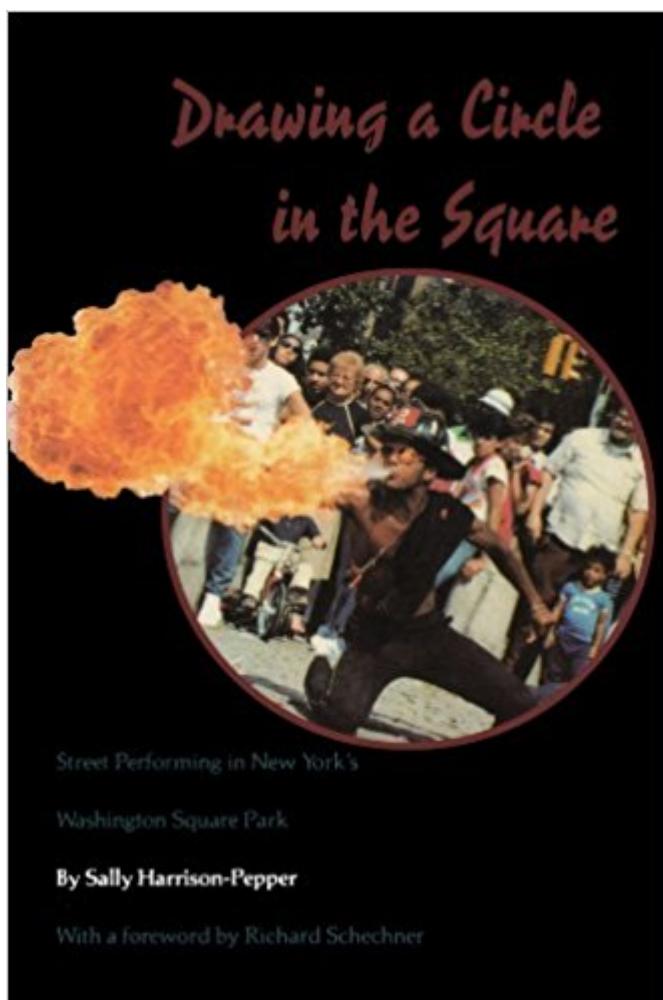


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# Drawing A Circle In The Square: Street Performing In New York's Washington Square Park



## **Synopsis**

This gratifying study of a phenomenon that has imprinted itself upon the folklore of big-city life, is a joyful book focusing upon the street performers in Washington Square Park in New York City. While documenting the complex expressions of street performance in a specific outdoor environment over a period of four years, Drawing a Circle in a Square gives a broad examination to the relationship between outdoor performance and urban culture. In this book we learn that most American cities prohibit street performance, charging such entertainers with vagrancy or soliciting, the performer--joyfully, cautiously, heroically--persists. On sidewalks throughout the country, in theaters reduced to their bare essentials, the performer juggles, blows fire, performs magic, and tells jokes, appealing both to our sense of humor and to our longing for a moment of spontaneity in our city--structured lives. Drawing a Circle in a Square is the first scholarly documentation and analysis of street performance. Based primarily upon original research, it makes a contribution that is as much toward a particular subject. Promoting the study of performance as an important and valuable vehicle for inter-disciplinary research and thought, it is a model of the kinds of research being developed in the emerging field of performance studies.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

A scholarly spotlight focused on the performers who enliven the sidewalks of New York

The very idea of this book fascinated me: analyzing street performers to gain insight into the nature

of human performance in other venues. I'd long revered the work of street performers - watching the likes of Butterfly Man in San Francisco, for example - as they engaged their audiences in ways seldom seen on the indoor platform stage. But it took Harrison-Pepper's tome to help me understand intellectually what I had admired viscerally. Her analysis of the street performers in New York's Washington Square Park, conducted over a stretch of four years, captured my imagination and elevated my own sense of what it takes to truly make performances connect. I loved her portrayals of Mitchell Cohen, Charlie Barnett, Chang, the Millses, and the venerable Tony Vera. There is much to be learned from their performances about acting spontaneously and creating sociable environments (from "found space"). Many people would find their jobs enriched if they were to view their work as street theatre; many designers - from web site developers and trade show exhibitors to mall developers and retail store managers - would benefit from understanding Harrison-Pepper's analysis of Star, Funnel, Spiral, and Ring design elements. If you want to be a better performer, you'd do well to read this book.

I came to work Washington Square Park a year after this book was published and it was one of the greatest thrills of my life. This book captures the subtle nuances and politics of the "Carneige Hall" of street performing. The author really got to know the performers and was there long enough to learn what is really happening in this amazing space. I came to know many of the performers in this book and it was a thrill to learn more about their past and inspiration that brought them to this place. Street performing is the ultimate test for any performer. It makes you better by sheer need. I was lucky enough to work the circle in the fountain and will always cherish that memory and the book that brought it all back so vividly. [...]

Harrison-Pepper's descriptions of the performances and players of Washington Square are top-rate, but it's with her analysis of street performance that she really shines. She explains "the street as stage", how the script of such performances is written between the performer and the audience, and how they turn "city space" into "theater place". I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to be a street performer, wants to understand street theatre, or who ever watches such performances and wants to do so from a knowing perspective. And, perhaps amazingly, what Harrison-Pepper writes about has wonderful applications to business. So, whether you're in the business of theatre or the theatre of business, read this book!

Though the book is hopelessly outdated and the author clearly does not write for people outside of

academic and sociological circles, Pepper does come up with some unique insights about street performers and impromptu theater. I definitely saw Washington Square Park differently after reading this.

I tried so hard to enjoy this book, but was unable to forgive the author for pretentious overanalysis of street performance. Harrison -Pepper ignores the more juicy issues of class and economics to give us yet another pedantic discourse on the virtues of breaking down the fourth wall.

My name is Peter Shub. I appear throughout the book beginning already on page 1. Was a long time ago that I was a street performer. Was wonderful training and preparation for what followed as a theatre career. Now I am in Germany and hope that Sally finds me again. Could lead to another book...a comicbook.

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