





# public space for which public?

TEXT AND COLLAGE  
**MAYIM FRIEDEN**  
EDITOR  
**MADY BEVERSLUIS**

I think of collaging, my transness, and my thoughts towards urban design similarly: each celebrates self-creation, agency, and a positive connotation of a mismatched 'mess'.

I started collaging around when I started studying architectural & urban history, subconsciously encouraging myself to dream beyond the rigid, hierarchical categories and obsession with 'order' and 'rationality' that I learned of. I made worlds where everything could melt into each other and nothing needed to make sense, where gender is not a binary trap but an endless game to play with.

Design controls how we move, feel, interact. The traditional one-size-fits-all approach to urban design tells us to conform and reshape ourselves in order to take part in public life. If our lived realities don't fit this 'one size', we're made to feel out of place. While I have only studied and lived within Western contexts as a trans person, this same dynamic likely shows up and harms other people in other places, too.

Public space design standards—the signage, street arrangement, materialities, seating options, monuments—are products of assumptions made long ago. Still solidified into the environment, these choices leave little room for us to vary from what was once considered 'normal' and 'acceptable' by urban planners & designers.

Public space is not designed for trans people because, historically, trans people were not 'allowed' to be part of the public. When a trans person leaves the house, the built environment continues to subtly send this message—design is the messenger. Where do trans people hear this message—and how do our bodies respond to it? Where do we feel drawn to sit down, where do we intuitively avoid?

Design isn't the only motor behind the often strange, uncomfortable, social dynamics consuming cities, but it has a lot of power in facilitating them, a power often overlooked by those holding it. Now done with school, I want to begin co-creating new forms of spaces, off the page. Municipalities, policymakers, and design firms are typically responsible for urban public space, so I hope to work with them to move away from one-size-fits-all cities. Hopefully, from here, design can send us kinder messages when we leave the house.