysis that reveals important aspects of the role art plays in the creation of urban space; and the community was underexplored in the public art and development process of SRP. I also discuss that despite the problems in SRDC's lack of attention to the community of local residents in the public art and development process, the artists propose projects that have the potential to engage community. However, the process of designing the development and public art plan for SRP still should more adequately allow for the input of community members. Ethnography offers a methodology that would allow SRDC to better design and create a space by doing just this: accessing the advice of urban dwellers—the "real" people on the ground.

Autobiography and Methodology

The invitation on to the public art advisory committee was by chance, but also dovetails with my interest in public art, as well as my knowledge of contemporary art in general and membership in the Philadelphia art community. Having completed my comprehensive exams in early December 1995, I attended an annual holiday party at the Fabric Workshop and Museum, a Philadelphia art center, in celebration of my success. The party is renowned for its festive atmosphere, abundant food, and attendance by Philadelphia art world players up and down the hierarchy from museum directors to emerging artists.

Towards the end of the evening, I had a conversation with Julie Courtney, an independent curator whom I knew from my experience organizing events and exhibitions in conjunction with a John Cage exhibition I coordinated for the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a previous employer. Courtney informed me that she was developing an advisory committee in order to select public art for SRP. I mentioned to her that I was still at a loss for a dissertation topic and this seemed like a strong possibility. A few weeks later, I received a formal invitation in the mail, and I agreed.

While this account demonstrates the relevance of the clichés “it’s who you know” and “being in the right place at the right time,” my interest in contemporary art had been ongoing for quite some time and logically leads to undertaking a dissertation on public art. In my graduate studies in Temple University’s Anthropology of Visual Communication program, I had focused on the socio-political context of museum exhibitions. In particular, I studied how artists used and critiqued the museum and spaces of exhibition as the primary subject in the creation of their art. I wrote a number of papers on Fred Wilson’s 1992 installation “Mining the Museum,” at the Maryland Historical Society, in which a small, white-identified history museum invited an African-American artist to use the museum’s collection to explore the museum’s exclusionary and racist history. Although a laudable project, “Mining the Museum” still relied on the museum experience, an experience alien to the very audience it sought to entice. In one of my comprehensive exam essays, I argued that the next logical step in developing new audiences for art would be to dispense with the museum and bring the art experience into those very neighborhoods that are economically, culturally, and geographically removed from museums. What I argued for was a community initiated public art—a kind of art that I saw developing in such projects as “Culture in Action” (Jacob 1995a). This Chicago-based public art project brought activist artists into direct partnership with community members who had had little if any contact with contemporary art and attempted to expand the role of audience from spectator to participant. My knowledge of “Culture in Action” influenced the direction I thought public art should take in SRP, despite Julie Courtney’s assertion that the Schuylkill project was not a community activated public art program. Thus, my interest in the social, political, and urban context of public art is not far a field from my interest in the institutional context of contemporary art.

Aside from my academic interest in contemporary art, I have been an art museum professional since 1990. At the Philadelphia Museum of Art, I was a curatorial assistant in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art. During my tenure as a graduate anthropology student, I continued my affiliation with that institution as an exhibition coordinator for the John Cage exhibition “Rolywholyover A Circus.” In February 1997, I was hired as a curatorial assistant at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Philadelphia, believing that taking a familiar position would mean more time and energy to devote to my dissertation. I was wrong. The position quickly evolved into a one requiring more responsibility (I must admit that part of my professional growth at ICA was due to my own initiative; however, it was also due to the needs of an institution in fiscal crisis. As the then director asked me, “Alex, please devise an exhibition for under \$5 thousand” [most ICA exhibitions cost between \$25 and \$50 thousand dollars]). Soon I was promoted to assistant curator and finally associate curator. For the first time in my museum career, I was curating art exhibitions of my own choosing. My interest in outdoor, so-called public art, was fertilized by my experience on the SRP advisory committee, although my role on the advisory committee for SRP was, for the most part, over by the time I took the job at ICA. Public art by committee with the attendant politics, snail-paced decision making process, requirements for large sums of money to ensure the completion of the art, expanded time frames for the securing of permits to begin work, etc., made “official” public art seem boring and ineffective to me. I gravitated instead to more grass roots versions of public art, such as graffiti, wheatpasted posters, and stickers. In a move that could be read as co-opting subcultural expression, I organized an exhibition entitled “Sticker Shock” which featured artists’ stickers—self-adhesive two dimensional art works—that, for the most part, were intended to be viewed outdoors on road signs, store windows, buildings, bikes, car bumpers, and skateboards. At ICA, they were applied to the walls. About a one and one half years later, I curated an exhibition “Indelible Market” which featured the work of three graffiti writers, whose work can be seen as “unofficial” public art. That exhibition was part of a collaboration among ICA and two community arts organization, entitled *Wall Power*. “Indelible Market” featured wall murals, a faux bodega, or urban corner store, complete with signage and products customized by the artists, and outdoor billboards, “advertising” what was for “sale” inside the ICA. My interest in the intersection of the urban economic, social and political spheres, which matured during the writing of my

dissertation and my exposure to Sharon Zukin's work on the symbolic economy and the landscape of consumption, prompted me to ask Zukin to write an essay for the *Wall Power* catalogue on billboards, entitled "Billboards are Public Art in the Money Economy." This information is important because it shows the "traffic" between my academic and "hands-on" curatorial endeavors. They are not mutually exclusive. I wrote much of my dissertation while employed full-time at ICA, but the difficulty of completing the project under these circumstances, coupled with the institutional and personal crises precipitated by the hiring of a new director, caused me to resign from my position.

Thus, my academic background in the study of contemporary art and my museum experience make me particularly suited to an ethnographic investigation of the public art selection process for SRP. However, my participation on the committee to select art for a park a few blocks from my home, for a development council literally across the street from where I live, raises important issues regarding insider anthropology (also called auto-anthropology, native anthropology, and indigenous anthropology). "Park neighbor," "neighborhood resident," "local art world member" all refer to my status as one well outfitted for the task of public art advisor. Nonetheless, each signifier of insider status proves confounding. Simply because I live near the park and across from the development corporation guiding both the development and public art process for the park does not necessarily imply insider qualification. Before my tenure on the committee, I had little knowledge of what the storefront business did across the street. For all I knew, it was a law office or small architectural firm. SRDC does not have a high profile in the neighborhood—the office does not announce itself as such through bold signage. In fact, there is only a small laser printer outputted sign taped to the window, visible only when scrutinized at close range. Similarly, my status as a local resident and park neighbor do not necessarily indicate that I am a frequent visitor to the park. Although I live five blocks away, I seldom use the park and only began visiting it more often once I began working on my dissertation. Finally, as a member of the Philadelphia art community, having worked at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, served as associate curator of ICA, guest curated exhibitions at other venues, and sat on an advisory committee for a small, non-profit art gallery, I still had no hands-on experience in public art. I may have already been familiar with SRP, may have had "book" knowledge of public art, and may have been acquainted with some of the committee members, but gaining access to local residents, familiarizing

myself with who might be a good informant, in short, conducting ethnography, was probably not very much different than the socio-cultural navigations of information gathering in “non-native” fieldwork contexts. The hair splitting about how one designates insider status has been a topic of discussion within insider anthropology, as I have indicated by problematizing my own insider status (see also Aguilar 1981 and Jones 1970). However, the comfort level endemic to conducting fieldwork in my own city must be nonetheless still be emphasized. As a Philadelphia resident since 1988, I have extensive knowledge of the area. There was no lag time in assuming my role as an anthropologist in Philadelphia. I had already arrived and was acclimated to my environment. I had some knowledge of my fellow committee members. I was familiar with the park. I would have no trouble finding the addresses of the various places where we would conduct our meetings. The anxiety of doing ethnography in a foreign culture was simply not a part of my experience.

This dissertation attempts to both contextualize public art within larger urban processes *and* use public art as a way of revealing those processes. Despite the problems related above in terms of what designates one as an insider, insider status on a number of levels facilitated my research: neighborhood residency in close proximity to the development site, my position on a public art advisory committee, and specialization in the field of contemporary art. Participant observation in this case was rich, comprehensive, and ongoing as knowledge of the site, neighborhood, and fellow advisory committee members had been gained over a number of years by living in Philadelphia as an arts professional. The artist collaborative team of Stacy Levy and Winifred Lutz, who were selected to create a project for SRP by the SRDC, have both exhibited at ICA, where I was employed from 1997-2000, and I have had the opportunity to work closely with Stacy Levy, as I assisted in curating her exhibition at ICA. While I was not involved in her exhibition at ICA, I am familiar with Winifred Lutz’s art, and worked as a guest juror for a mock public art competition in her undergraduate sculpture course at Tyler School of Art, Temple University, and have guest lectured for her undergraduate sculpture seminar on one other occasion.

The research for this dissertation was conducted through my experience as a public art advisory committee member for SRDC by attending a total of eleven meetings; eight were plenary sessions, three were either subcommittee meetings or special park tours. Meetings attendance began in January 1996 and

concluded in December 1996. I also attended a symposium, "Spotlight on the Schuylkill III," organized by SRDC to precipitate awareness of the development of the Schuylkill River and to provide a forum for ideas regarding development. This symposium, which took place in October 1996, was extremely important for my research as it provided the discursive context for the development of SRP, a context that was never provided in the public art advisory committee meetings. In addition, I attended two artist presentations and one Philadelphia artist informational meeting (designed to inform the local artist community about the public art competition for SRP). Although the advisory committee consisted of a total of twenty-five people (excluding John Randolph, executive director of SRDC, Julie Courtney, director of the public art program for SRP, and John Collins, SRP landscape architect) only about eight people, myself excluded, regularly attended meetings. I interviewed Randolph, Courtney, and Collins, as well as four out of the eight committee members. I also interviewed the artists Stacy Levy and Winifred Lutz, who were selected to create a collaborative project for SRP. Interviews were conducted in the winter of 1999-2000 and summer 2000.

I interviewed a total of seven local residents (nine if I also include the one advisory committee member and Julie Courtney, who both live in the neighborhood). While the sample number may be small, these informants were of "high quality," either in terms of their ongoing knowledge of the development of SRP, previous experience in volunteer service in developing the park, positions of power on neighborhood associations, political activism in the park, or tips regarding who might be a more knowledgeable informant than they. Of the seven residents I only knew one of them previously. I employed what Setha Low has termed a "snowballing" sampling technique, in which an informant would refer me to another person who would be appropriate to talk to (Low 1997: 62). Five of the interviews with local residents took place in their homes, one took place at a restaurant and one at the informant's place of work. Access was surprisingly simple, once I determined who to talk to. People seemingly had no reservations inviting a stranger who had called them on the telephone into their homes and who would tape record their conversation. I was also surprised with the swiftness in which people returned my phone calls. Interviews with committee members, local residents, and artists, were extensive encounters that lasted from approximately one and one half to three hours. These interviews were conducted in winter 1999 through

summer 2000 and were tape recorded. I visited the park on numerous occasions while conducting fieldwork in order to observe who used it. I had one informal discussion/interview with a group of men of Irish descent who congregate near the southern entrance to the park on summer and early fall evenings; this was not tape recorded. In order to protect local residents, I have invented fictitious names. However, since the names and job titles of the SRDC public art advisory committee are public knowledge, their names remain unchanged.

Aside from the myriad academic-oriented secondary sources from anthropology, urban sociology, urban theory, geography, and art history, newspaper and magazine articles charting the development of SRP over the past thirty years were provided by an extremely helpful informant, Bill Hostetter, who was a chief player in the initial development of SRP. Other secondary sources include *Philadelphia Inquirer* articles which followed the “renaissance” of Philadelphia during the tenure of Mayor Edward Rendell, including the construction of hotels, the expansion of the Convention Center, rent increases, and the influx of new residents into Center City. Census information from 1990 was utilized to ascertain the economic and demographic status of households bordering, or in close proximity to the research site.