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Bridging the Gaps in Public Conversation by Fostering Spaces of Activism

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Bridging the gaps in Public Conversation by fostering
Spaces of Activism

A Thesis presented
by
Karitikeya Sonker

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University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfilment
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Bridging the gaps in Public Conversation by fostering
Spaces of Activism

A Thesis Presented

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DEDICATION

To earth and the future.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor Pari Riahi for her constant help with this thesis process. As I understand, this is as much her thesis as mine. Her support, teachings and guidance have predominantly helped me bring this thesis to its current form.

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ABSTRACT

BRIDGING THE GAPS IN PUBLIC CONVERSATION BY FOSTERING SPACES OF ACTIVISM

MAY, 2021

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Spaces for protests, demonstrations, and activism are shifting under contemporary social, cultural and governance structures. While particular conditions for physical space were once fairly unified in their ability to establish space for activism and dissent; social media and digital platforms have fundamentally changed the nature of those areas. This thesis aims to investigate frameworks of space-making that can potentially reposition spaces of activism as everyday events that represent the mood of the society. This in turn will also help in revisiting the terms of human engagement with the help of spaces that facilitate deeper understanding of the people around us and conceive a sense of empathy within our social conversations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, our civilization has primarily demonstrated that people's voice, in general, operates either in a sociological setting that is at the center of a larger mediatized perspective or within the muted locus of collective memory and societal consensus. The wrongful influence of social media in some communities, the advent of misinformation, and the rise of disproportionate power for state-run medias in some countries has not only veiled the public voices that could potentially represent the temperament of some societies, it has also in a sense rejected many of their democratic ways. Some countries have seen drastic measures where activists, artists, writers and other similar critics of governing institutions have either been held captive, sought asylums or refuge in other places.

Such understandings of social order bring our attention towards a phenomenon where the powerful voices of leaders and media has been misconstrued as the voices of people. In a way, the voices of more-visible political spectrum in form of governing bodies, authoritarian states and dictatorial regimes have suppressed the voices of common people that largely represent the society. The role of cultural and racial diversities in our society has been questioned repetitively, and this backtracked years of our social progress.

Our society's spectrum of diverse understanding and the freedom of thought has been arguably over-written by actors augmenting political, nationalist, and scientific

fabrications. Lee McIntyre surmises such concepts, and calls them “alternative facts”¹ that replace our actual feeling in his book titled *Post-truth*. He questions whether we are living in a world where the actual facts and feelings have less weight than the alternative and misinformed ones.² Such fabrications, having been amplified through motivated filters of mediatization, have led to a public discourse that plays into a feedback loop. This loop not only begets a way of living where thoughts become binary but also invokes tremendous pressure on non-actors of society to behave in a certain way that is synonymous with the trends of the social media. Thus, in such contexts, the essence of public discourse becomes dependent upon media and the power structures that unfairly manifest themselves within our societies.

1.1 Shifting trends in Our Democracies

Authoritarianism, propaganda, autocracy, dictatorship, and totalitarianism are some of the words that have become synonymous with countries worldwide. These instances of self-determining behaviour have been visible over the last few years where democracies have been devoured by newer ways of populism. Countries like India, Brazil, United States and Indonesia have all undergone a phase where the “new representatives of institutions” have tried to perpetuate their hold on power in ways that include

¹ McIntyre, Lee. 2018. *Post-Truth*. Cambridge: MIT Press. 89 – 123.

² McIntyre, *Post-Truth....*, 63 – 89.

delegitimizing the oppositions³, and inflict lasting damages upon the electoral processes of their respective countries. Much more significant are the nuances that invoke the disposition of these evil doings, that it has only widened the gap within the public conversations and made most of the thought-process superfluous in a general way of speaking. These shifting trends in democracies also affected and sparked a debate in academia where some theorists and historians such as Niall Ferguson have called such kinds of governance short-lived and incompetent; while other political theorist such as Chantal Mouffe have labelled these changes as “positive potential defending the failed status quo through their movements”.⁴

All such new movements in past years have gained traction either through the campaigns of alternative information on social media or by gaining a long-term proximity to the power structures such as town halls and other such public buildings. It can be said that if one needs to be heard within the normal functioning of everyone's day-to-day life, one needs to pass through the filters of mediatization and power structures. For instance, the political acts and so called public movements in India within the past few years have heavily relied upon their reach on social media and other non-state run news channels. This has pushed the tipping balance of a country in a way that has impeded the progress within social conversation to the point that the voices of people such as local activists,

³ Kyle, Jordan, and Yascha Mounk. 2018. *theatlantic.com*. 26 December. Accessed April 15, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/12/hard-data-populism-bolsonaro-trump/578878/>.

⁴ Ibid.

artists and writers who represent other factions of the society have barely been covered, or worse where some have been branded as people against the interest of the nations. In some cases, this has led to activists and demonstrators either leaving their countries and seeking asylum, or being coerced into falsely accepting the implications of their deeds as anti-national and in violation of the nation's sovereignty. It can be said that perhaps the laws are slow when it comes to paying attention to the voices that have faced such consequences in past few years.

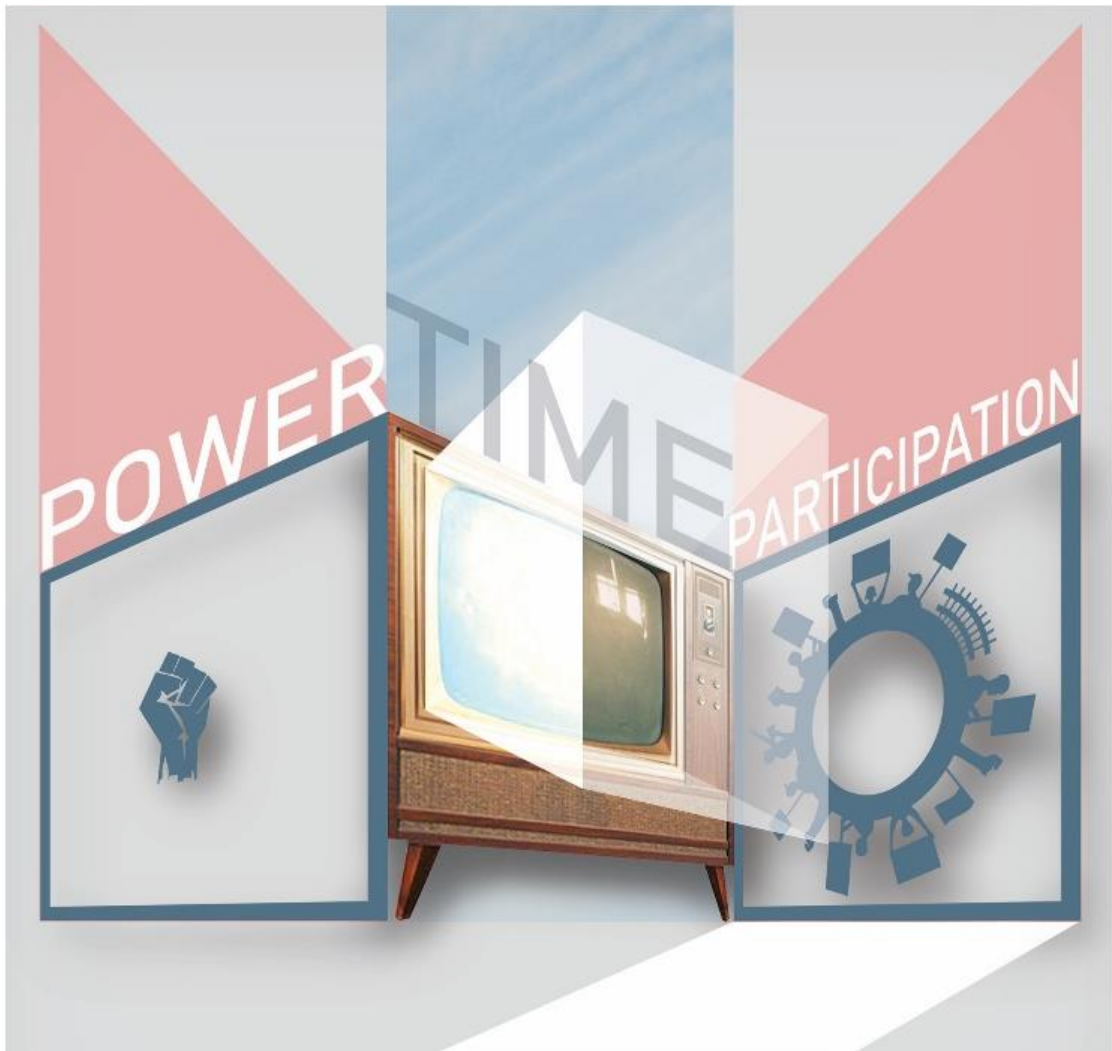


Figure 1: Factors governing the idea of democracy in current world. Image by Author

However, similar shifts are also visible within our cities and more tangible social landscapes where the power has been systematically segregated through the design of our cities and other such urban spaces. This has involved creating power centers and important government institutions inaccessible to public view, or stacking financial hubs into their separate spatial domains. Such tactics have presented our cities as futuristic utopia and veiled their ground reality where people are more sharply divided about their opinions because of the kind of misinformation they are being fed. This has brought everyone under the umbrella of a dystopian future where our voices are deemed powerless.

With such examples in recent years, demonstrations have largely projected that not only is it difficult to voice an opinion as an ordinary person, the ways of demonstrations have also become superfluous. The movements could still fail despite the high number of voices that collect to channel them. Micah White, in his book, *The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution* argues that the reason behind such failure is because the will of people no longer controls the sovereignty of their government.⁵ In my view, society's ways to pursue collective liberation have become monotonous. Noam Chomsky has spoken on similar wavelengths where he discusses the role of corporate media to the severity of our crises. In one of the interviews, he outlines the difference between a news article that discusses global warming and a standard article that discusses oil exploration in United States. He further explains how we actually read the first article and summarize it as a

⁵ White, Micah. 2016. *The End of Protest - A New Playbook for Revolution*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knoff Canada. 24-29.

“catastrophe”⁶ while the second article prompts us into conversations about our economy, self-reliance, and technological advancement. Further questioning the differences of lengths for each article in print-media, he adds that this has created a tunnel vision, and a kind of “schizophrenia”⁷ that currently reflects in the society.

Unfortunately, such reflections, as I understand, are audaciously present in our society where protests are perceived as so trivial that they no longer remind us of a cause manifested. The spaces of protests in some parts of the world have become so disconnected from the spatial fragment of the society that one starts to wonder if they will even have an after-effect that could potentially prompt a newer construction of meaning. If anything, these public conversations either drift into societal platitudes or polarized endeavors. Aristotle in one of his works, *Politics*, has explained that political community supports the honest lives of its citizens. He elaborates that achieving such honesty which leads to a sense of self identity can be gained through social interactions and functioning for the betterment of society.⁸ According to him, being a member of society, being social, or living in a community is necessary to complete human life and he further elaborates that our cities are therefore, pinnacle of this form of collective identity that starts from families to villages to cities to centers of culture. In the book, an individual member with honest character understands if a meaning behind the situation is just or not irrespective

⁶ Chomsky, Noam, interview by Robert Hackett and Linda Solomon Wood. 2019. *Race Against Climate Change* (12 February).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ellis, William. 1888. *A Treatise on Government - Aristotle*. London: Ballantyne Press. 14 – 16.

of the fact whether our society has any fixed rules or not.⁹ This meaning has slowly lost its way in our public conversations as part of our society not only seems to have lost its way in choosing just actions, they have also forgotten why those actions were just. Such meanings and factors that were once dispositions of any social conversation, public dialogue, form of governance and act of protest have flattened so much that they no longer penetrate the deeper consciousness of the more extensive public strata. Our public strata has grown in relation to the mediatisation of selective media filter who are wedded to a business model which don't care about the nature of society's growth, as long as they grow.¹⁰ George Orwell, in his book, *Animal Farm* talks about how the consciousness of our society can be tamed by internalised working of such growth models which can potentially lead to a suppression without any use of force.¹¹ He satirically explains how our functioning as individuals plays into hands of such wealth and educational models, such that we don't think about such missing larger meanings and factors that would govern public progress. While these examples may once have been fictional or satirical, they have begun to hold more significance as we find ourselves in the midst of similar social divide and public ignorance.

⁹ Ellis, *A Treatise...*, 175 – 179.

¹⁰ Chomsky, Noam, interview by Robert Hackett and Linda Solomon Wood. 2019. *Race Against Climate Change* (12 February).

¹¹ Orwell, George. 1945. *Animal Farm*. London: Secker and Warburg. 10.

1.2 Our changing ways of life

The advent of social media is not the only reason behind our current public divide. If anything, this may have simply accelerated such misgivings of our society's thought process. While the factors such as selective censorship in countries, extensive campaigns of misinformation and alternative forms of journalism can be directly linked to the world drifting into a dysfunctional dystopia, other factors have perhaps been a lot more nuanced. Our ways of urban-planning portray a demographic divide that is on the basis of economics, race, ethnicities and religions. This naturally opens up avenues in our cities where full inclusion is one of the biggest challenges. Our current trajectory of poverty alleviation, and balancing the disparate power structures within society heavily relies upon short term goals and incrementalism¹² in hope that all can be equally represented which has not really been the case.

1.2.1 Activism within our Digitized Space

The ever-changing social and political paradigm in the age of information has created turbulence within the conventional wisdom of society. In her book, *Privacy and Publicity*, Beatriz Colomina argues that architecture has transformed into a more modern role after its engagement with mass media and in this process has radically replaced the traditional sense of space.¹³ She argues that mass media may have been the true site of

¹² Hecht, Ben. 2015. *How To Build A New Civic Infrastructure*. Austin, 15 October.

¹³ Colomina, Beatriz. 1996. *Privacy and Publicity - Modern Architecture As Mass Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press. 37-39

twentieth century culture within which modern architecture may have been produced. With modernity, Colomina argues, that the “architecture literally moved from streets to photographs, films and media.”¹⁴ In this way, modern architecture negotiates the traditional relationship of space and its experience. Such “publicity of private”¹⁵ is also evident in our everyday lives where the autonomous volatility of the digital age has blurred the boundaries of what may define themselves as a public representation in the 21st century. Further, Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley assert that “good design is meant to be contagiously virtuous.” In their book, *Are we Human?*, they explain the elements of touch, sight, experience, reading and so on can “ultimately have a viral chain reaction that ultimately transforms the society.”¹⁶ According to the book, a well-designed object does well to people forever. It is like a modest ambition to social reform.¹⁷

However, when it comes to mass media, digital world and other such agencies of blurred boundaries have potentially shaped our urban environments over the last few years through their own social principles. According to Zeynep Tufekci, the advent of “clicktivism and slacktivism”¹⁸ in social media has helped us skip the tedious step of

¹⁴ Colomina, *Privacy and...*, 41-48.

¹⁵ Colomina, *Privacy and...*, 37-39.

¹⁶ Colomina, Beatriz, and Mark Wigley. 2016. *are we human? - notes on an archaeology of design*. Zurich: Lars Muller Publishers. 89-101

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Naim, Moises. 2014. *theatlantic.com*. 7 April. Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/04/why-street-protests-dont-work/360264/>.

collecting people to organize a protest. However, this has also been detrimental¹⁹ as the movements rush past that step of empathy that only comes through organization. Achieving that requires face-to-face political work, otherwise the movement fizzles out. It can be said that there is a gap between the experience of people in reality and the experience that is reported. This in turn has tipped the balance of society. While the cause of public opinion was once portrayed in its ability to establish particular conditions for a physical space; social media and other similar digital platforms have fundamentally changed the nature of those areas.



Figure 2: Socially blurred boundaries of digital space. Image by Author

Social activism, public demonstration, and peaceful protests have become fodder for all kinds of political discourse, which has cleverly concealed our problems at hands from

¹⁹ Naim, Moises. 2014. *theatlantic.com*. 7 April. Accessed April 30, 2021.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/04/why-street-protests-dont-work/360264/>.

the larger public view and somewhat misguided a broader world view. A part of the problem is also the mediatization of only selective voices that subsequently feed upon their bases or public following. This inappropriately misrepresents the problems of ordinary people and also alienates their personal choices within a broader spectrum of public thinking.

1.2.2 Urban Planning and its role in Activism

Our cities seem to be already overwhelmed with the constantly changing dynamics of its environment and demographics that contribute towards making them liveable. In the midst of such contributing factors, urban equity and inclusivity based on demographics and ethnicities have barely been a priority until recent times. Consequently, spaces of activism seem to be insignificant concern that could have been accommodated in a broader concept of place-making until now. This might also be because it often involves a complicated conundrum of moving masses that hope to guide democratic processes within our cities.

If anything, the previous decades have shown that the designers of our cities have seemingly set out to make urban areas resilient to the demonstrations from the outset. Any congregation of people to voice grievances has mostly been portrayed as a counter-narrative to society's progress. This has been evident in the recent protests in the United States that seek racial equity as well farmer's protest over the last few months in India. In both the cases, we come across instances where media and a major portion of society have called such demonstrations as detrimental to the civic progress. Participants and activists

often face harsh criticism from their own people along with disproportionate rebuke of their movements. In a way, certain groups also feel alienated because of their participation in such activities owing to the stigma surrounding certain selective causes. These factors have led to a lack of public participation in the eventual decision-making that govern the public itself. Such results highlight a crucial idea of urban spaces where there is little space to demonstrate, lesser space for easy dispersal, and subsequently urban density that disenfranchises the local people. This ultimately deprives any person of the dissemination of information that could potentially limit their momentum to sustain their thought process.

There are pieces of evidence where our modern cities actually observe a higher number of public clashes with their disciplined and structured environments of urban spaces. Jeff Hou, the author of *City Unsilenced: Urban Resistance and Public Space in the Age of Shrinking Democracy* explains neoliberalism as one of the causes for growing conflicts within our cities. He explains that this system of governance that favors privatization, and reduction in government spending ultimately reduces the impact of public funding within our cities.²⁰ With such limits on public funds, the development of parks and other similar urban spaces would rely upon private entities. This would in fact privatise the public spaces and eventually conceive a public life that is “tamed”.²¹ Any

²⁰ Hou, Jeffrey. 2017. *City Unsilenced: Urban Resistance and Public Space in the Age of Democracy*. New York: Routledge. 56-67.

²¹ Hou, *City....*, 94-106.

opportunity of activism and other public expressions would therefore be diluted. As a counter-idea, it also makes it easier to impose restrictions, curfews and reduce public gatherings in such spaces. For once, if we assume that the number of people is not consequential to the success of the demonstration: sub-dividing cities and blocks and neighborhoods, especially with pieces of evidence of racial segregation, make our cities less harmonious in the first place. Further, people tend to over-think their capacities and their stature in power relations when it comes to their own presence in a particular location, or a specific access point, or sometimes being within a focal point of any demonstration. This shows that if their personal meaning is distant from the bodily manifestation of themselves in the space, it can soon flip a peaceful cause into an intensely contested space that inhibits any public progress. People are generally aware of such nuances. After all, how often do we see a protest in a hospital, or a shopping mall or a football stadium despite the fact that all of them classify as public space?

1.2.3 Power Struggle

In some parts of the world, 'Democracy' is identified as a beacon word within the nature of public space in parts of the world. These public spaces are synonymous to the democratic spaces where free speech and activism are identical to public conversations. In 2015, Swedish student Greta Thunberg had skipped school to protest outside her parliament owing to the lack of actions towards reversing climate change. A week later, she was joined by her classmates, teachers and parents attracting attention for her

campaign.²² While such examples are common to the countries like Sweden where the meaning of public space is predominantly owed to its people, it is difficult to peacefully seek such public support in some other parts of the world. In India, the students protests in 2019 against a discriminatory citizenship law within the Delhi University campus witnessed culling of student voices through aggressive policing and threats towards students in terms of hostel eviction, legal action and unlawful imprisonment.²³ Despite being within the walls of a university campus and largely being anti-government, the protests were labelled anti-national and nonsensical in country's interest. The outcome of the protests polarised the political factions within the country. Many other universities and political parties saw this as an opportunity to voice their own concerns within the growing student movement.

Perhaps it can be said that such intermingling within the public space involving protesters and certain spectators have certain political significance. This can be demonstrated through examples where the call for protests or public participation to demonstrate through various mediums of activism could reveal power struggles within the hierarchies of the society. Some urban spaces such a shopping malls, privately held parks and recreation centers reflect these struggles more than other spaces such as old city

²² Taylor, Lin, and Sonia Elks. 2021. *news.trust.org*. 19 April. Accessed April 28, 2021.
<https://news.trust.org/item/20190819233721-jaa90/>.

²³ Dhillon, Amrit. 2020. *theguardian.com*. 6 January. Accessed April 28, 2021.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/06/students-injured-in-india-after-masked-attackers-raid-top-university>.

monuments, historical landmarks and other public buildings that serve as a seat of power. The impact of these struggles can have consequences on either side of the power structure. This is to say that while societies can call themselves inherently democratic, their functioning or manifestation within its people might reflect otherwise – in a way where people find it difficult to break out of the system to voice an opinion over the most trivial of things.

While any assembly with or without such power structure can be treated as a symbol of voicing an opinion, it cannot be conflated with the idea that the voicing actually would lay within a democratic domain. For instance, the last few years have shown that the prominence of a cause manifested within the society is loosely defined by their proximity to the supposed beacons of democracy or public institutions. The protesters in Washington D.C. have marched along the Mall, the *Syntagma* square was the center of anti-austerity movement in Athens, the *Tahrir* Square in Cairo that has mobilised people towards their carnival of freedom or the Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing where the square is flanked by the Great Hall of the People and National Museum of China with Monuments of the People's Heroes next to it. It can be understood that the closer a protest is to a public building, the higher their chances of being seen and talked about. Thus, when it comes to voicing a local level of public discourse, the after-effects of demonstrations in smaller places hardly remind us of any cause manifested in due course of time.

In last century, our urban spaces have relied heavily upon the construction of public spaces that were either integrated to their adjacent urban functions or served as a good

view for privatised urban areas. Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson in 1980s, thus conceived a framework where they could study and bring to conclusion if the spaces could be both, spatially integrated and visually connected, equally.²⁴ The quest to find that perfect space that is equally integrated to its surrounding and visually connected on similar parameters is still ongoing. This brings light into our study where one finds a disjunction between public participation and public space. Thus, some of our urban spaces tend to crumble, lose their significance, and witness regression in public participation unless a certain kind of meaning in terms of timelessness or historical significance is bestowed upon them. On the other hand, the actual historical monuments have seen the rise and fall of their cities, and served as a suitable place as far as public discourse is concerned. So while the newer places in the cities seem lost when it comes to conceiving a public space that involves public, the advent of digitization has further dispossessed demonstration as synthetic as well as a constantly simulated idea among the spectrum of the society. Thus, the message of the public and its manifested space become too distant.

As we understand, such physical spaces of public intent are hardly possible in current times unless it can be amplified through mass media or controlled virality of other social media platforms. In other words, unless digitized, it is close to impossible to be heard for one's cause when it comes to a demonstration in the current urban habitat.

²⁴ Hillier, Bill, and Julienne Hanson. 1989. *The Social Logic of Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This disposition of activism carries within itself an explanation of truth that is common to many kinds of crises. The general inspiration behind any societal opposition for a protest movement is based upon the idea that not all people will embrace one's personal values. Hence, this leads us to an understanding that behind any public demonstration is the fact that our society constantly changes for good or worse. Any such event should support a public conversation. Perhaps, our spaces also carry sub-textual language, as Richard Sennett suggests that "there are as many ways of representing space as there are people".²⁵ This is an understanding of substantial value as it suggests that all the spaces have an inherent tendency to endure if they are able to be represented by the people who occupy it. Very often, such endurance of space is tied down to the sense of meaning and perhaps what we closely call social equilibrium.²⁶

However, a space that exhibits such endurance can also be misunderstood as a space of diffused reality where lesser-observed public phenomenon lies in the collective conscience. Perhaps this is when no one speaks or listens, and all beings are in fact vested in their day to day lives oblivious to what is happening around them. With such understandings, it is difficult to subjugate the public opinion where the constituents of the public are imprisoned within their own lives. Public spaces in such a domain show

²⁵ Sennet, Richard. 1970. *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City life*.

²⁶ Coser, Lewis A. 1992. *Maurice Halbwachs On Collective Memory*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

themselves as abstract spaces or sometimes as manufactured utopias which in exchange make the smaller pockets of our urban places less flexible.

Broadly speaking, the standardisation of urban place-making in recent years has made the places derivative of various urban concepts. This may be a good thing if we were talking about sustainable urbanism that thrives on their surrounding ecosystem but having the urban spaces standardised in approach also diminishes the concept of diverse representations in our cities. Perhaps, these notions should be tackled through examples that are parallel to specific ideas of workplaces. Juhani Pallasma describes the clarity of workspaces by nature of work but implores us to explore the “spacing” between them.²⁷ The idea of spaces acting as hosts of their function they carry out reflects how much we stress upon our buildings as objects.²⁸ This creates a hierarchy of spaces that echo power. This domain of power relation implicitly coerces people to orient themselves to the nature of spaces where they submit themselves as prisoners of someone else's thoughts. The spaces in turn are merely helpful in guiding those thoughts in people²⁹ through compartmentalization of spatial network is not helpful for the progress of democratic environments.

²⁷ Pallasma, Juhani. 2005. *The Eyes of the Skin*. Cornwall: John Wiley and Sons limited.

²⁸ Colomina, *Privacy and...*, 37-39.

²⁹ Shah, Rajiv C., and Jay P. Kesan. 2007. “How Architecture Regulates.” *Journal of Architecture and Planning Research* 350-359.

1.3 The means and meaning of Public

Urban habitats can be helpful in smooth functioning of the public. Our cities are actually represented through the lens of such urban functions. The livelihood of the people is understood based upon how various urban functions situate and move themselves within our cities. However, with the advent of modernism brings with itself many stringent guidelines to the nature of public-place.³⁰ The disposition of spaces is employed in a way that our urban areas are required to perform in a certain way. In current times, there has been a growing tendency to attend a space and presume its understanding by the nature of its expectations. This has amputated the nature of voicing opinions as well as passively diminished the idea of 'exchange between people' and 'democracies' that were once used interchangeably on streets and in institutions alike. Moreover, the demarcation of public places has conjured a landscape of imageries where the performance of the space is determined by what is contextually the right thing to do. Naturally, this context begets a variety of factors, who seem to take up one problem or the other, and then continually 'voice the imagery of the problem' with little attention to the intricacies of the solutions. As a result, not only have the public places become less meaningful, their narratives are becoming more and more derivative as far as power relation is concerned.

³⁰ Aoki, Keith. 1993. "Race, Space, and Place: The Relation Between Architectural Modernism, Post-Modernism, Urban Planning, and Gentrification." *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 699-829.

1.4 Idea

The following thesis will explore the idea of how the participation of people within a public place through spaces of protests can create new perspectives in generating community. It will further investigate if these new concepts of urbanism can foster the social construct to create an environment of activism and democracy that has a more open public dialogue and free expression.

Chapter 2: Related Literature

The public space as a stage for democracy has become more crucial with the rising number of protests and demonstrations to express disagreement around the world. These stages seem to be over-dependent in the forms that rely on the means of visibility to reach out to the masses irrespective of their interests in a particular movement. However, the standardization in the public language of carrying out demonstrations has created a power-relation with outside actors of demonstration that makes it difficult for these spaces to be more vocal in social orders. In a way, these spaces have become invisible vestibules outside larger urban functions that keep a check on the freedom of public-speech within public space. This liminality of space does little to help the more-public part of the power relationships in our society and favors the coercive side of relationship. This means that not only have our public space that symbolize public history started to become redundant, but they also have an outside interference that implicitly counter-argue the nature of protests. The language of standardizing design in our urban spaces do little for public to reimagine spaces outside their designated functions. Also, unless a demonstration gets proper coverage and trends on social media in contemporary times, it is hard to create even a threshold of its impact. This arguably implies that spaces of protest have a displaced meaning that seems to dictate the purpose of public spaces that were once, historically, a platform for equity.

The thesis recognizes that such may not always have been a case. While power relations and social dynamics of two different times are often unfair to compare, it can still

be argued that the planning of urban spaces has been highly dependent upon visibility where an idea of sight has been highly articulated. Although there seems to be nothing wrong with working on making spaces more visible, the unintentional but orchestrated suppression of other senses has created a distance between human understanding and expression that is inherently more emotional and tactile to the construction of empathy within a larger social order.

The initial part of the thesis structures its readings around two distinct systems of understanding space: the spaces of protests and the spaces of social engagement. While spaces of protests often are misconstrued as spaces that occupy and disrupt the urban functions, the spaces of social engagement on the other hand are assumed to be all around us. This is a particularly interesting notion because while both spaces as larger urban entities might not be used interchangeably, their definitions still has the potential to replace the other. For instance, spaces of social engagement have the potential to disrupt urban functions if the source of engagement or the public get too large. Our cities have often been designated with such functions which range from music festivals, to political canvassing. However, spaces of protests carry with themselves a sense of conflict and dissonance that make them uniquely unacceptable in larger spectrum of society and subsequently urban space. Just like spaces of social engagement, the spaces of protests are all around us but they are often studied with a greater scrutiny.

The diversity in different readings has been helpful in bringing together such diffused topics and support an argument relevant to the thesis at hand. The readings have

covered topics that operate within the understanding of activism growth, confrontation, immersive experiences in our cities and emergence of protests as static and dynamic features in the city.

2.1 How Design Activism confronts Growth

In her book, *Architecture & Design versus Consumerism*, Ann Thorpe writes about the design activism that confronts growth.³¹ Here, she provides insight into design activism, where she sought methods from social movement studies. The work mentions that there has been an increasing interest in the notion of architecture and design as activism, but the area where social movements and various repertoires of social and political action intersect with design has not been well explored.³² The results suggest that the protesters engage with tactility to organize a protest in a way that allows and reinforces their positionality in power relations.

The thesis explores the readings of Ann Thorpe and her understanding of social activism within space as vessels of imparting meaning to objects that can be engaged with the protest movements. The primary idea was to engage into an inquiry that promotes protests as peaceful yet powerful public experience that has a potential to influence the pace of urban function within our cities without completely disrupting them.

³¹ Thorpe, Anne. 2012. *Architecture & Design versus Consumerism: How Design Activism Confronts Growth*. New York: Earthscan. 32-35.

³² Thorpe, *Architecture...*, 35-41.

2.2 Design Justice Workshops and Outreach Engagement

On the lines where architecture and urban settings of contemporary times tend to make one feel like an emotional outsider with respect to architecture and its tactile engagement, Bryan C. Lee Jr. explores the actual building blocks of protests that are nested in the privilege and the power relation of spaces defining potential injustice. He mentions that design, like all institutions, imposes its power through policies, procedures, and practices that are subject to inherited biases. He further advocates for the dismantling of power ecosystems in architectural settings that have factually paid less attention to the residual impact of design as protest, suggesting that architecture should be willing to speak the language of people it serves. This work provides a clear understanding of the disjunction between the idea of protest and its actual implications in today's time. This has created a feedback loop of voicing opinions where spaces have become more visually democratic but at the same time reshaping the disposition of voicing dissent to a very synthetic and superficial nature in many cases.

The thesis seeks to understand the source of feedback within the urban setting, both within the social order and spatial logic,³³ and works towards an incremental idea that makes spaces more responsive and cohesive to voicing dissent through peaceful tactile engagements.

³³ Hillier, Bill, and Julienne Hanson. 1989. *The Social Logic of Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2.3 The There There

Gina Ford and Martin Zogran of Sasaki's urban studio list out different aspects that advocate for the 'meaning'³⁴ of protest in place. According to them, the emphasis that each march is intentionally planned for a particular cultural setting and its design provocation is oriented 'towards' the monuments rather than 'at' the monuments implies the need for orchestrating strategies that would enhance the experience for marchers as well as those watching.

In their works, protest can be personal as well as collective but should provide a deep sense of empathy.³⁵ The works of Gina Ford and Martin Zogran have included aspects of "*mine, yours, and ours*" that elaborates various understandings of personal and social democracy among the protestors: "*throwing shades*" that counter the climate of place that plays an important role in protest movements: and "*design proportions*" that deal with the scale of protest movement ranging from micro-conditions to grand.³⁶ Their design intentions involve nuanced differences between enabling a grand and flexible street for collective purposes while allowing more minor and more personable interactions.

³⁴ Ford, Gina, and Martin Zogran. 2017. <https://www.archdaily.com/>. Accessed February 9, 2020. <https://www.archdaily.com/873608/8-ways-we-can-improve-the-design-of-our-streets-for-protest#>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

This research has been particularly helpful as it occasionally prompted my study to reimagine of civic streets to be inspiring, engaging, experiential and respectful in the foreground with people and their primal nature of amplifying voices.

2.4 For the lack of Haptic in the Western Hegemony

In one of his classic works of Architecture theory, "*The Eyes of the Skin*," Juhani Pallasmaa questions the hegemony of the sight and addresses what he calls the 'western' instrument of consciousness. He writes that the eye has become the metaphor for truth. Indeed, abundant examples of this exist since the Renaissance history period, when one began to understand the knowledge of an event as a phenomenon often abounds by visual metaphors synonymous with clear vision.³⁷

While the book was initially based on Pallasmaa's personal experience and speculations, later, he became increasingly concerned about the bias towards a vision and the suppression of other senses. He further differentiates between the focused vision that confronts humans with the world to the peripheral vision that envelops us in 'the flesh of the world' and explains the essence of the experience that is molded by hapticity and peripheral unfocussed vision. The work has been constructive in understanding the deliberate suppression of sharp, focused vision to experience "spatiality, interiority and hapticity".³⁸

³⁷ Pallasmaa, Juhani. 2005. *The Eyes of the Skin*. Cornwall: John Wiley and Sons limited. 15-19

³⁸ Ibid., 44-56.

The thesis aims to address the understanding of how architecture in the past century has reduced the drama of societal construction to a mere visual engagement. While it is engagement, the meaning behind such engagement has more or less been misplaced. The lack of haptic nature can also be re-phrased as more-than-required-accommodation-of-vision in space-making that has created a distance between one's presence in space and one's own understanding of space. This research potentially explores the limitations of this error in judgment as an outcome of force inhabits in recent times where the world seems to be more available than it really is.

2.5 Public places of protest or Center of state control

Majdih Faleh, in her works, *How city squares can be public places of protest or center of state control* writes about "the image of power".³⁹ This imagery dissects the beginning with the name of a place. The urban public spaces tend to represent governments and cities rather than people and their voices. Over the past several years of disturbing scenes in city squares all across the world, the idea of protests and engaging "visually" has made it possible for power relations to suppress these voices. The idea of demonstration has merely trickled down to considering protests as a collective formation being televised rather than leaving memory etched in the temporality of space. Public squares were considered to be places of encounter and exchange since the times of Greek Agora, and Roman forums have been dissected and transformed into their new individual

³⁹ Faleh, Majdih. 2018. *How city squares can be public places of protest or centres of state control*. Melbourne, 3 October.

functions that either reflect the idea of power and repression, or a social uprising, or a city square protest. This dissection may have also transformed the thinking process of civilization, and social order as the protest is merely "seen" as a part of a discrete system where people voice and fight to stand up for their opinion rather than exchange. This has created an awkward distance between the actors of exchange and engagement, which needs to be addressed.

The study helps us in setting up the argument that while demonstrations may have lost their impact as invisible and non-visual forms of communication, the cities and their dwellers also seem to have lost their sight as well.

2.6 The Occupy Movement

In her paper called - "*The Occupy Movement: Emerging Protest Forms and Contested Urban Spaces*," Judy Lubin writes about the occupy movement that represents the evolving nature of social movements. These social movements employ traditional tactics as well as new technology and alternative forms of organizing to articulate concerns.⁴⁰ The claim to the right to the city by its own dwellers has more or less become an outsider's perspective, and this shift has created a virtual audience that is concerned as individuals, but lack of haptic weakens their concerns as groups in urban social movements.

⁴⁰ Lubin, Judy. 2012. "The Occupy Movement: Emerging Protest Forms and Contested Urban Spaces." *Berkeley Planning Journal* 184-197.

Lubin underscores the need for horizontal relationships and a "leaderless" structure in these protests to provide insight for design activism that has been lacking in the image of the city.⁴¹ The paper acknowledges the horizontal social movement and democratic structures as well as the setting of the stage for occupation in financial cityscapes. Lubin also underlines the persistence of presence which is more or less a stimulus for designing such places and making them more participative, expressive, and responsive to all types of voices.

The text separately describes some protests as rhetorical openings which sometimes get chaotic. Our society is trapped within so many number of problems that sometimes it is difficult to register their collective will on one topic. This lack of active engagement into one problem might be because of our suppression of other senses, which in turn is due to the lack of haptic spaces. This also highlights why our society has gradually become less empathetic. While all the efforts to solve our problems can be recognized as valid, the presence of a unified collective voice and a deeper understanding of the subject will be more effective in pushing the problems towards means of palpable change. This notion brings forth the meaning of occupying spaces. The occupation of spaces seems to have a visible impact on temporal spaces, but one can indeed occupy the space only by "the power of the arguments."⁴² While this holds true for almost all public movements that

⁴¹ Lubin, *The Occupy....*, 184-197.

⁴² Tharoor, Ishan. 2011. *www.time.com*. 15 November. Accessed February 10, 2020.
<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2099501,00.html>.

redefine and impose a newer identity to space-time, the argument becomes more reasonable when one considers the feedback loop structured around the coherence and collective unison of people.

This reading has been helpful in understanding that not only have the spaces been over-dependent upon the idea of visibility for too long, the fact that so much time can pass in simply giving each problem their space is testimony that it is difficult to actually differentiate between our social engagements in urban environment. Spaces need to be more empathetic in their nature of experience than be just merely visible. Perhaps, this may help the space in being more vocal.

2.7 Everyday Spaces as Sites of Protesting

Greg Watson in his paper, *Sites of Protest: Rethinking Everyday Spaces as Sites of Protesting the Marginalization of Difference* discusses how spaces in our contemporary societies have become increasingly difficult for people to negotiate disagreements. The writing represents people who oppose oppressive social conventions that marginalize them because of them belonging to or identifying as minorities. The paper explains an understanding of expressive activism through a valuable lens of the 'Human Library'.⁴³ These libraries “transform the spaces provided by traditional libraries into spaces that challenge contemporary socio-spatial dynamics.”⁴⁴ The paper further explains that

⁴³ Watson, Greg. 2018. <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/>. Accessed February 11, 2020.
<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1426>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

protests can be portrayed as both instrumental as well as expressive forms of activism where the former aims to change a law or policy and win human services and the latter as a continuum to lawful demonstrations or sometimes a political act.

Watson sheds light on the local social order of spaces that engage with 'Intergroup Relations,' 'the Spaces of Everyday Urban' that discusses the micro-spatial terrain of 'visibility and encounter,' the micro-public, and the spaces where people spend a significant amount of time on developing associations and "Spaces and Being" where spaces are stretched between encounter and negotiations, sites of illusion and bearers of informal segregations.⁴⁵

Perhaps this was one of the most important readings as it contributed towards the systematic development of how protest could unfold in a conditioned public environment. The thesis on the basis of this research explores the potentiality of protest movements being turned into volatile engagements, protest festivals and space of public conversation. This was also helpful in underlining that when the going of such spaces gets tough, perhaps space of protests can reasonably be divided into separate counter spaces.

⁴⁵ Watson, Greg. 2018. <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/>. Accessed February 11, 2020. <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1426>.

Chapter 3: Understanding Protests

3.1 The Duality of Activism in Social and Personal Beings

By the disposition of its nature, spaces of protests project a conundrum where each individual is confronted with self as well as operates as a part of a larger entity. This indicates a dual nature of our human behaviour. The duality of simultaneously being in oneself and in a crowd or larger entity at the same time is so immense that people often revisit their priorities. They question and frequently second-guess the relevance of their individual participation in relation to their social participation. This dual existence within a space of protest might be helpful in underlining one's depth or the degree of involvement in a particular cause. It can be said that spaces of protests lead us to an understanding where the same person could be distinct from self, based upon the level of separation from their temporal beings where their personal and collective choices might sometimes overlap, and other times be completely different. However, in any case, because such conflicts contribute to the progressive understanding within our society, it can be loosely assumed that this is one positive notion of transformation that is manifested in our spaces.

Protests, demonstrations and other similar forms of activism are metrics upon which one can weigh the mood of the society. These metrics are the moments of our society that help us revisit our assumptions which contribute towards production of social space. However, there are also other factors such as culture, ethnicities, geography that contribute to such production. It can perhaps be said that such factors can also govern for a protest to turn into a festival or similar temporal events. The nature of temporality for

these events is such that one may feel conflicted with the experience of one's ephemeral moments. The feelings outside their own self could often be different than the feelings within them. The ephemerality of such conflicted self-separation are such that both people and the space they manifest such events in, might not be aware of disposition of protest they have been through. Hence, it can also be said that protests are often historical events that take time to be comprehended and documented completely.

3.2 The philosophy of protest

The idea of voicing dissent or subsequently demonstrating opposition to specific values could eventually either be a personal one or a social one. While the protest map of the world has constantly been changing throughout the last few documented years, the cause manifested usually has required a motivation that is either political, scientific, moralistic, religious, or environmental amongst others. Usually, the locus of this form of event is defined by how protests expand and in what part of the society they dominate. However, the way a protests unfolds helps us understand its tendency as to whether it will transform into a violent experience. In my mind, such ontologies can be called as sub-textual understandings of space that undergoes events which may and may not be classified as successful form of activism.

It can be said that the nature of space and social order may help towards making our protesters and subsequently, spaces of protests creative. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons as to why the protests around the world in general are collective experiences and

less of a personal endeavour as our urban spaces predominantly focus on collective nature of society and less towards one's personal experience.

3.3 Examples from recent years

The thesis study identifies similar precedents from recent years where such demonstrations were carried across different age groups, races, and geographies. Each of the movements explained showcases that almost every protest has the potential to navigate itself into a culture of its own, and thus, make corrections against negative assumptions that exist within our social ecosystem.

3.3.1 Pursuing Environmental tactics in Save Our Forests Movement, India:

Understanding Collective action

The "*Chipko*" movement in India was designed to feign off cutting logs in the foothills of the Himalayas back in 1964 by the use of vernacular methods of protesting. One of the primary aspects of the movement involved that the individuals tied themselves to the trees that were being felled in order to gain lumber for a business elsewhere in India. The movement spread over the years and not only saved the trees but also gave wings to the concept where women could lead the society within a country that had long exposed itself to the notion of patriarchy.⁴⁶ In the year 1979, the movement had become one of the factors towards appeasement politics for all the political parties, and for the first time, they

⁴⁶ Petruzzello, Melissa. 2015. <https://www.britannica.com/>. 11 June. Accessed September 10, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chipko-movement>.

included the protection of the environment as a priority concern in their manifesto. Later that year, the parliament let the march and ordered a moratorium on felling of trees for commercial purposes in an area that bordered the Himalayas and its foothills. In 1980, a 15-year-long ban on all logging was passed in the region.

It was later revealed that the villagers taught “*Stick to your trees*” tactics to the later generations if this were to occur again. The campaign had grown into a movement that, even today, is spread across India under various banners.

The movement is also a testament to the idea that the realm of activism can be overlapped in public history at various stages of time. While some areas of public activism might look less visible than others, their involvement with time nonetheless underlines the nature of politics it holds when it spreads out to the masses. It also highlights the idea of place-making where environmental activism can simply be an adaptation of landscapes to signify the public interest that can educate the masses for what should be a common practice.

3.3.2 The Student-based movements in pursuit of Democracy: Protest shaping public spaces

Raoul Vaneigem in his book, “*The Revolution of Everyday Life*” writes that power clearly takes pleasure in persuading tyranny.⁴⁷ This tyranny potentially could produce

⁴⁷ Vaneigem, Raoul. 1967. *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Oakland: PM Press. 48-75.

fatalism that risk progress and representation in higher steps of social organization. He adds that "the perspective of power has only one horizon: death. Moreover, life goes to this well of despair so often that in the end, it falls in and drowns."⁴⁸

The unfolding of student protests in Beijing back in 1989 is an example of how a protest movement can eventually start from the boundaries of the classroom and end up adjacent to any country's seat of power. The movement not only highlights the unfolding of a protest but also how it can move within the city, eventually taking the center stage even in non-democratic societies.

The search and want of a more democratic and liberal society had led to students voicing grievances and calling out more needs for change. This soon became a counter idea for the functioning of Chinese government where protestors that included students, activists and academicians sought an alternate form of government that could run their country. Despite the immensity of the movement, the protest failed to achieve its mark and years later is recognised as *Tiananmen Square incident* of 1989.

Protest and other similar acts of demonstrations require easy gathering and dispersal of people who can participate in voicing concerns. This involves proximity to the nearest transportation network, walkability index of the cities, and the nature of power that govern such places. The city of Beijing shows that it had little space for easy dispersal. This factor alone can overwhelm the nature of protest irrespective of the number of people that could gather in supporting such causes. The higher urban density and nature of public

⁴⁸ Vaneigem, Raoul. 1967. *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Oakland: PM Press. 48-75.

space also can disenfranchise local participation and ultimately deprive protestors of the dissemination for information that could potential limit their momentum to sustain themselves.

The case of Beijing demonstrates an urban labyrinth that might not be able to differentiate between catch and release. Having a walkable distance that limits a walkable demonstration, non-public city centers, privately owned lands, and buildings are usually the recipes to create a disaster for demonstrations and voicing opinions. It outlines the basic idea in the mind of the protestor: there is no real place to go. While the strength of the movement sometimes makes people less conscious of spatial limitations, it is sometimes the modestly small crowds that can create achievements.

The India Gate situated in New Delhi, India is one such public space that potentially represents the mood of the country in times of social conflict. However, with similar concerns of walkable distances that are merely a symbolic gesture in city's axis, and the limitation to easily disperse often limits the protest movement in this monumental place to figurative need within society. While the area around India Gate is predominantly designed to host huge public gatherings, it has little room to engage a public conversation that could last days. Furthermore, the scale of this urban space barely helps in moving the protest around the city. The movements here are usually restricted to idea of occupying places and urban disruption instead of creating an urban vessel for significant change.

Such instances in protest spaces highlight the growing regression of public space from public life. While the recent years have seen an effort to significantly overturn the

nature of similar public spaces, in Beijing and Delhi, the occasional prompts coming from public discourses are still limited to simply making the spaces walk-friendly and they still seem to miss out on public spaces accommodating public life. The diminishing role of the public can be potentially reversed in the wake of emphasis that is required to demonstrate space's ability to help voice opinions.

3.3.3. The response of the Anti-racism movements in the United States and elsewhere in recent years

Black Lives Matter has become a significant movement in recent years that has reflected space as a Heterotopia⁴⁹ where almost all aspects of protests have been met with a counter-protest. Michel Foucault in his book, *"The Order of Things"* describes Heterotopia⁵⁰ as a parallel space that where everything in our utopian world is replaced by "undesirable"⁵¹ bodies. Usually, in an ideal world, any protest movement would be talked about in unison to foster progress in our society. However, the heterotopic space would rather have just different things with no intelligible connections. Such has been the idea of *Black Lives Matter* movement where populist parts of society have responded to the movement with their own counter-narrative that defeats the purpose in arguing for a collective progress. The movement can be termed as an expressive form of activism that has seen both periodic struggles and spontaneous reactions against the racial

⁴⁹ Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. 1986. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 22-27.

⁵⁰ Foucault, Michel. 1971. *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Books.

⁵¹ Ibid.

discrimination within our communities in parts of the world. People sympathising with the cause have subsequently participated in the movement through both the social media as well as manifestation in the physical spaces of our cities. The movement has garnered voices on social media in ways that have included sharing of articles, writing about them, supporting the cause with tags and photos or creating support groups and funding the protests. However, the physical manifestation of space has ranged from occupying parts of the cities through active demonstrations, visual representations of the movement on urban forms by artists, adopting faces of people who experienced discrimination to reach the masses, as well as taking the knee in public spaces, sports and recreation centers, and other similar public events among other things. It is interesting to note that the movement has gradually been adapted into an instrumental⁵² form of activism where the politics of our society has shaped the outcomes of certain democratic processes.

Moreover, this kind of protest teaches us is that sometimes the nature of societal conflicts become so much noticeable over time that the causes sometimes jump to other assumed dispositions of societies. Such is the beauty of specific responses in the wake of racial discrimination that people have found parallels and meanings within their lives when the times have got relevant and appropriate. Such protests teach us that perhaps there are movements that can soon shape into a cultural understanding such that it aims to remove negative assumptions while being collectively acknowledged. The determination

⁵² Watson, Greg. 2018. *<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/>*. Accessed February 11, 2020. <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1426>.

to march out openly in the midst of a pandemic⁵³ might offer a vital context for the revival of race-based activism in urban spaces. Not many movements in modern history have so openly disobeyed the civic rules⁵⁴ of their democratically elected government by setting aside the need to stay away from the urban spaces in times of emergencies. *Black Lives Matter* is one such protest that involved diverse community participation which questioned public crises of the society through various lenses.

However, the movement is also an example which represents the fact that although our society is sharply divided among certain issues, there are still people on both the sides who can sympathise with social causes contributing towards the progress of the society. The locus of the movement does not limit itself to voicing concerns against racial disparity. In fact, it asks us to revisit the nature of policing that our cities experience, the reasons behind the disparities that influence the urban aesthetics of certain neighborhoods, and re-visiting the allocation of public funds towards upliftment of the same.

3.4 Summarizing the recent years of Protest-Movements

The previously discussed precedents and movements teach us that a protest has the potential to systematically engage diverse community participation. This potential

⁵³ Arora, Manish. 2020. *washingtonpost.com*. 5 August`. Accessed April 27, 2021.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/08/05/how-coronavirus-pandemic-helped-floyd-protests-become-biggest-us-history/>.

⁵⁴ Cuddy, Alice. 2020. *bbc.com*. 21 October. Accessed April 28, 2021.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-54477523>.

invites social gestures and collective symbolism within public discourse that make any movement a vital step in re-visiting the societal contracts that would potentially represent everyone. The understanding of these newer social contracts helps us to conceive newer concepts in urbanism and breaking the representational barriers that are sporadically spread all over city planning.

For a very long time, the social logic of activism has been muted within our urban spaces. The causes and their manifestations have been too raw to process simply because they seem to have no space in our cities. Urban spaces unfairly represent sections of society and this has led to space being a vessel of a non-democratic phenomenon. Moreover, not only do our cities find close to no room to voice dissent, the available room, in fact is highly compressed because of urban functions that have been given higher priorities. Hence, our cities have often been found guilty to fence off spontaneous vocalism. It could be accurate to say that when the public gets tough, the places find themselves of lesser use as far as helping to represent a cause or amplifying a voice is concerned. There is no conducive positivity that an urban space provides, by design or any reason to believe that it could drag itself with the public threshold and create a pivotal moment in representing the history by its own choice.

In reality, our cities are manifestations of different livelihoods that find their homes within its boundaries. These presence of these lives is symbolic of the representations that our cities must reveal. While Aristotle elaborates that cities are the center of culture that

is representative of many different individuals;⁵⁵ such definitions seem to be missing in our modern day cities. Hence, many planned spaces actually have a tendency to ignore such representations that should otherwise be used for inspiring further generations. This could mean that the landscape of urban spaces can be entirely political, but it is absolutely shunned by our cities and eventually a large part of society as far as multi-representation is concerned.

Recent history has seen examples where governments have renamed the streets or erected statues of relevant public figures in order to re-assign urban space a larger public meaning. However, such instances limit the public conversations to the meanings assigned and open society to little room for a broader conversation outside the assigned public boundaries. In a way, it is like walking through open museums where newer meanings are erected in the shape of statues or laid down in our public realm in the name of streets and roads. This musealisation of multi-representation only freezes the moments of history and closes all possibilities of furthering public engagement. After all, the idea of any public movement is to expand the boundaries of public thinking and social thought processes.

Arguably, the reason that such practice gain prominence and are deemed acceptable is because the movements gained symbolically provide us a place to react against the atrocities and negative assumptions in multiple ways. The limited functions of our cities

⁵⁵ Ellis, *A Treatise....*, 175-179.

would otherwise bar individuals the permission to do similar activism within their own cohort. Our schools are supposed to educate. Our neighborhoods are supposed to be lived in. Our financial centers are supposed to run economy. And our streets are supposed to help us move in the cities. These aspects and designated functions leave little room to react to our imaginations where spaces can be something other than their own designations.

Our cities are largely blind towards the pain of any crisis which is discriminatory. The so-called public institutions often find a reasonable argument for betrayal. The people should have the right to decide the democracy and vocalism of their space which is currently not the case.

3.5 What can we take away from this?

Peter Schwarzstein, in one of his articles, explains places around the world that are a perfect stage to voice grievances. In one instance, he calls Athens one such city where housing a protest movement is synonymous to engaging with the aspects of urban planning and architecture where the role of people is paramount in producing rich dialogue for a society.⁵⁶ Perhaps, this has something to do with entropy and the timeless ways of living in such places. This shows that the significance of place comes from the way they function instead of how they look like. Such examples have been found proportional to a socio-urban topography where places have existed along with their people for more than

⁵⁶ Schwartzstein, Peter. 2020. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/>. 7 June. Accessed June 30, 2020. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/geography-protest-how-urban-design-can-make-or-break-people-power-180975189/>.

a while, and they resonate on similar wavelengths. A similar example has been found in Berlin, where the accelerated change in social and urban topography over the last centuries has opened up an avenue for public spaces that invite a broader social dialogue apart from nesting the public buildings within its boundaries.

While one could argue that protests could be about spectacle,⁵⁷ there are movements that have found themselves in less artistic spaces than just representations that bear the weight of their movements. If anything, the vastness of cities plays a minor role when it comes to protesting movements or shaping the narratives of the people sitting within its walls. However, recent years have shown that the rise of social networking and the internet has challenged this notion of human operation. The depths of vocalism can be found within the focal points of the any protest movement that are generally manifested in our urban or digital space. However, all focal points run the risk of vanishing if they are hidden away from public view. Our city planning does not recognize such kinds of participation from its inhabitants.

Recent years of protests and their instances have brought attention to the power relations and understanding of imbalanced hierarchies that may have inadvertently gone into making our cities, often veiling the true meaning of participation in what might seem like a perfectly democratic space.

⁵⁷ Strauss, Claudia. 2018. "Engaged by the Spectacle of Protest: How Bystanders Became Invested in Occupy Wall Street." In *Political Sentiments and Social Movements*, by Claudia Strauss and Jack R. Friedman, 33-60. London: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

There are built environments that are undesirable instigators to impede freedom of speech and restricting movements. The nature of public space within a democracy can always have an underlying political significance to it. In some ways, the call for protests and participation in the various medium of activism is a power struggle between the hierarchies of society. Urban spaces largely reflect these struggles more than the others, and the impact of these struggles can have consequences on either side of the power structure.

Jeff Hou, in his book, *City Unsilenced* mentions that “the development and maintenance of parks and other open spaces have mostly relied upon private funding that results in the privatization of space.”⁵⁸ He further explains that this has actually diminished the support for public spaces in the larger context of living, and in cases, private spaces such as shopping malls have increasingly replaced streets and plazas as more desirable places of everyday life.⁵⁹ In a way, public life have been disciplined to be devoid of any kind of political expression.

While mass communication and social media have become really conducive for the dissemination of information, it can be observed that the operation of public democracy has been regressed to the democratic structures with freedom of expression perceived as a threat to the image of public life. We have instances where the leaders of our institutions rely upon social media for their public image but constrict any public conversation about their work in public space. These tactics have not only involved blocking of websites to suit

⁵⁸ Hou, *City.....*, 15-48.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

needs, it also involves jamming of foreign broadcast and surveillance of journalists, artists, writers and foreign correspondents. In some countries, that have seen a dramatic rise in populist movements, we have examples where governments have actively promoted targeted hackings and trolling campaigns.⁶⁰ The urban design has become restricted to whimsical imagery that provides a peek to only specific shades of the social, political, and economical way of life. This has suppressed the negotiations of perspectives and interests by controlling the direction for the growth of public space in the future.

The rising numbers of recent protests around the world are suggestive of the fact that people might be losing faith in democratic institutions and feel their representations are being suppressed. This opens up an avenue for working upon the public spaces and making them essential, multi-representational, as well as resistant to the restraining tactics that have evolved over the years and are contemporarily being employed to supposedly maintain a sense of calm in public spaces. In theory, if the urban space can get more public and democratic than it currently is, one might not even need permission to voice an opinion or go through the tedious process of finally organizing a protest. The use of urban space should be to help liberalize the landscape for its citizens.

While the active support and opposition of having spaces of such democratic yet polarised nature could be a topic of debate, this chapter of the thesis took some liberty of

⁶⁰ Committee to Protect Journalists. 2019. *10 Most Censored Countries*. 2019 September. Accessed April 26, 2021. <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/09/10-most-censored-eritrea-north-korea-turkmenistan-journalist/>.

weighing the narrative of spaces and their subsequent spectrum of larger social order at various points in recent history. The idea has been to understand the fundamental aspects of public demonstration through specific keywords or passive narration so as to build an incremental idea of architecture that could perhaps, be seen as holistic and participative rather than a space that constantly sparks unrest within specific structures of society.

Chapter 4: Vessels of activism - Expressionism and Instrumentalism

The over-reliance upon the internet and superfluous representation of everyday struggles through the mouthpieces of corporate and social media has created a divide amongst people as well as widened the gap between the public and their fundamental idea of interaction. Jaron Lanier, the founding father of Virtual Reality and author of *“Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now”* explains that the modern day activities of internet and social media are synonymous to human addiction.⁶¹ He explains that the internet has come a long way from being an acute place for ideas and their exchange to being business model of companies where people are both, commodities and consumers.

4.1 Thriving culture of social media

The influence of behaviour on the basis of algorithm in the past few years has diminished our social idea of being. Limiting our emotions to the virtual world of smileys and emoji has also flattened our self-worth. Not only this, it has misguided the boundaries of human interactions where everyone sheepishly occupy their digital and not physical space. Such behaviour has deprived our real world of its value, meaning, and truth. This idea of spaces plateauing in terms of experience has become more and more evident as spaces have catapulted their meaning into oblivion.

⁶¹ Lanier, Jaron. 2018. *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*. London: Penguins Random House.

On similar notes, architecture too has relied upon facile images as means of representing the public. This has naturally misled spaces into being unconcerned with the mood of ordinary people. Dissonance, friction, and conflicts are dispositions of spaces that make them more temporal. Such aspects of spaces only improve the idea of a more public place than a place that is tied to imagery which is never true. One could say that architecture has over-relied upon imagery⁶² in the past few years, and this has vaporized the nature of temporal spaces from our surroundings. Hence, much of the meaning is misplaced when the distance between the thoughts and their tendency to be recognized in unfamiliar surroundings is unreasonably stretched. Thus the sensory experience of the space becomes more synthetic, and it begets a lesser meaningful space to exist in.

4.2 How should we protest?

The nature of protest could potentially employ either an instrumental form of activism or an expressive form of activism. While instrumental forms of activism are mainly prolonged over a period of time and are spread across decades, they also “aim to change the laws or policy within a social order”⁶³ that can help in winning critical human services. On the other hand, expressive activism is relatively a spontaneous action that is rooted within the grass-root movements and perhaps “challenges the notion of public space”.⁶⁴

⁶² Gomez, Alberto Perez, and Louise Pelletier. 1997. *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

⁶³ Eschle, Catherine, and Neil Stammers. 2004. “Taking Part: Social Movements, INGOs, and Global Change.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 333-372.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Instrumental and expressive activism can also be differentiated on the kinds of spaces they occupy. The former is more inclined to happen within a democratic process or within the walls of democratic symbols such as parliaments, town-halls where elected officials primarily voice the need to bring a change and make progress: thus, signifying the notion of collective action. One such form of instrumental activism has been the reform of Section-5 in the public order act in the United Kingdom.

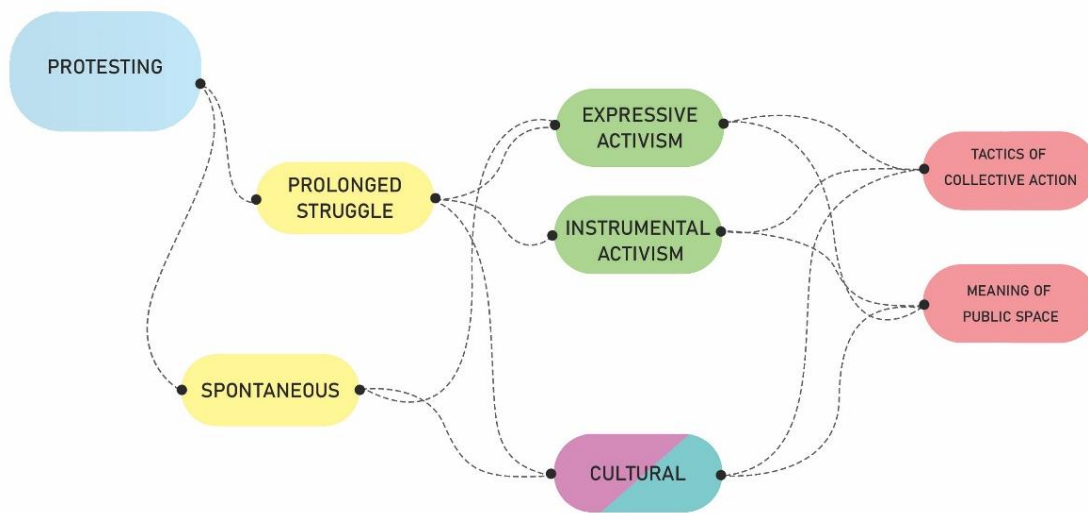


Figure 3: Anatomy of a protest in general. Image by Author

4.2.1 Reform towards Section V: a form of instrumental activism

Christian Institute – a registered charity and a pressure group is one such organization that carries out forms of Instrumental activism at a broader societal level. Back in 2012, they launched a campaign to remove the word “insulting” from section 5 of the public order act because it posed dubiousness around the idea as to how people could lawfully decide whether they had been insulted by someone other person or group. The campaign underlined that while the law should protect people from unjust discrimination,

it should not protect them from having their feelings hurt or, the fact, owe the decision of whether or not one had been insulted to the local courts or police.



Figure 4: Image by reformsection5.org.uk

We live in a digital age where the devices of information and knowledge within the paradigm of all their positive aspects are unfortunately also infested with a culture of outrage, shaming, calling out through the self-appointed arbiters of the public good that often encourage media stoked outrage. Such culture thrives upon the procurement of

public actants who might feel a terrible pressure to react or participate in online discourse.

Such incidents have raised two key issues within our society's functioning:

- The amorphous clouds of the digital age are mainly governed by media. This, in turn, raises some fascinating issues about expression, communication, and information handling that we have not come to terms with as yet.
- Such instances also highlight that our society has the potential to be polarised immediately if the time allocated to it for particular issues is not enough to think over. This might lead to an accelerated thought process that might be less informed and more dangerous.

In the digital age, people, by default would participate in an objective fallacy where they scroll through vast amounts of information within a short span of time. This social process begets personal assumptions that people make about themselves where they think that the information they are going through can be processed by them faster than they would think, and thus, it serves their interest. However, it is not really the case most of the time. A 1973 study by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Twersky, based on the availability heuristic, identifies and labels this current social phenomenon where people or users actually might use mental shortcuts by basing external information upon their own personal experience.⁶⁵ The immediate examples that come to their mind help in evaluating

⁶⁵ Kahneman, Daniel. 2011. *Thinking Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

specific topics, concepts, or methods and thus, influence their decision-making. This is perhaps an over-simplistic way of looking at the world and has, in fact, led to a recent rise in misinformation within the digital space that basically thrives upon this oversimplification of a complex topic, thus feeding into a problematic loop.

4.2.2 Expressive forms of activism: Our cities

The expressive form of activism, on the contrary, may predominantly be found within public places such as parks, streets, or around power structures instead of within them. While expressive activism involves a spontaneous response to underlying prejudice, it can also come across as continuous political acts ranging from lawful demonstrations to aggressive exchanges. Nevertheless, it does not mean that one form of protest cannot cross ways with another form.

There are examples of places around the world that can closely be represented as the cradles or contemporary representation of such expressive forms of activism. With emergence of much deeper understandings about the evolution of our society through the passage of our cultural time, our cities and places of everyday habitat have constantly conceived newer ways of public conversation and interactions. These ways have reflected themselves in ancient Athenian *Agoras* that were frequented by philosophers, medieval English cafeterias that were center of 'equal academic discussions' or historical Indian riverbanks in *Varanasi* that were centers of religious and social discussion as well as disputes in India among other places. These spaces have time and again been representation of expressive forms of activism that have manifested themselves in a

democratic societies. Athens and Berlin have been two of such similar places in their specific periods of history. At their point in time, they have reflected similar social behaviour for fostering public voices through its spaces and subsequently its people. The reason that democracies in such cultural time periods and places have been so profound is because at their heart, such societies aimed at fostering a healthier and more public conversation. These are not some radically new concepts but explain us that when left at the mercy of the public that has more horizontal societal structure, our cities thrive to become more democratic.

A good way to understand our cities and their manifested democracies is to study them in parts and reason with them why their specific demographics still made up those cities. To my mind, a space may manifest a more equitable democracy if the measure of rearranging the same demographics in multiple ways within our cities can be carried out without changing the value of those representations. In such an ideal city, no matter how we rearrange the demographics, the culture of the city would not change. Perhaps, it can be said that the spaces that have many ways of representation can be called spaces with high degree of democracy and the spaces with minimal representation can be called a space with lower degree of democracy. However, we know that none of the spaces remain the same over years and therefore, the spaces of expressive activism within such cities either transform or disintegrate to some other space. With our cities constantly becoming culturally diverse over the passing years, it is overwhelming more likely that having such spaces of public conversation would help in creating equitable and just societies. The thesis

identifies examples of cities that may have inadvertently fostered spaces that are conducive to the expressive forms of activism.

4.2.2.1 Culture and Multiplicity of Berlin

In the years 1984-87, Peter Eisenmann and Jaqueline Robertson invested their time committed to one of the most prestigious Kochstrasse and Friedrichstrasse competitions. Their project provided an opportunity to discuss the triangulations between Germans, Jews, and Turkish people with respect to discrimination, given Germany's historical connection with racism and anti-Semitism. Eisenmann, then questioned some of the theories and basic constructed values of modern geometries, which at times were "non-representational, artificial and timeless."⁶⁶ For his submitted explanations, there were at least three versions of a project titled "City of Artificial Excavation," which highlighted his intention to respond to the symbolic location of the site along the Berlin wall⁶⁷ by excavating all of its historical layers.

⁶⁶ Akean, Esra. 2020. "Open Architecture, Rightlessness, and Citizens-to-come." In *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, by Irene Cheng and Charles L. Davis, 324-338. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

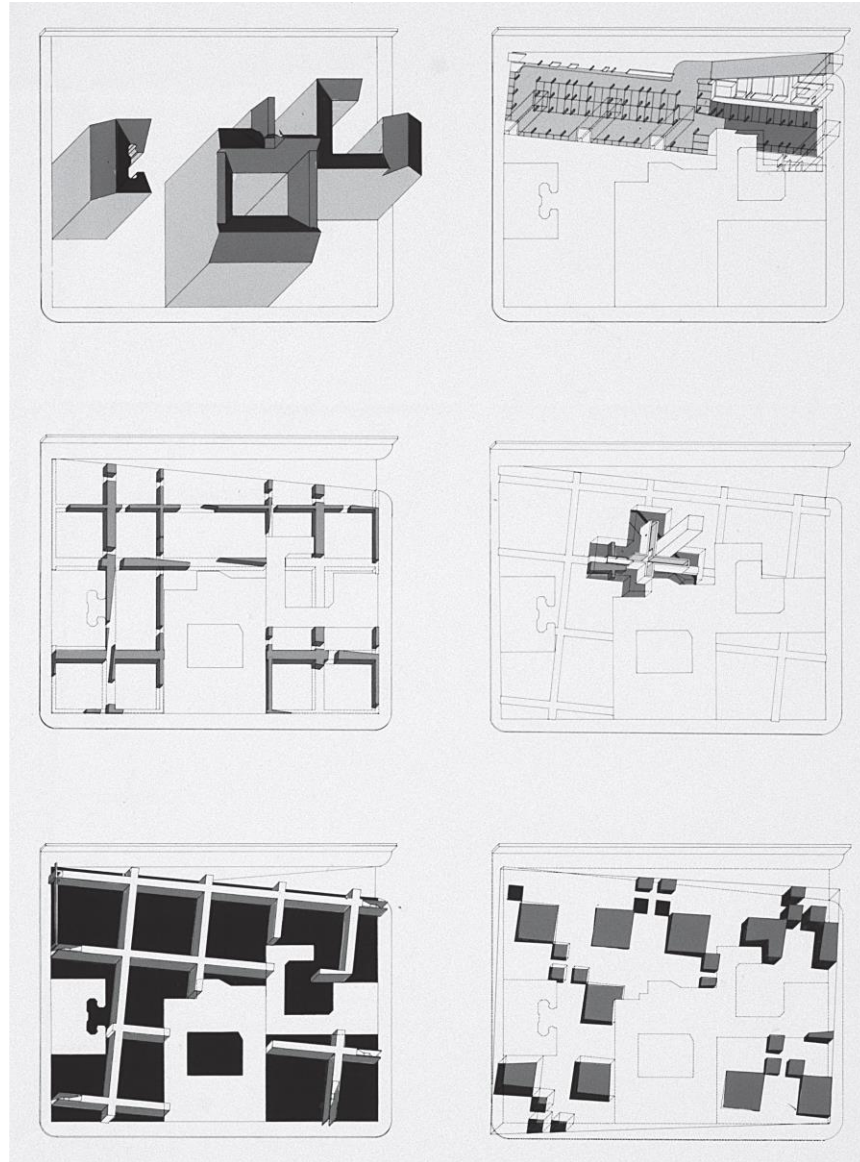


Figure 5: Image adapted from the Project of Peter Eisenmann and Jaqueline Robertson, "Kochstrasse/ Friedrichstrasse Competition" in IBA-1984/87 published in Eisenman Papers, Canadian Center for Architecture

The frequent and repetitive use of the word "void" provided an inspiring metaphor for Berlin which in later years was described as a city that has been "written, erased and re-written throughout its violent century." Although many of events in Berlin's history did not make it to the final report, given the rich background of Eisenmann's intellect resources, one might assume that if ever such an idea was to translate into a physical

space, the unsaid events such as Holocaust oppression would find themselves a central monument in Berlin's fabric where the city is portrayed through cut and voids symbolizing power relations within Berlin's past. While the pre-world war II Berlin in late 1910's during Weimar Republic offers a fertile ground for a more social demographics despite the confusion political turmoil of Germany, the latter years mark that democracy and its spaces cannot be self-evident.

Esra Akean further discusses the open architecture in her works where she mentions that working in an immigrant city district and specifically on public housing projects has helped her translate new ethics of hospitality in architecture. This can further elaborate collectivity, democracy and multiplicity.⁶⁸ The works further highlight that while cities can have democratic processes that are highly participative, they may not be conducted without contradictions. It also underlines that idealizing unresolved participatory design process as a synonym of democracy may as well be problematic.⁶⁹

Such an example highlights that while public conversations and spaces of contested and similar public discourse is vital for a just city, it is more necessary that those public conversations lead us towards some solutions as well, otherwise such spaces could be very paradoxical to their purpose.

⁶⁸ Akean, Open Architecture....., 324-338.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

4.2.2.2 Freedom, Acropolis and Athens

Among the first places that “favoured many instead of few”⁷⁰ has been the ancient city of Athens. In light of the same, *Athenian* statesmen have been largely responsible for the completion of *Athenian Democracy*. The idea of freedom of speech was ingrained to the point that it became part of the private lives of people.⁷¹ This idea of freedom has been largely reflected in the *Athenian Acropolis* that embodies Greek Ideals of Democracy.



Figure 6: Syntagma Square in Athens has been one of many protest points in recent years. Photo by Louisa Gouliamaki

⁷⁰ Rhodes, Robin Francis. 1995. *Architectural Meaning of the Athenian Acropolis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 42-66.

⁷¹ Fefferman, Dan. 2007. *newworldencyclopedia.org*. 4 September. Accessed April 28, 2021. <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Acropolis>.

“The architecture of Acropolis in several ways has also been a clear expression of civic pride. This is based upon the foundations of citizen’s individual freedom inherent in democratic Athens.”⁷² For this reason, Greek Architecture epitomised by *Acropolis* is still visible in many of our government buildings.⁷³

The influence of the ancient philosophy has been such that even today, modern day Athens exhibits broad, if not overly long, central boulevards, which one can say were stitched into the urban fabric over the years for only parading. *Syntagma*, its large parliament-facing square, forms a natural focal point for marchers.⁷⁴ With narrow streets surrounding the center, it is very easy for demonstrators in Athens to steal away if the going gets rough.⁷⁵ If anything, the production of cultural space in Neo-liberal Athens creates a number of sites where hegemony is contested.

4.3 Argument of Democracy in Our Space

There have been instances of urban spaces in *Athenian Acropolis* and Athens, as well as the Berlin in both *Weimar Republic* and Germany that fundamentally reflect the temperament of a democratic society. This might not have perfectly manifested itself in any of the societies but even the smaller fragment of spaces leave us with reasons to

⁷² Rhodes, *Architectural....*, 145-166.

⁷³ Neils, Jenifer. 2005. *The Parthenon: From Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁷⁴ Schwartzstein, Peter. 2020. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/>. 7 June. Accessed June 30, 2020. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/geography-protest-how-urban-design-can-make-or-break-people-power-180975189/>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

believe that spaces in all such cultural periods in above instances were open to public discussion and expressive forms of activism.

To my mind, an ideal democratic space exhibiting both expressive and instrumental forms of activism would produce unexpected structures and social encounters that operate within the modes of social praxis. This would range from politics to art, life to death, static to dynamic urban limits and therefore be helpful in crossing boundaries of non-established roles of activists and spatial divisions within the city.

This idea of history where the historical setting of Acropolis transforms into a modern day Athens, and the fragments of democracy, participation and contradictions in the historical timeline of Berlin highlight that protests could ontologically be a collection of starting points. These starting points would invite unexpected urban exchanges that manifest themselves in a space that eventually gives rise to a newer meaning of public. Such newer meaning of public produces much newer models of city organisation challenging the old ones. A potential lead towards newer form of public sphere which is sometimes seen in a contested space, or more precisely a protest space will therefore, help our society evoke a response that is cultural, synonymous to collective action and meaningful to new forms of democratic urbanism.

Chapter 5: Unjust Spaces

The growing difference in power relations within the zones of the city has led to the urban spaces being increasingly controlled through various forms of surveillance or censorship. It is noticeable that there are cities that operate within the principles of exclusion where a significant effort is spent in keeping out the 'wrong' kind of crowd, narrative, and highlighting a sense of diffidence to the cause of many grass-root movements. Such surveillance highlights the obsession of our power structures to be public even though the spaces they seem to occupy feel fairly reclusive.

In a way, while the building that accommodates our representative and houses various seats of power within our cities call themselves public; there is something less public about such buildings. This can be observed in the axis or the roads that lead to our public monuments. Often our so called powerful public building are comfortably placed within a setting that is besotted with similar buildings such as memorials, public libraries and museums. In a way, an argument could be made where such sets of buildings might in fact have served better had they been spread out within our cities instead of being collected within particular locations. This nature of city planning produces our spaces in the city that operate as "discrete systems".⁷⁶

A society's choice for a social narrative is probably suppressed when our urban spaces start to function as highly regulated internal systems. These regulated internal

⁷⁶ Hillier, Bill. 2007. *Space is the machine*. London: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.

systems leave out the public within the domain of spatial experience. This has created a vast gap between the public that is governed and the people in the so called public building that govern spaces. Such compartmentalisation of urban cities as well as specificity of buildings within a particular part of the city often leave the rest of the city structure imbalanced as far as the power relations is concerned. Some of the tactics that have previously led to such imbalance are:

- Gentrifying parts of the cities as financial centers.
- Creating a steep socio-political hierarchy within a particular region of the city.
- Dedicating portions of the city to the tourism and forgetting the inhabitants who should be the priority.

In a way, all such urban tactics stage our cities as theme parks instead of vessels for everyday life that is social and just. Such hegemonies create gaps within social justice or impede our progress towards just cities. This demise of our cities becomes a little more visible when parts of the cities come closer to being called privatized estates as the nature of power dissolves around their walls.⁷⁷ It has been observed that in the recent past, cities have intentionally made way for spaces that make it difficult for people to negotiate disagreement respectfully.

⁷⁷ Hou, *City....*, 119-156.

It is understood that some spaces may function well with others, as many urban functions are intertwined with the "flow of routine" that involves habitual behavior of going to work, crossing streets, shopping, or sending kids to school. It also highlights that "Belonging" or "Being represented" are not abstract concepts. As people move in and out of different spaces, they demonstrate how belonging is experienced differentially.⁷⁸ "The pleasure and powers it confers are not distributed evenly but linked to relations of the unequal practice of social exclusion."⁷⁹ This warns us against romanticizing our cities as accessible to all or over-simplistically neutral. There are specific spaces in our cities that have their own way of functioning.

Some of such spaces can be classified as follows:

- Shared space of Personalisation: these include spaces such as beaches, cafeterias, university classrooms where people in such spaces can enact separation based on the personalization of shared space. This highlights that separation practices can be enacted and reproduced.
- Shared space of Freedom: the social dynamics in cities becomes "less flat" when spaces are described as nests of misgivings or serendipitous engagement. These spaces are malls, parks, and often cultural streets where social thriving is more vertical than horizontal.

⁷⁸Watson, Greg. 2018. <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/>. Accessed February 11, 2020.
<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1426>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

- Shared space of Engagement: these are the spaces that always run the risk of being labelled something else in public meaning. They are usually limited in numbers and scattered around city. Such spaces are dependent upon the micro-public and could be within universities, public monuments, or next to work, sports, recreation and could potentially function as spaces of an engagement or voluntary negotiation.

However, these examples also highlight that “co-presence and collaboration”⁸⁰ could be two different things. For instance, “workplaces and schools do invite a certain code of civility”⁸¹ in their spatial domain, making it difficult to have certain public conversations until space is designated for them. Such is also true for the internal environments of many public buildings such as museums, libraries, and certain public monuments. These explanations highlight that there may be a need to re-visit our civic spaces and help them take a cultural route so that it activates spatial politics by engaging more in urban public spaces. Hopefully, this may help in highlighting long-standing socio-spatial inequalities and further resolving them.

⁸⁰ Watson, Greg. 2018. <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/>. Accessed February 11, 2020.
<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1426>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Chapter 6: Design

The thesis aims to highlight problematic constructs that are based on underlying prejudices, injustice, or resentment. It acknowledges that not everything can be addressed on a social platform where the movements are usually aired, agreed upon, or dealt with outside a socio-legal and spatial system. One of the ways to tackle society's resistance towards such hatred or gaps in intellectual temper is to foster free speech and probably real interactions of people in a public conversation. Not being able to speak or participate is incrementally an effort to restrict progress. This eventually becomes a tool to silence any thought process. Hence, this can probably be tackled by fostering spaces of activism that could counter the censoriousness of media, invoke a healthier public acceptance as far as robust criticism is concerned, and reduce the roles of certain governments extraordinarily authoritarian and controlling routines when it comes to freedom of thought.

6.1 Conceptual Position

Spaces of protests can have their bearings in significant experience and construction of meaning that are prone to be ignored by conceptual and objective design practice. As previously discussed, our cities are filled with urban forms that are either standardised in design practice and overstep their spatial functions, or are filled with cordoning of centers of power and finance that not only gentrify certain parts of the city but also limit the overall social functions. In order to create a just city which is socially sustainable and bridges the gap between financially disparate neighborhood, we need newer forms of urban spaces which not only re-invent the scale of our cities to a more

human or community level but also help in engaging practices that foster empathetic public conversations. Hence, spaces of protests, demonstration and activism instil a temperament where people get to know about their personal and public differences. Furthermore, they also are helpful in understanding the mood of the society at the grass-roots level. In these ways, such spaces can potentially contribute significantly towards the representation of all public in any urban form.

However, this potential also comes with challenges where social dynamics may question how people's being in particular sites impact their being a person. This highlights that when it comes to protesting, the fate of protest is often pivoted by the people being labeled either as outsiders or insiders. For many people, this means that our societies are examples of dissatisfaction based upon various kinds of discriminative profiling. In some sites, people may be referred to as "cohabitants or citizens"; in others, they could, unfortunately, be called "impure and threats."⁸² In an ideal world, spaces of activism would be able to identify such disparities through the public conversation of its people, and contribute towards reducing these negative assumptions that detriment the progress of our society.

My design program aims to circumvent the idea around identity politics where instead of posing a question related to "what we are," there can eventually be a public evaluation about "how we are" and perhaps "why do we do, what we do." This opens up

⁸² Watson, Greg. 2018. <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/>. Accessed February 11, 2020.
<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1426>.

room for social conversation instead, where people may accommodate other people's thought processes. Such conversations aim to augment the public narrative in our cities that are subsumed by social tensions. It hopes to transform the traditional urban spaces into spaces that challenge contemporary socio-spatial dynamics.

6.2 Terms of Engagements

The new narrative of our city involves proposing spaces of social engagement where people can choose various parts of conversations – and engage in a dialogue about the ways in which people experience and perceive differences. They schedule and develop their protests and also choose their own description of engagements. Perhaps the multitude of expression might need to be defined by certain rules in the space where:

- People are free to raise any topics or questions
- Spectators can voice their opinions too
- A provisional right to reserve or decline when dialogues become volatile or unreasonable
- Assuming it is okay to make mistakes in the first few days of participation
- Highlighting that this is a constructive process.

Perhaps this form of expressive activism where laying the norms of peaceful demonstration could be potentially helpful for people to explain "how they are" without being toxically positive or negative about their beings all the time. With such rules of engagement, people can perhaps discover their own construction of meaning within public space that helps them gain empathy for other people. With the idea that people

understand other people, no matter how that is manifested in space would help in bridging the gap within social conversation and public discourse.

Our spaces constantly manifest the ideas of dissonance, temporality and festival that challenge the notion of a conventional public discourse which currently depends upon a hierarchy of social structure. The thesis concept aims to address those disparate boundaries and understand what could potentially constitute a public space.

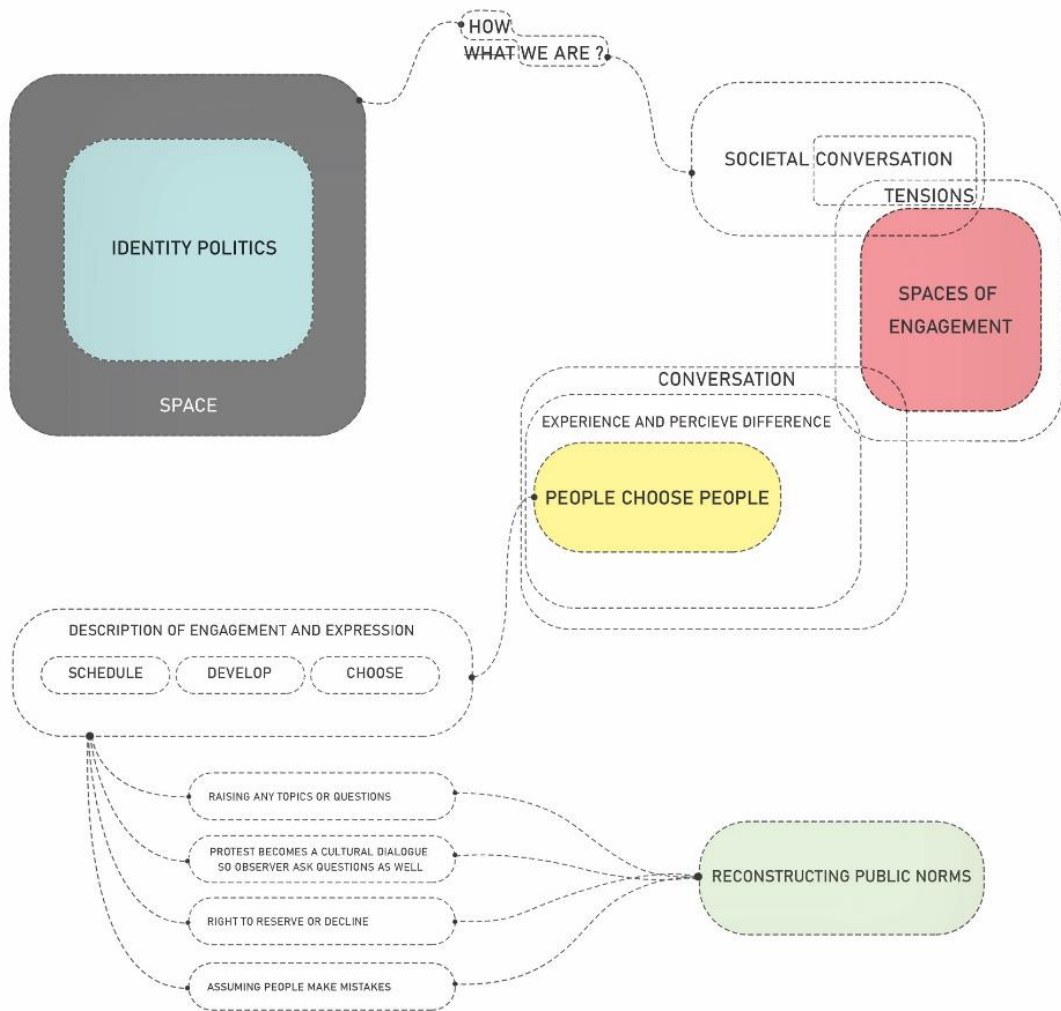


Figure 7: Conducting a public conversation in a protest space. Image by Author

While the thesis tries to address concerns to cull the unequal manifestation of social structure within the space, at the same time, it recognises that urban character, power-relations, urban exclusions and tensions, social topography, and image of the cities are still some of the factors that will dwell within our conversation to define the public space. It is simply that the factors governing the public life of the city would have more accelerated impact within our social structures. These accelerated impacts may not be sudden changes but it still highlight the progress within the social construct of the public. Hence, it can be said that our newer public space will potentially recreate public norms that dwell within the realm of our cities.

6.3 Site

Adding further to the study, after rounding up relevant sites to support my thesis argument, I went around looking for potential sites that could perhaps help in showcasing the proposed concepts a more clearly. This process involved studying various spaces such as “the Mall in Washington DC”, “Reichstag in Berlin” and “India Gate in New Delhi”.

However, I narrowed down my research and limited my scope of study to the City Hall Plaza in Boston which happened next to Boston City hall. This was shortlisted for the study owing to the scale of the site which was neither too big, nor too small when compared to the other sites. I could manage the understanding of social and public space within such a scale. The site was located within the urban precinct that had all kinds of public buildings, markets and proximity to residential neighborhoods. This also was potentially helpful to me because for me, the protest spaces are largely about moving out

of their focus points and the nature of site could potentially help me understand as to how such spaces transform to various scales when a variety of urban scales are put together. The site also had figments of history and collective memory in the current context that could help anyone revisit the history of the site in order to connect the dots and understand the reasons behind the current version of the site, 'why it is the way it is?', and so on. The historical documentation and essays on the site have shown presence of constant wear and tear for the site, with the site being used as a street at one point, to being opposite to the field at the other. It is also significant to notice that the City hall was not always there on the current site but was in fact shifted from a place that was South of the site and looped against the Court Street.

The current version of the city hall goes back to 1968 when Brutalism as an architecture movement was more acceptable. This has evident in many such University, public spaces and government buildings of the time. The project was part of the project movement that included building a City hall as a part of Government Center complex that was next to a 'surrounding plaza'. The rugged brick landscape was translated to a more concrete look on the building facade with the building that accommodated Council Chambers, library and Mayor's office in its sleek curtain walls and cantilevered upper floors. The adaptation of bold granite structure and brick was owed to the spaces around Alexander Parris' Quincy market that was immediately to the east of the complex.⁸³ The

⁸³ Millard, Charles W. 1970. "The New Boston City Hall." *The Hudson Review* 110-115.

brick based plaza was proposed keeping in mind that the public may have wide access to the building.

The space around the proposed plaza had been negotiated repetitively over the years as part of the various design moves in its history. The site originally was a collection of three to four different sites that had major public movements through it. These collections of sites were flanked by Cambridge Street on its west and the Congress Street on the east. The two streets that were named differently back in 1800s were linked by the Hanover street that ran from more eastern precinct outside the site and connected the movement to the other side on the west. In recent years, with the access to the archives and historical maps demonstrates how the site may have been far from its current function of accommodating City Hall.

However, the plaza negotiated back in 1960s may have been part of the architecture moves which were fairly common around some of the Brutalist buildings that situated themselves in vast bland urban-scapes.

6.3.1 Site History

The access to the site archives and historical maps also shows how fragmented the site had been throughout its course while contributing to the urban form. This fragmentation and contextual disconnect of the history of the site implored the need to identify some urban landmarks of previous period of times that may have been common throughout the history of the site. While the fields on the east of the site were completely gone, the larger precinct map still highlighted a presence of a cemetery next to the site of

older City Hall on the south side of the site with Court Street looping towards northwest from the south.

Similar landmarks were difficult to find within the site boundaries but one such historical context was laid into Hanover Street that ran through the site joining the east and west parts of the precinct. The street was closed-off as part of the larger design move in 1960s to accommodate a city hall plaza that would be more accommodating to the public view. While I could not find any historical significance to the Hanover Street in the archival maps and texts, the idea that the scale of city hall plaza broken down with the steps to divide the site into multiple parts also brought back my focus within the immediate needs of the site.

By a quick gaze, one might tell that the site misses the element of human scale as we move towards the center of City Hall plaza where one feels lost within the vastness of the site. Moreover, the presence of JFK federal building and the Boston City hall wrap the argument as far as amicable human scale and connecting to a more public narrative is concerned. This prompted the design move to partially bring back the Hanover that would overlap the surface of the City hall plaza but at the same time give the sense of situating oneself within the city. I believe that the narratives of social construct and public conversation are best communicated on the streets which seem to be the lifeblood of social values within the public.



Figure 8: Hanover Street through the site in year 1769 demarcated within red. Archive image by William Prince, Library of Congress

6.3.2 The intervention of Hanover Street

A well negotiated street has a potential to augment the public narrative of the society. It also contributes to the construction of meaning from grass-root within our democracies. An effort was made to re-negotiate the street within the present times of the site, and so the Hanover Street was brought back into the contoured hardscape of the site to connect the adjacent roads on east and west.



Figure 9: Proposed Site plan with Hanover Street in red running across the site while the circumambulation paths give the site a more public setting. Image by Author

Once this design move was carried out, the site began to feel more public in terms of urban movements as the traffic roads flanking the site on all sides felt that the site was more or less cordoned off for a public engagement. This, despite the fact that the site had two significant public buildings within its boundaries.

6.3.3 Congress and Cambridge Street

The re-introduction of the Hanover Street into the site made the same more public to the urban movement, the site contours were adjusted to suit the topography of the site situation. This also helped in reassessing the strategy where protest movements often travel outside their sites.



Figure 10: Section through the site depicting Congress Street and Cambridge Street, and a contour difference of 13 feet. Image by Author

This aspect of the design move also highlighted the fact while the protest movements have predominantly been accommodated next to the seats of power, or so called the more public building, there could be a future where the power and mediatization of such

movements will probably manifest itself in a opposite manner where the power of the movement and the temperament of the society will be vested in its people.

The site had a gradual slope that accommodated a level difference of roughly 13 feet across, from Cambridge Street to Congress Street. This rise in contours invited us to re-assess the position of Boston city hall in this vast contour-scape. It was soon realized that such gradation in contours served a purpose where the site created a natural amphitheater around the Boston city hall which served as a backdrop for a more public movement. From there onwards, it was just a matter of making the site more accessible.

6.3.4 Beyond the Urban!

The rise in contours, the re-introduction of the street and a muted sense of the natural amphitheatre contributed towards exploring missing textures that were important to the public narrative of the site. This was when the sense of landscapes and vast green fields from the west on the site archival maps was brought in to the site to signify a modest yet strong public takeover of the plaza. This change of environment by reconfiguring the landscape opened up site as both a personal space to contemplate as well as an urban space to move along.

The duality of landscape gave design the potential to expand outwards with respect to the urban functions of the site and was not confined to simply a view of brutalism building like Boston City Hall that symbolizes the public. There were aspects of gathering spaces, smaller pockets of engagements and artists spaces that negotiated the presence of landscape on some of the territory. However, this also gave the design a ground to move

out of the site and therefore, the City hall itself was surrounded by a series of protest paths that circum-ambulated into the transforming landscape, then into the Hanover street and finally into the adjacent urban space before finally circling back into the landscape around the city hall. The paths ran into Congress Street that negotiated the presence of vehicular movements onto the site, thus expanding the potential of protest movements outside its domain.

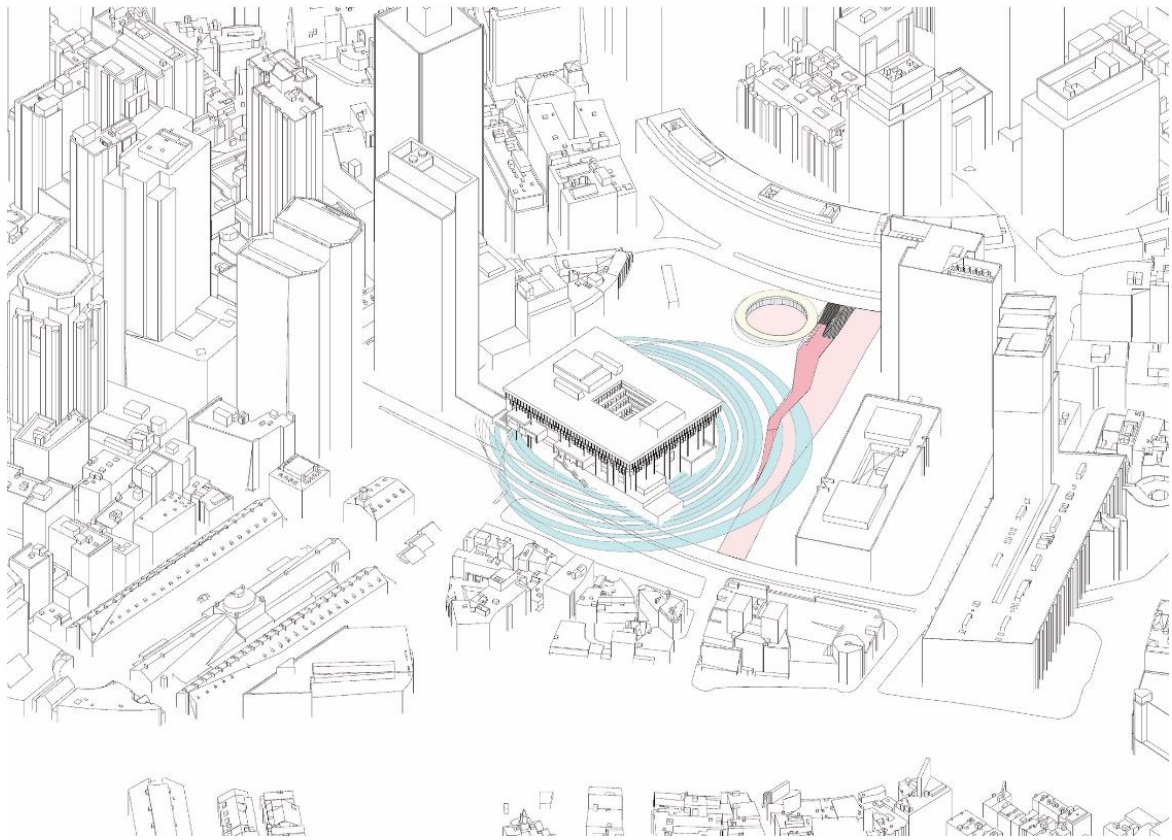


Figure 11: Area of counter protest and other such diffused topics. Image by Author

6.3.5 Store, Install and Counter!

Separate spaces for installations, storage, and other such public activities were provided in the form of a more negotiated tactic so that the site has a diffused focal point.

However, the nature of protests is such that their duality would often invite the open dialogue that could potentially slip into volatile experience. Despite the attempt to keep the design subtle and muted around the imagery of a brutalist landscape building that is cordoned off with major vehicular networks, it is still possible that the urban spaces of protests and people in it accommodate to the accelerated change for initial time-period. Hence the design attempted to identify spaces to diffuse as well as decompress when the going gets rough. These diffused focal point could potentially serve as the breakout spaces for the factions of public who do not agree but are ready to listen in short time period, and area of counter-protests in case-specific demonstrations where the movements become volatile or step up their mark. Hence, these diffused spaces are places designated especially to redefine a gathering especially when there is need for one.

The idea has been to foster a nature of performative urbanism that finds its bearings in significant experience and construction of meaning. The spaces around it will undergo a sense of rupture, dissonance, transformation and occupation. Such a temporal space can unfold a public space to a newer sense of dialogue and keeps a check on society's semblance.

6.4 Conclusions

The Plaza around the Boston City Hall lies within the intersection of urban complexities that have a potential to unveil public spaces which are constantly capable of advancing our social issues. While the style of architecture within the precinct might be one such tool to manifest it, I feel that keeping the attempts of conceiving spaces of protest

and activism to a more believable scale might be helpful in adapting similar spaces with different experiences elsewhere.

In the current context of accelerated change which relies upon the advent of social media, the spaces around the world have become more connected than ever. While this is a positive construct in social sphere, the phenomenon may have skipped certain steps in order to truly understand most experience. The western world heavily relies upon the visual and has compressed the idea of experience. Juhani Pallasmaa called this aspect of the west as the “visual hegemony”.⁸⁴

In the nature of such social needs that could potentially transform the experience of society, architecture for social meaning might be a little slow. Traditional values and ideas of morality have been challenged in recent years by values that were potentially antithetical to years of public progress. All such challenges and censorships have occurred within the same buildings, spaces and architecture that conceived our ways of life. Hence, it become overtly necessary to call out the space by the nature of its needs, such as protests, dissonance, disparity and helplessness; and not rename it as some space that is part of the utopian future that is still not within our reach.

Identifying the social problems at hands becomes necessary and doing so in the public realm is going to accelerate the process. After all, revolutions hardly start within the buildings. The messages of protest are often taken to streets and then multi-represented

⁸⁴ Pallasmaa, Juhani. 2005. *The Eyes of the Skin*. Cornwall: John Wiley and Sons limited.

across our cities. However, our cities do not equal spaces for such messages and that is predominantly a reason that there may be a lack of public participation when it comes to conducting a democratic process.

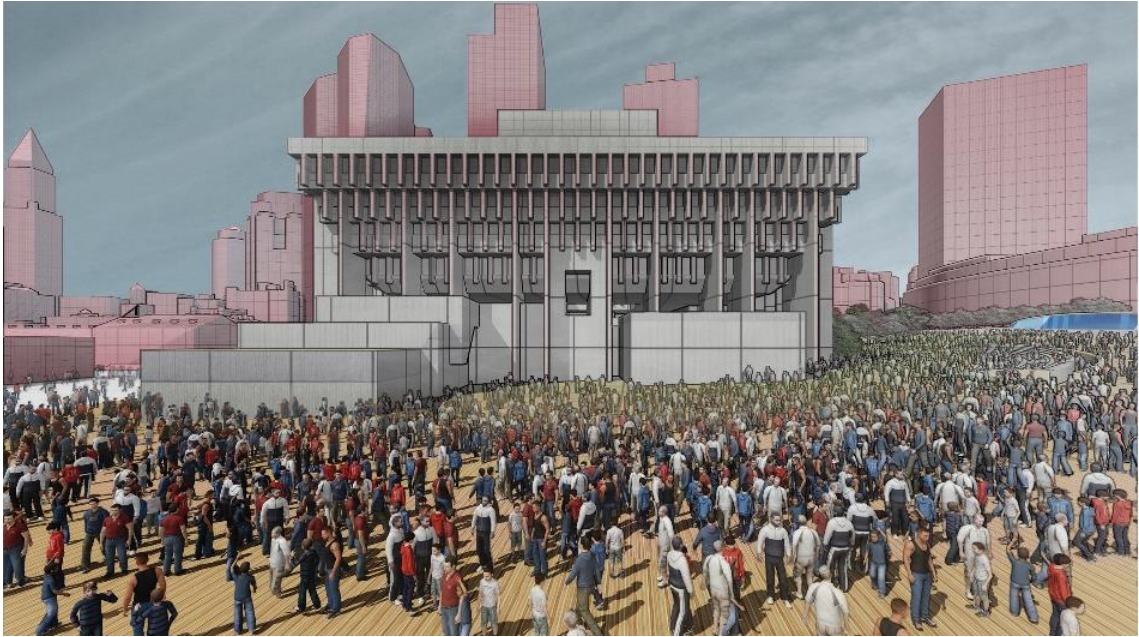


Figure 12: view of Boston City Hall from the North. Image by Author

Finally, the design understands that the idea of protest at least brings together two kinds of conclusions amongst others:

- Tactics of collective action that probably shape collective identity
- Newer meaning of public space.

In current understanding of public space, these outcomes are present within our cities but are more often disjointed from their roots. To my mind, one should not exist without the other and perhaps this is the reason that ‘meaning of place’ is often a government gesture that seek to make our cities beautiful through statues, renaming of streets and looking after historical monuments. While there is nothing wrong with such

examples of public space, I feel that spaces would better represent meaning if the people in it were able to construct the same on their own. The meaning of public space should shape the tactics of collective action which should be controlled by the public and people of the cities in general. This process could also be reversed as long as it stays democratic and more grounded in the context of the society.

The thesis attempts to study the consequences of their interaction. At any point of these stages of protests can unfold themselves physically or symbolically to control the space of the city through the occupation of plazas and roads, mass marches, disruptive sit-ins, or takeovers, which highlight the lack of public representation and censoriousness our society faces. This is currently the case in most parts of the world. So why not change it?!

Chapter 7: Epilogue

Protests are temporal events whose meanings are impossible to paraphrase beyond an experience, but their disposition offers fertile ground to mediate between surface-level logic and a deeper public narrative. As opposed to the idea of planned cities that arguably seem to be less protest friendly or, in fact, demonstration-resilient, spaces of protest have a potential to reveal themselves as less flat, less “nihilistic”⁸⁵ by engaging people into a space of participatory performance.

It is how Vitruvius would describe in his second book about an understanding of space as a “clearing”⁸⁶ in the forest. This counter landscape contributes to the richness of potential languages and culture. In truth, such spaces are the ones that have historically become the political space of a city. Participation in such an emotionally charged environment urges the spectator to grasp answers to fundamental human questions and self-understanding. It makes us realize our all-encompassing conceptual position, first operating within the constraints of micro-public that would possibly have the potential to transform itself into varying scales—and second, developing critical themes through series of ontological techniques and architectural practice.

⁸⁵ Pallasma, *The Eyes...*, 24-35.

⁸⁶ Morgan, Morris Hicky. 1914. *Vitruvius - The Ten Books On Architecture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Such spaces, in turn, help people accept justified criticism. “Rhyme, rhythm, arrhythmia, and harmony are underlying senses”⁸⁷ that help people recognize themselves in an event. Spaces of protests are universal theatres where temporal space and time overlap. Such overlaps have the potential to align collective human actions for the progress of the society. Additionally, any participation in such collective actions help us in potentially accomplishing both, collective and personal understanding. This is where protests also become bodily manifestations and the space around each manifestation transmutes into a space of psychological and emotional relief. This process transcends the meaning of public space.

Architecture could be a tool to carve such vessels in space that legitimize the existence of issues at hand and potentially work towards filling those gaps leading to censorships and social categorization. Public place-making can be used to re-assess the public discourse. Hopefully, it helps to solve social tensions under observations and further unlock the new possibility of voicing dissent instead of creating dichotomous thinking.

The spaces of protests are surprisingly all around us. They range from a single person to a collective gathering. The protest maps of the world in the past few years have highlighted a notion that lies within the heart of place-making. While our spaces exhibit

⁸⁷ Morgan, Morris Hicky. 1914. *Vitruvius - The Ten Books On Architecture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

duality in their nature, they have been limited to their assigned functions. This has limited the potential of our societal conversation and public norms.

Identifying such concept in architecture might actually strengthen our sense of self-identification and provide support against suppressed voices. It will help us become more empathetic towards people, and possibly bridge the narrative gap within our society. The functioning of protest also highlights the duality of one's participation because the idea of protest can be both within and outside the organization. These do not need to be very large as long as they are appropriately scaled and acknowledged.

More importantly, the fact that it is difficult for people to voice public opinion in a physical space, occupy part of the urban areas to voice their concerns or pursue activism across their habitat in order to be heard simply states that our society often experiences a lack of public participation, censorship and gentrification around the cities. This should be identified as our principal problem at hand which needs to be solved. The acknowledgement of such problems elaborates the amount of work we still need to put in our society's progress. A protest for better or worse is the condition that defines any moment in time, and architecture should be able to accommodate such capacities just like any other. Therefore, bringing in spaces of engagements, activism and helping our spaces to search the silent voices to be heard, suppression to be seen, and oppression to be felt is perhaps one of the first steps to transform such negative emotions of our society.

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