This article addresses the disjunctions that emerge between planning, design, and praxis in the creation and sustaining of urban public spaces. Considering the roles of policy makers, planners, implementers, and urban dwellers, I compare the evolution and use of two public spaces in a gentrifying region of Brooklyn, New York. The Naval Cemetery Landscape, which opened to the public in May of 2015, is the result a collaboration among several institutions to create an “open space, sacred place” for urban residents to commune with nature. Ensconced in a corner of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the former cemetery is a meticulously designed refuge for native flora, welcoming passersby who, for the most part, arrive via the bike trail adjacent to the park. Less than a mile and a half away, Grand Ferry Park is a minimally designed space perched on the shore of the East River, with a view of Manhattan and the Williamsburg Bridge. The diverse population that frequents the Ferry Park engages with nature in the ways expected, but much less often observed, in the Cemetery Landscape. In spite of the overlapping demographic
characteristics of the neighborhoods surrounding the parks, the publics that frequent the spaces are vastly different. Interviews with stakeholders, ethnographic observation, and analysis of the respective histories and negotiations surrounding the spaces, are used to evaluate accessibility, use, and the dynamics and relations that evolve in these sites. The comparison of the two parks highlights the ways in which space and its use is mediated by urban institutions and organizations that profess alignment with the democratization of access to nature and public space, and yet bolster inequality in their planning and implementation practices.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Denise Milstein’s research builds a relational, historically grounded perspective at the intersection of art, politics and the environment. She has collaborated extensively across disciplines, combining participatory action research, ethnographic observation, and network analysis methods. Her work with the Ensayos collective, grounded in Tierra del Fuego, examines and intervenes artistically in relationships among the changing environment, natural and human built, human and non-human communities of fueguinos, artists, and scientists. Her research on the Naval Cemetery Landscape in Brooklyn, New York, interrogates the role of nature in the lives of urban residents, and the ways in which contact with nature is mediated by schools, social service agencies, and urban organizations.