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# Place, Space, and Mediated Communication

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## Exploring Context Collapse

Edited by  
Carolyn Marvin and Sun-ha Hong

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## Democracy, protest and public space

### Does place matter?

*Jeremy Németh and Evan H. Carver*

#### Introduction

On October 11, 2011, people began gathering at Frank Ogawa Plaza in central Oakland. By the middle of the afternoon, at least 600 protestors had assembled there. Some wore Guy Fawkes masks. Some waved handmade placards with slogans like “Do you feel it trickle down? The 99% don’t!” Others were there just to show solidarity with a movement for economic justice that had swept the country. Seven months later, hundreds gathered in the same spot to demonstrate for immigrant rights, and in March 2013 dozens of students assembled to raise awareness for lack of access to higher education.

Early on the morning of July 14, 2013, an unregistered group of citizens assembled at Westlake Park in downtown Seattle to protest what they saw as the miscarriage of justice in the Trayvon Martin murder trial. By the afternoon, their numbers had swelled to the hundreds, and they departed on a parade through downtown Seattle, clogging traffic throughout a meandering route through the city that eventually took them back to Westlake Park, where they unfurled banners, waved signs, chanted and conducted multiple interviews with news media.

What makes spaces like Frank Ogawa Plaza and Westlake Park ripe for protest? Why do protests seem to naturally take place in some spaces but not in others? What is it about these spaces that make them conducive to a wide variety of political demonstration? Many have discussed the importance of public space for democracy, and others have debated the institutional and political arrangements that might create the conditions for a “thicker” democracy, but few have gone further to understand what spatial arrangements or conditions of public space itself – as well as its surroundings – might increase the potential for an active democracy.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, we re-center material space in the construction of the political. In the context of time-space compression, of “context collapse,” it is the coming together of bodies in solid, concrete space that is the “only available tactic of resistance for those who do not carry weapons.”<sup>2</sup> Place can be seen as both physically anchored and immobile but also mediated

and structured through the transmission of images of actions occurring in such material spaces. As we will argue, virtual and material space are mutually constitutive – for one, the Occupy Movement started as a virtual forum and morphed into a physical occupation of Zuccotti Park, among other sites. Then it successfully spread around the world mostly due to images transmitted on social media; this virtual transmission begat more physical occupations, images of which were transmitted via virtual fora, and so on and so forth. Indeed,

there is a unique linkage between the virtual and the real. Both are needed to gain a better understanding of issues, for political organizing, for education, for building solidarity. One needs real spaces to break down barriers and create a more equitable society.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, we ask whether there exists an “architecture of democracy,” or certain “real spaces” and physical arrangements that provide conditions for a coming together of bodies, for collective dissent.<sup>4</sup> It would be reasonable to focus our exploration on, say, the content of the speech act itself, but could it also be possible that the design, management or location of the public space itself could structure the size, scale and even existence of the protest? If we can argue that certain features might preclude protest – such as a space’s location in a private, gated community – then it is at least plausible that certain characteristics of space might allow, facilitate, encourage or, at the very least, not limit protest. Our aim in this paper is to re-center material space in the performance of democracy while acknowledging that the production of space relies on both conceptual and material realms.

We attempt to answer these questions through a pilot study of ten sites of large protests in the US since 2000. One of the goals of this study was to test a rubric for assessing the “publicness” of a physical space by amending Lessig’s model for virtual space.<sup>5</sup> Our model, first developed by Németh,<sup>6</sup> assesses a space through its physical (design), code (management) and content (symbolism, human factors) layers, each of which has a number of constituent variables. From this small pilot study we notice several compelling trends among the sites for all three layers. Although they do not indicate causality, these trends suggest several avenues for future research. Findings may help geographers, social movements and civil rights activists think through the complex relationship between physical and political space. But before discussing the findings in depth, let us elaborate on what we mean by public space and why we believe it so important for democratic societies.

#### Democracy and public space

More than 75 years ago, the US Supreme Court<sup>7</sup> claimed that public space’s primary function is for “assembly, communicating thoughts between public citizens, and discussing public questions.” From the sidewalk soapboxes of

the Industrial Workers of the World to the Civil Rights marches of the 1960s to the recent uprisings in Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia, city streets, parks and plazas have always played home to acts of protest and dissent.

To be clear, the existence of space itself – even if officially designated a “free speech zone” – never guarantees it will house protest or collective action (and more often guarantees it will not). In fact, we would argue, public space in name alone is never public: it only becomes public through its occupation by individuals and groups claiming a right to shape the city in accord with their own desires.<sup>8</sup> In this reading, public space is both physical and conceptual, both material and political. Although technology opens up new avenues of publicness and exchange, material space is where we still exercise our most important values. From the Civil Rights Movement to the Occupy Movement, social movements have used physical space to enable linkages across issue areas, even in an era of ubiquitous digital communication. One of our central premises, however, is that material space – as opposed to virtual, online space – is a necessary, albeit insufficient condition for revolutionary, transformational protest, for reasons related to visibility, citizenship and face-to-face communication.

Protest is about being seen and heard, about asserting the right to amass in public space, and about making people listen.<sup>9</sup> Protest in material space publicizes and makes visible dissent.<sup>10</sup> Visible protest helps disadvantaged groups voice their claims to a broader public, to the powers that be. Marginalized groups make themselves counted when they make appearances in public. When we walk past a homeless person we are forced to confront our biases and reflect on our complicity in a system that allows such inequity and disparity. In the material city, the political representations of this homeless person are experienced in a way they cannot be felt online. In this way, protest in material space is fundamental to concepts of citizenship, or the right to engage in the various forums and alliances that constitute governance.<sup>11</sup> By engaging in visible protest, then, members of social and political movements *become* citizens.

The Internet empowers individuals to customize their online experience and the types and sources of information they receive, but this benefit may have paradoxically negative consequences for democracy and community. The ability to discount, even dismiss, alternative viewpoints may “impoverish the diverse experiences that sustain a pluralistic culture.”<sup>12</sup> Online, politicians or virtual passersby can delete an email or close a screen, whereas traditional demonstrations and protests parade through downtowns and require the attention of non-participants that likely benefit most from hearing such dissent. None of this is to say that technology is not integral to democracy – the recent Twitter Revolution in the Middle East bears this out – yet it was digitally-transmitted images of actual protests in Tahrir

Square, for example, that inspired revolution across the Middle East and North Africa.

The media transmission of messages from material to virtual space (and back) is key. Stories rarely run without an “image.” And though online petitions or message boards may garner hundreds of thousands, even millions, of signatories, and Facebook posts thousands of “likes,” media outlets will not cover the great bulk of them. But if a few dozen protestors show up downtown, the news cameras will almost surely be there. Media outlets are savvy producers (and consumers) of iconic protest images such as the famous AP photo of Tiananmen Square “Tank Man” Wang Weilin. Protest groups have also become increasingly aware and responsive to media reporting techniques, acknowledging the presence of cameras by holding signs intended to engage audiences outside the protest itself. From burning a flag of a western nation to demolishing a statue of a deposed former leader, iconic moments are seized upon as stage sets and photo-ops meant to incite a broader, often foreign, audience. Babak Rahimi<sup>13</sup> notes that such images haunt the public imagination and are frequently used as both provocation and inspiration for future protest events, including those that never take place in material space.

A shift from material to more conceptual notions of public space reflects a societal shift away from face-to-face communication in favor of virtual social networks.<sup>14</sup> Smith and Low argue that social and political theorists who use the term *public space* are more concerned with the diminution of the political public realm than with material bricks-and-mortar – but that “the spatiality of the public sphere potentially transforms our understanding of the politics of the public.”<sup>15</sup>

Political scientist John Parkinson worries that a focus on metaphorical conceptions of public space is deleterious to democracy. He joins urban geographers and sociologists in arguing that “democracy depends to a surprising extent on the availability of physical, public space, even in our allegedly digital world.”<sup>16</sup> Decoupling political space from material space weakens democracy, he argues, by isolating political elites from the concerns of the masses. This erodes the sense of solidarity that underlies any effective and robust democracy and de-emphasizes how social structures are embedded and reproduced in the built environment of cities.<sup>17</sup>

## Methodology

### Site selection

Earlier researchers have argued for a careful analysis of sites of resistance to strengthen our conceptions of democracy.<sup>18</sup> What defines a site of resistance? Following Irazábal,<sup>19</sup> we focus in this paper on ordinary places that host extraordinary events (italicized quadrant of Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Categorizing sites of resistance

		Event
Place	Ordinary place, ordinary event	Ordinary place, extraordinary event
	Extraordinary place, ordinary event	Extraordinary place, extraordinary event

The types of spaces that interest us occupy a central and symbolic role in the spatial politics of a city. Thus, we selected the ten US sites that hosted large protests since 2000. Except for Zuccotti Park, all these sites regularly host demonstrations, are permanent parts of their respective urban landscapes and function primarily as open space. Major protests in “free speech zones” set up during political conventions, for example, would occupy the lower right quadrant. We are not concerned in this paper with everyday, ordinary places that host everyday, ordinary protests in which a handful of dedicated persons dutifully show up to support the cause championed by their organization. We wish to understand the spaces of events that aim to change the system by assembling masses of people around common sets of issues, as spaces *with the potential* to “expand dramatically the spaces of citizenship.”<sup>20</sup>

This is not to downplay smaller, everyday actions. Some argue that these everyday cracks in the armor of the state – “a thousand tiny empowerments” – have a more powerful cumulative effect and prime the pump for that extraordinary event.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Irazábal provides a rubric for understanding these events: the spaces that interest us host “history-making,” not only “life-making,” actions.<sup>22</sup> History-making events transcend our ways of thinking and operating in the world. They are unique and transformative episodes in the life of society. Their deeply political nature brings together masses of citizens around a set of central issues and forms “cracks in the lifeworld.”<sup>23</sup> Life-making events and practices occur in the plazas, atria and streets of the city, “spaces of banal transgression.”<sup>24</sup> Some, including Kohn,<sup>25</sup> and Amin and Parkinson,<sup>26</sup> are quite critical of the “one-off” rather impersonal event. They note that what breaks down stereotypes and builds interpersonal trust is repeated contact with others over shared interests (the community garden is an exemplar).

In particular, spaces that host history-making events are disappearing at an alarming rate. Their very visibility and centrality imperil their existence given recent shifts that threaten civil liberties and dissent in the name of security (for one). Németh<sup>27</sup> and others show that since September 11, public and private officials in most cities in the western world have deployed a discourse of anti-terror security as their rationale for tightening security and fortifying our streets, sidewalks and spaces. The result is a threat to the very publicness that makes cities vital and attractive. These measures limit civil liberties by controlling behavior, limiting movement and downgrading the

quality of city life.<sup>28</sup> Graham, for example, argues<sup>29</sup> that anti-terror policies limit rights and undermine wider public dissent, social activism and popular protest. Warren argues that officials enacting the War on Terror have used security policies to legitimize the “prevention, repression and control of mass citizen political mobilization in cities.”<sup>30</sup> The spaces in our study deserve attention, therefore, as all of them have hosted major protests *in spite of* these shifts.

In this study, we focus solely on singular, bounded sites. Although streets often host major protests, they are not normally built to host protesters and are not “ordinary” spaces in the sense described above. Since street demonstrators typically march and move down the road, their longer-term occupation of any piece of ground is quite rare. Although street rallies can be more powerful than protests in designated public spaces,<sup>31</sup> especially by shutting down automobile traffic, they “less visibly demonstrate the scale of displeasure, and are thus less effective for the making of public claims.”<sup>32</sup>

We used a Google search in September 2013 to assemble our chosen sites from secondary data. We looked for geographic distribution and distribution across content areas (i.e., we did not want all protests to be under the 2011 Occupy banner). Though five study sites were occupied in 2011, all of the sites – with the important exception of Zuccotti Park – had longer histories of demonstration and are generally iconic public gathering places.<sup>33</sup> The sites we chose are listed in Table 7.2.

### Site evaluation

It is important to note that we do not aim to prove causality or statistical significance with this exploratory and descriptive work. We think of this study as an assessment that allows us to confirm some suspicions and ask more questions than we answer. The value of our findings is to have confirmed some of our suspicions, rejected or modified others, and invite future research, outlined in the conclusion. We recognize that in relying on second-hand data we have omitted one of the most important components of protest, namely the experience of people. We anticipate that future research will “ground-truth” our findings with surveys, interviews and even participant observations to better understand whether the emergent patterns we found were serendipitous, spurious or otherwise.

Some have speculated that protest in an ordinary space is a function of its “looseness,”<sup>34</sup> its (lack of) history of insurgency<sup>35</sup> or its geographic centrality.<sup>36</sup> The assessment tool we use to think empirically about why certain spaces might be prone to extraordinary events was developed by Németh,<sup>37</sup> who adapted a heuristic from Lessig<sup>38</sup> originally intended to explore the freedom of the virtual space of the Internet. The model consists of three constitutive layers: physical layer, code and content. These layers are not mutually exclusive and certain features can fit in more than one layer. In

Table 7.2 Ten of the largest public space protests in the US since 2000

Site	City	Date	Size est.	Cause	Duration
Woodruff Park	Atlanta	Oct. 1-25, 2011	100-1000	Occupy Atlanta	2 weeks
Dewey Square	Boston	Oct.-Dec. 2011	100-1000	Occupy Boston	70 days
Daley Plaza	Chicago	March 27, 2013	700-900	School closure	1 day
Civic Center Park	Denver	Oct. 2011-Jan. 2012	100-1000	Occupy Denver	Over 2 months
L.A. Plaza Park	Los Angeles	May 1, 2013	"Thousands"	May Day/immigrant rights	1 day
Wisc. State Cap. Grounds	Madison	Feb. 25-June 14, 2011	Up to 12,000	Public employees	Daily over a period of weeks
Zuccotti Park	New York	Sept. 17-Nov. 15, 2011	5000-15,000	Occupy Wall Street	2 months
Frank Ogawa Plaza	Oakland	Oct. 10-Nov. 14, 2011	100-1000	Occupy Oakland	34 days
Independence Mall	Philadelphia	March 13, 2013 (monthly)	100-500	Marijuana legalization	1 day
Westlake Park	Seattle	Jan. 13, 2013	200-500	Gun control	1 day

Table 7.3 Public space analytical framework (adapted from Lessig 2001, Németh 2012)

Publicness layer	Variable category	Geographic level	Example variables
Physical	Access	Neighborhood	Proximity to transit
		Site	Presence of fences
Code	Design	Site	Size
	Management	Site	Opening hours, policing
Content	Demographics	Neighborhood	Income, employment, diversity
	Symbolism	Site	Age of site, monuments

general, the physical layer includes programming, spatial relationships, location, adjacencies, mobility, access restrictions and aesthetics. The code layer includes management techniques such as laws, regulations, surveillance and policing norms. The content layer includes actual use and behavior, user characteristics and symbolic perceptions of space related to monuments, memory and history. To assess the physical, code and content characteristics of the ten selected sites, we identify five groups of variables. Under the physical layer are access and design; under the code layer is management; and under content are demographics and symbolism. We hypothesize that not only do the characteristics of the space structure its occupation, but also its location in the city.<sup>39</sup> We analyzed the ten spaces at both the site and neighborhood level – more accurately, the zip code tabulation area or ZCTA (see Table 7.3). (Refer to Appendix A for data collection and measurement on individual variables.)

**Site-level data collection and analysis**

We determined the physical characteristics of each site through Google Earth satellite imagery, Google Streetview photos, photos posted on Flickr and other public photo sharing sites, and news reports of demonstrations that have occurred at the site. For Civic Center Park (Denver), Westlake Park (Seattle), Zuccotti Park (New York City) and Independence Mall (Philadelphia), site visits confirmed the information we gathered remotely. We collected information about site management from parks department websites or information posted by the entity that manages the site. Where no specific management information was given about a particular site, we assumed that it was governed by the rules that apply to all parks in the given city.

We coded and scored for comparison using the simple assessment method outlined by Németh<sup>40</sup> (see Table 7.4). Specifically, we grouped characteristics into access controls, which include bollards, planters, gates or fences located at ingress points; behavioral controls, which include posted signs prohibiting activities like photography or loitering, or design features to

Table 7.4 Public space restriction classification criteria (see Németh 2010 for detail on scoring)

Control	Minor Restriction	Major Restriction
Access	Few physical impediments to access but entrances not blocked	Several physical impediments to access or entrances blocked
Behavior	Behavior limited by physical or legal restrictions	Behavior limited by both physical and legal restrictions
Surveillance	Sporadic security presence	Daily security presence

discourage actions like sitting or gathering in a small group; and surveillance measures, which include security guards and other human surveillance. For this study we were unable to obtain information about human surveillance. We assumed that all sites, being in city centers, have video surveillance.

To assess historical importance and symbolism for each site, we made some important assumptions. Assuming that older parks or plazas are repositories of significant symbolism or occupy a “center of gravity” in a community, we sought the dates of construction of the sites. These data were typically available on parks department websites or through local historical societies and libraries. In some cases a local business improvement district or advocacy group had “adopted” the site and posted additional information about the site’s history and monuments or public art located there. We attempted to assess how the space has been used historically for political demonstration. Since not every demonstration was covered in the media, and since the scales of demonstrations are famously difficult to assess, we scanned a variety of news sources to establish the frequency, duration and nature of demonstrations in order to form a *gestalt* picture of each site’s political importance over time.

#### Neighborhood- and city-level data collection and analysis

To be clear, when we use the term “neighborhood” we actually mean the Zip Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA). The ZCTA is a statistical area defined by the US Census having the same boundaries as a US Postal Service ZIP code. While almost no ZIP code corresponds directly to what local residents would call a neighborhood, we used this geographical level for analysis for several reasons. The breadth and uniformity of demographic data collected at the ZCTA level renders analysis relatively easy. ZCTAs are also contiguous and almost always of a relatively “natural” polygon shape (i.e., not contorted or gerrymandered). And because they are typically so small – the median size of the ten ZCTAs in our study is about a square mile – they give a good sense of the area within easy walking distance. Figure 7.1 shows the relative sizes of site, ZCTA and city for a typical case.

ZCTA physical characteristics were drawn from the US Census’s American Community Survey (ACS) (2011) as well as Google Maps and



Figure 7.1 Example of site, ZCTA and city relationship.

Walkscore.com. Although Walkscore provides some measure of the walkability, bikeability and transit connectivity of a location, we combined these scores with Census-reported commuting behavior from the site’s ZCTA for a richer picture of mobility at the sites and across their respective cities.

To compare sites’ demographic and socioeconomic neighborhood contexts, we again used ZCTA data from the ACS. To determine racial and ethnic diversity, we use Blau’s Index<sup>41</sup> with ACS data on race and ethnicity. Following Knudsen and Clark,<sup>42</sup> we counted Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) as an aggregate of three subcategories of registered businesses as reported in the Census’s Zip Code Business Pattern survey: (1) Environment, Conservation and Wildlife Organizations (NAICS 813312); (2) Human Rights Organizations (NAICS 813311); and (3) Other Social Advocacy Organizations (NAICS 813319).

#### Hypotheses

From our own experience and a review of the literature, we expected that a few variables would be found across a wide range of sites. Table 7.5 shows eleven hypotheses regarding patterns we expected to see across these ten sites. They are discussed below.

Table 7.5 Hypotheses regarding protest sites

Layer	Category	Geography	Descriptor	Hypothesis ("These protest sites will . . .")
Physical	Access	Neighborhood	Connected	. . . be highly accessible via multiple forms of transit.
Physical	Access	Neighborhood	Dense	. . . be located in dense neighborhoods.
Physical	Access	Site	Open	. . . have very few physical/symbolic barriers to entry.
Physical	Access	Site	Central	. . . be located near the center of population gravity.
Physical	Design	Site	Large	. . . be able to accommodate large crowds.
Code	Management	Site	Free	. . . have few behavioral controls, rules and regulations.
Code	Management	Site	Public	. . . be publicly owned and operated and permit large gatherings.
Content	Demographics	Neighborhood	Diverse	. . . be located in racially, ethnically or economically diverse areas.
Content	Demographics	Neighborhood	Engaged	. . . be located in neighborhoods with high numbers of SMOs.
Content	Symbolism	Site	Visible	. . . be visible from major government buildings.
Content	Symbolism	Site	Historical	. . . have historical significance in their host city.

## Findings

We tested each hypothesis (in *italics* below) to determine whether these descriptions (e.g., dense, diverse) are likely to be found in or around a strong majority of the sites.

### Physical layer

#### Connected

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will be highly accessible via multiple forms of transit.* We assume that protestors need easy access to a site by foot, bike, car or public transit in order for a protest to reach a critical mass.<sup>43</sup> This is especially true for protests that expect to last more than a few hours; few would be likely to park their car for many hours or days to participate in a protest.

*Finding: Correct.* We find that all ten spaces are very connected by transit and are very walkable and bikeable. All ten have dramatically better Transit Scores than the city overall; five sites have a Transit Score of 100. Nine of ten sites are within walking distance (0.25 miles) of a subway or light rail stop. All ten sites have a better Walkscore than the city overall; nine sites have a Walkscore 90 or higher. Eight of ten sites have an intersection density higher than the 140/sqmi required for LEED ND certification as a sustainable neighborhood.<sup>44</sup>

#### Dense

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will be located in dense neighborhoods.* This hypothesis is related to concepts of access and diversity. With regard to access, the concentration of people, facilities and infrastructure provide the thresholds needed to support high connectivity and low cost of transit.<sup>45</sup> With regard to diversity, dense settlement patterns can also facilitate interaction and encounter with diverse social forms, divergent cultural movements and dissenting ideas.<sup>46</sup>

*Finding: Correct.* Eight of ten sites have higher population density than their overall cities. The median density of the ten sites' ZCTAs is 11,060/sqmi, and median weighted density of the ten cities is 7,877/sqmi.

#### Open

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will have very few physical or symbolic barriers to entry.* A site must be easy to enter and exit so that a relatively uncoordinated group of demonstrators can assemble there with little challenge.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the site must *look like* a public area or park so passersby know that what is happening there is of public importance.<sup>48</sup>

*Finding: Correct.* Only two sites in our study have significant access-restricting design features: Philadelphia's Independence Mall and Madison's Capitol Grounds have walls or fences surrounding most of the site. All eight other sites are accessible on all or most sides without protesters having to negotiate portals or significant grade changes. Critically, the interior lawns or open areas of all sites are visible from the outside.

#### Central

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will be located near the population center of the city.* People from across the entire city should have comparatively equal access to the site in order for the protests that occur there to reflect issues of interest to a broad sector of the population.<sup>49</sup>

*Finding: Incorrect.* Using ArcGIS software, we calculated “population centroids,” or the population “center of gravity” for each city. We were surprised to find that while all the sites are well-connected and highly walkable, only one site (Madison’s Capitol Grounds) is within walking distance of the city’s population centroid. Seven of the ten sites are more than five miles from the population centroid.

#### Large

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will be able to accommodate large crowds.* Extraordinary political demonstration involves many, many people amassed in a single open space (as opposed to strung out along streets, as in a parade). However, sites must not be so large as to dwarf any crowd that might gather there.<sup>50</sup> We estimated that sites will be at least five acres, or roughly a large city block, but no larger than ten acres.

*Finding: Inconclusive.* Only three of the sites are between five and ten acres. The median size of all ten sites is just 2.65 acres, or roughly two football fields. Two of the sites (Zuccotti Park in New York and Westlake Park in Seattle) are less than one acre in size.

#### Code layer

##### Free

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will have few behavioral controls, rules and regulations.* In order to be conducive to relatively spontaneous demonstration, a site must not be heavily policed or have onerous restrictions on assembly.<sup>51</sup>

*Finding: Correct.* Only two sites have unusually strict regulations on hours of access and group usage. The parks are typically open from dawn until dusk and require permits only for exceptionally large groups. All have posted rules. Two sites are worth describing in greater detail. As a National Park, Independence Mall is subject to much stricter access regulations than all the other sites. It is open only from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Groups larger than 25 persons require special permits. Many of the surrounding facilities included within the park require paid tickets for entry, creating an overall environment of control. Independence Mall, which houses the Liberty Bell and the site of the approval of the Declaration of Independence, does have so-called First Amendment zones, but they are no more physically accessible than the rest of the park. The irony of this is difficult to miss.

#### Public

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will be publicly owned and operated and permit large gatherings.* Though we acknowledge the wide range of management practices in both public and privately owned open spaces, we assume that on average publicly owned spaces will be easier to access and more likely to allow the political behavior we are interested in.<sup>52</sup>

*Finding: Correct.* Only one site, Zuccotti Park in New York, is entirely privately owned. All the other sites are public parks overseen by city parks departments or, in the case of the sites near Colorado’s and Wisconsin’s state capitols, a state parks agency, or in the case of Independence Mall, the National Parks Department.

#### Content layer

##### Diverse

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will be located in racially, ethnically or economically diverse areas.* We assume that neighborhoods that are diverse polyphonic places are more accepting of the expression of alternative viewpoints in public.<sup>53</sup>

*Finding: Inconclusive.* All ten sites have equal or lower rates of racial and ethnic diversity than their host cities. Socioeconomic diversity was impossible to determine given available data. Most sites have higher rates of employment in the Census-defined “professional/managerial” sectors, but most also have lower median incomes. Three sites were noticeably better off than their surrounding cities and one was noticeably poorer. ACS data are conclusive on this question, and this remains an important area for further research.

##### Engaged

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will be located in neighborhoods with high numbers of Social Movement Organizations (SMOs).* We assume that neighborhoods with an existing climate of activism, i.e., a proportionally high number of SMOs, will be more amenable to spontaneous street protest.

*Finding: Correct.* As anticipated from Knudsen and Clark,<sup>54</sup> the dense, walkable neighborhoods around these sites are home to numerous social movement organizations. The scale of this advantage was remarkable. Nine



of ten sites (all except Denver's Civic Center) have a higher proportional concentration of SMOs than their host cities, and many are much, much higher. The ZCTA of Atlanta's Woodruff Park has nearly eight times as many SMOs as would be predicted for its population.

#### Visible

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will be visible from major government or legislative buildings.* We assume that demonstrators want to deliver their message to political decision-makers as directly as possible in a way that is impossible to ignore.<sup>55</sup>

*Finding: Correct.* Five of ten sites are immediately adjacent to a major government or legislative building. All ten sites are within a mile of such buildings.

#### Historical

*Hypothesis: Protest sites will have historical significance in their host city.* For a protest to have maximum impact, it should occur in a part of town that residents, leaders and the media associate with important events in the city's history or important elements of the city's identity.<sup>56</sup>

*Finding: Inconclusive.* Our sites are of various ages. Four of ten sites did not exist before 1950. Four have well over a century of history as important meeting places in their communities. Dewey Square, L.A. Plaza and Independence Mall are among the earliest and most famous public fora in the country – indeed, each predates US independence. A long history is not a prerequisite for political demonstration, however. Seven sites regularly host protests or demonstrations (Denver's Civic Center, Chicago's Daley Plaza, Los Angeles's L.A. Plaza, Madison's Capitol Grounds, Oakland's Ogawa Plaza, Philadelphia's Independence Mall and Seattle's Westlake Park). Two sites rarely see protests (Atlanta's Woodruff Park and Boston's Dewey Square). Zuccotti Park was the epicenter of Occupy Wall Street but had no other history of political demonstration and has not seen much demonstration since.

#### Discussion

We categorized these findings in Table 7.6 below based on layer (left) and geographic analysis (right). Each descriptor is followed by the number of sites to which it applies.

Table 7.6 Site characteristics by frequency (refer to Appendix A for measurement table)

Physical	Code	Content	Site	Neighborhood					
Connected	10	Free	8	Diverse	0	Open	8	Connected	10
Dense	8	Public	9	Engaged	9	Central	1	Dense	8
Open	8			Visible	10	Large	3	Diverse	0
Central	1			Historical	6	Free	8	Engaged	9
Large	3					Public	9		
						Visible	10		
						Historical	6		

#### Physical layer

Most of the findings relating to the physical layer are not surprising. A place must be easy to get to and easy to enter if it is to host large, somewhat spontaneous gatherings. Some findings are more nuanced. Following Parkinson,<sup>57</sup> we find that size does matter. Specifically, a site must be large enough to accommodate a significant number of people, but not so big so that even a huge crowd would look small. A site on the scale of New York's Central Park (843 acres) would swallow most public protests. Indeed, we find the median size of the sites is 2.65 acres, roughly the size of two football fields.

Proximity to a major government or legislative building is another physical factor worth discussing. Parkinson<sup>58</sup> argued for demonstration sites visible from a "government assembly building," and ideally right next to one. In our findings, proximity to such buildings is correlated with protest but physical adjacency is not required.

#### Code layer

We found that publicly owned places are more likely to be open to the public. By contrast, privately owned Zuccotti Park is part of New York City's development incentive program in which developers are allowed to stretch building sizes beyond normal limits in exchange for building open space. These "bonus spaces" are required to remain open 24 hours a day – so in the case of Zuccotti, ownership requirements actually make it *more* open.<sup>59</sup>

On the other end of the management spectrum is Boston's Dewey Square. Part of the larger Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston, Dewey was established by the Massachusetts legislature as "a public park and traditional open public forum"<sup>60</sup> to encourage open congregation and dialogue. During

the Occupy Movement in late 2011, protesters were allowed to remain for days on end and were evicted only when the camp spilled over into neighboring plazas and park areas.

### Content layer

It could be that demographic homogeneity is conducive to solidarity, which is conducive to political demonstration, though we make no such claim in the present study. That said, the presence of nearby social movement organizations may be more predictive of public political demonstrations than any other factor.<sup>61</sup>

As noted, ACS data allow only a crude assessment of neighborhood socioeconomic diversity. They do imply that many of the neighborhoods under consideration contain a diverse blend of bankers, business people, politicians, service employees and blue-collar workers, though a sufficiently thorough analysis of such indicators is beyond the scope of this study.

Further quantitative research could examine, for example, the presence of local union members. Qualitative research could also establish whether extant social and political networks in diverse neighborhoods lead to more political demonstration. It may be that some blend of well-educated and powerful residents, underemployed residents and unionized workers are particularly conducive to political demonstration. Nonetheless, there seems to be a meaningful role for physical context as well as the design and management characteristics of the site itself.

### Conclusions and future research

In this pilot study we notice several compelling characteristics. At the level of the physical layer, all spaces are very accessible to public transit and are situated in highly walkable neighborhoods. Most lack significant barriers to entry, such as fences or concrete dividers. All the sites are relatively small, averaging just 2.65 acres. At the level of the code layer, all but one site are publicly owned, and all sites but one operate with relatively permissive rules and access hours. At the level of the content layer, all ten spaces are within one mile of a major government institution, and the surrounding neighborhoods exhibit high levels of social activism (as measured by registered social movement organizations). These neighborhoods tend to be less ethnically diverse but more economically diverse than their host cities.

We suggest several avenues for future research. First, it would be useful to scale up the number of observations to a level capable of yielding statistically significant results. Variation with regard to location (especially non-US examples) and types of space are desirable for future research. It would be fruitful to compare our results to the characteristics and features of *ordinary* spaces and *ordinary* events, the everyday sites of “banal transgression,”<sup>62</sup>

since the iconic and impersonal spaces studied in this article may do less to break down stereotypes and build trust than everyday spaces that foster repeated contact with others over shared interests (the community garden as exemplar).<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Miraftab and Wills urge scholars to focus less on studying dissent in *invited* spaces, i.e., officially-sanctioned protest spaces, in favor of the everyday, *invented* spaces of citizens.<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, inquiry into iconic spaces of protest remains important. Since September 11, officials in many western cities have relied on a discourse of anti-terror as their rationale for tightening security and fortifying the public realm, thus legitimizing repression of massive political mobilization. That these spaces and the spaces studied here have hosted major protests *in spite of* these attempts to curtail them is quite remarkable and, we believe, worthy of further study.

Future research should also determine whether certain descriptors co-vary. If a site is centrally located, is it likely to be in a neighborhood that is more or less diverse? If a site is located near a major government office, will site behavior be managed more or less stringently?

One finding suggests that large-scale restrictions as in Philadelphia and Madison will not discourage protest if the site is highly visible, historic and right-sized. A relative lack of population density in the surrounding neighborhood (as in Los Angeles and New York) may not discourage protest if the site is well-connected, visible, open to physical access and free from excessive behavioral regulation.

Most importantly, future investigation should address the relationship between features of physical space and the content of protest. Do certain types of protests correlate with certain types of spatial arrangements? Do different kinds of protests *deserve* different types of spaces?

Recent shifts toward a more conceptual notion of public space may reflect a societal shift away from face-to-face communication in favor of virtual social networks. Decoupling political space from material space risks weakening democracy by isolating political elites from concerns of the masses, thus eroding the sense of solidarity that underlies effective and robust democracy, and deemphasizing the social structures embedded in the built environment of cities.<sup>65</sup> This article suggests a re-centering of material space in the context of protest and democratic action.

### Notes

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## Appendix A: data table from Chapter 7

Variable	Source of data	Unit measured	Type of variable	Range	Further analysis?	Threshold to confirm hypothesis
Access						
Neighborhood						
Transitscore site	Walkscore.com	Transitscore	Discrete, bounded	0–100	None	Higher than city score
Walkscore site	Walkscore.com	Walkscore	Discrete, bounded	0–100	None	Higher than city score
Bikescore site	Walkscore.com	Bikescore	Discrete, bounded	0–100	None	Higher than city score
% walk to work	US Census ACS 2007–2011	Percentage	Continuous, bounded	0–100	None	Higher than city score
% public trans to work	US Census ACS 2007–2011	Percentage	Continuous, bounded	0–100	None	Higher than city score
Census blocks/sqmi ZCTA	US Census TIGER	Count per sqmi	Continuous, unbounded	0–infinite	ArcGIS analysis	Higher than city score Higher than CNU designation of 150/sqmi
Census blocks/sqmi city	US Census TIGER, municipal GIS services	Count per sqmi	Continuous, unbounded	0–infinite	ArcGIS analysis	Higher than CNU designation of 150/sqmi
# of bike paths	Google Maps	Count	Discrete, unbounded	0–infinite	None	Higher than zero

(Continued)

(Continued)

	Variable	Source of data	Unit measured	Type of variable	Range	Further analysis?	Threshold to confirm hypothesis
Access	Distance to pop centroid, streets	Google Maps	Miles	Continuous, unbounded	0-infinite	Entry of the two points	Lower than 0.25 miles
	Distance to nearest subway/LRT	Google Maps	Miles	Continuous, unbounded	0-infinite	Entry of the two points	Lower than 0.25 miles
	Control - Access (0-2)	Google Streetview, Flickr	N/A	Ordinal	0-2	Coding	Lower than 2
Design	Size of space	Daftlogic.com (Google Maps)	Acres	Continuous, unbounded	0-infinite	Entry of sites' vertices	Between 5 and 10 acres
Management	Public or private	Secondary literature	N/A	Dichotomous	N/A	None	Public
	Control - Behavior (0-2)	Secondary literature	N/A	Ordinal	0-3	Coding	Lower than 2
	In a BID	Secondary literature	N/A	Dichotomous	N/A	None	Not in a BID
Demographics	Median household income ZCTA	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Dollars per year	Continuous, unbounded	0-infinite	None	Roughly equal to city
	% below poverty ZCTA	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Percent	Continuous, bounded	0-100	None	Roughly equal to city
	% owner-occupied ZCTA	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Percent	Continuous, bounded	0-100	None	Roughly equal to city
	Median age ZCTA	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Years	Continuous, unbounded	0-infinite	None	Roughly equal to city
Symbolism	% w/HS degree or higher ZCTA	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Percent	Continuous, unbounded	0-100	None	Roughly equal to city
	% w/bachelor degree or higher ZCTA	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Percent	Continuous, unbounded	0-100	None	Roughly equal to city
	% in managerial/prof/exec ZCTA	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Percent	Continuous, unbounded	0-100	None	Roughly equal to city
	% unemployed ZCTA	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Percent	Continuous, unbounded	0-100	None	Roughly equal to city
	Diversity ZCTA (Blau index)	US Census ACS 2007-2011	(Ratio)	Continuous, bounded	0-1	Index calculation	Higher than city
	Persons of color ZCTA (Blau index)	US Census ACS 2007-2011	(Ratio)	Continuous, bounded	0-1	Index calculation	Higher than city
	SMOs	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Count	Discrete, unbounded	0-infinite	Tabulation of SMOs	Higher than city
	Percent of SMOs in ZCTA	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Percent	Continuous, unbounded	0-100	Tabulation of SMOs	Higher than proportional to population
	Pop density ZCTA	US Census ACS 2007-2011	Count per sqmi	Continuous, unbounded	0-infinite	ArcGIS analysis	Higher than city
	Prox to house of gov't	Google Maps	Miles	Continuous, unbounded	0-infinite	None	Less than 0.25 miles
	Age of site	Secondary literature	Years	Discrete, unbounded	0-infinite	None	Built before 1950
	Statues and monuments	Secondary literature	Count	Discrete, unbounded	0-infinite	None	More than zero
	History of protest	Secondary literature	Count per year	Discrete, unbounded	0-infinite	Tabulation and scoring	More than zero