

Locating Protest in Public Space: One Year in San Francisco and Los Angeles

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Abstract

This paper focuses on protest as a form of political life in public space, examining the location and content of protests in San Francisco and Los Angeles in 2006. The cities are similar in terms of regulation of protest and production of privatized public spaces, but strikingly different in terms of metropolitan land use and transportation patterns, and urban morphology. Evidence suggests that these factors are significant to the accommodation of dissent in public space, though they receive limited attention in research. These findings suggest that an expanded, more comprehensive definition of “access” to public space is needed.

Introduction

IN RECENT DECADES, urbanists have noted a decline of public life and of the public realm (Sennet 1976, Sorkin 1992, Zukin 1995, Mitchell 1995). On the one hand, public authorities have increased control of public assembly through the regulations of time, place, and manner, known as the public forum doctrine (Mitchell & Staeheli 2005, 799; McCarthy and McPhail 2006, 229), and have invented a plethora of additional regulatory tools of exclusion, limiting use of public spaces (Beckett and Herbert 2010). On the other hand, there is a loss in the size of the public forum due to the “privatization of public space,” resulting primarily from (1) privatization and gating of suburban developments (McCarthy and McPhail 2006, 232); (2) the establishment of “privately owned public spaces” in key downtown spaces, including new construction and pre-existing plazas and parks where private entities regulate public behavior (Kayden 2000, Loukaitou-Sideris and Banjeree 1998, Mitchell 2003); (3) the emergence of new centers of urban activity that are either semi-private or “limited public fora,” notably shopping malls, sports arenas, concert halls, and airports (McCarthy and McPhail 2006, 229–234); (4) the use of urban design to discourage access to public spaces (Davis 1990, Petersen 2006), (5) the disjuncture between the location of new public spaces and areas of heavy pedestrian traffic

(Loukaitou-Sideris and Banjeree 1998, 155–7); and finally, (6) technological advances in communications, especially the Internet, which some argue has, to a degree, usurped the significance of physical public space as the main arena for public life (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banjeree 1998, 180–1).

Despite this “socio-spatial erosion,” others point to the continued significance of public space. Peter Goheen observes:

The will to command public urban space expresses the desire of many urban groups and institutions to be acknowledged, to convey messages forcefully, to promote the legitimacy of one’s cause. The range of such expression is great, and the contest for visibility and influence is lively. ... It is all-important public space which lends its iconic value to those who occupy it, even briefly. (Goheen 1998, 484)

In particular, protest in public space remains a powerful medium for those without direct influence on the levers of power:

It is a signal about who you are, what you want, and what else you might do. A former White House adviser can write an op-ed against a planned war and create a stir; less prominent citizens need to do something more dramatic to win attention for their views, demonstration at the Capitol or trespassing at a military base. What you do reflects who you are and what you want.

...When people protest, they tell authorities that they’re unhappy about something, and implicitly threaten to do more than protest: vote, contribute money, lobby, set up a picket, blockade a clinic, or try to blow up a building. (Meyer 2009)

Three points are crucial: (1) protest in public space expresses serious intentions to direct passersby *and* to a broader audience through the media; (2) location or place of protest is often a crucial part of the message; and (3) protest is an especially important means of political expression for the less powerful and poor.

This paper empirically investigates the location of protests in Los Angeles and California, noting striking differences, and suggests that these differences could be explained through a more fully developed understanding of “access” to public space that considers (1) the existence of a network of public space where free speech is relatively unimpeded, (2) the impact of urban morphology and urban design at the micro-scale on the function of public space,

and (3) the impact of metropolitan land use and transportation patterns on residents' ability to travel to public spaces. Literature on public space commonly discusses the need for "access," most often regarding lack of access due to regulatory restrictions prohibiting protest, either by the police in the case of public land, or the owners in the case of privatized public space (see above, in particular Beckett and Herbert 2010). Some literature has pointed to a reduction of "access" due to micro-scale urban design factors, regarding physical entrances, visual connections, and symbolic expression that invites or deters entry (Nemeth and Schmidt 2007, Petersen 2006). Loukaitou-Sideris and Banjeree (1998) go further to include both micro-scale urban design and larger morphological issues, concluding that privatized public space should be required to be physically and visually well-integrated into a vital public pedestrian network, and this works best in a downtown with small blocks, and with mixed-use buildings with plenty of doors and windows on the street. In their view, privatized public space is not the problem per se; rather, the problem is its tendency to divert pedestrian activity and life from the public realm instead of contributing vitality to it. Blumenberg and Ehrenfeucht (2008) focus on the importance of the sidewalk itself to public life and protest.

Solely Capron (2002) directly examines "accessibility" to public spaces, including consideration for metropolitan land use and transportation patterns, and consequent equity issues: in Buenos Aires, car owners can travel from suburb to center in a fraction of the time it takes the poor using transit, and with much easier conditions. Other authors directly or implicitly recognize the importance of access to the metropolitan center, whether in terms of physical mobility and symbolic welcomeness (Grimson 2008), or provisional regulatory restrictions (Herbert 2007, Uitermark 2004). In sum, all agree on the importance of access to a lively, culturally meaningful public realm, though they focus on different aspects of the problem.

Zick (2006) indicates that the public forum doctrine presumes that government is a neutral actor regarding the distribution of public space, but argues that government has an "affirmative obligation to facilitate speech by making space for it." Considering the multiple dimensions of access to public space discussed above in light of Zick's assertion, then government is obliged to provide a network of open spaces sufficient in number, size, location, and design to accommodate protest for the metropolitan area, and, equally importantly, to ensure that they are integrated into a lively pedestrian

network. Further, the government should take concerns to enhance the ability of residents throughout the metropolitan area.

Also of note, Zick makes this view of place-based meaning as essential to expression in the public realm the basis of a challenge to the public forum doctrine. His alternative, "Theory of Expressive Place," is based on humanities' research on the importance of place-based meaning and defines an "expressive topography" including six types of place:

Embodied places implicate the competing interest of a speaker to reach an intended listener or viewer by, in some sense, invading her "space" and of an unwilling listener or viewer to privacy and psychological repose. Efforts by "sidewalk counselors" to persuade women not to have abortions are the primary example. *Contested* places are perhaps the most common spatial type. They involve the claimed right of a speaker to inhabit a particular place and express himself there, in part because the place itself is part of a specific political or social contest. For example, civil rights protesters during the 1960s sought to protest library segregation policies in the library itself, or outside a jail, as opposed to someplace else. *Inscribed* places consist of two types... "inscribed" places of a more sacred, symbolically powerful sort. These places are locales that have been closely identified over time with the exercise of expressive and associative rights. The best-known examples of this spatial type are the National Mall and Central Park in New York City. [Zick also includes places that represent public ideas through iconography in this category]. *Tactical* places are the product of the government's use of space as a strategy or technique of control. Broadly speaking, institutions like schools and prisons are tactical places. So are the zones, cages, buffers, and other architectures now routinely used by government to discipline and control public expressive and associative activities. *Non-places* are locales like malls, airports, and subways. Modern citizens spend an abundance of time in these places, but public expression is tightly regulated there, if it is permitted at all. Finally, for purposes of this discussion, *cyber-places* are the various locales "in" cyberspace (Zick 2006, 442).

Zick suggests that a specific place may fit into different categories, depending on how it is being used, and that it may fit more than one category. Further, these types should be used as a launching point by the courts, as the type of place is one determinant as to how the court approaches a particular case. This typology will be used to classify the protests for evidence regarding the provision of an accessible, meaningful public realm in the two cities.

San Francisco and Los Angeles 2006

San Francisco and Los Angeles were chosen for the study as they are large West Coast cities with significantly different development patterns. The city and metropolitan areas of Los Angeles have a much larger land area and population, but with considerably lower densities.¹ This has great consequences for access to the downtown area, especially for those dependent on mass transit. San Francisco has a relatively effective regional rail network, whereas sprawling Los Angeles is more bus-dependent. As a result, trips from the outer suburbs of Los Angeles often take considerably longer, with significantly less riding comfort.² In terms of morphology, the downtowns of the two cities differ strikingly. San Francisco has small blocks, a fine grain of mixed uses, and many doors and windows on the street. Los Angeles has large blocks, a coarser grain of land uses, and fewer doors and windows adjoining the street.³ Additionally, the heart of downtown Los Angeles has large swaths dedicated to surface parking, further eroding the pedestrian realm. In short, downtown San Francisco is a reasonable example of the transit metropolis and traditional city with a vital pedestrian realm, whereas Los Angeles is auto-centric from fringe to core. These patterns result from the development practices and governmental decisions since the founding of these cities, including San Francisco's continued commitment to transit and urban infill during the latter half of the twentieth century. Both cities have added a considerable amount of privately owned public space in recent decades. San Francisco has taken more effort to ensure that such spaces are integrated into the public domain, though it is unclear whether it has succeeded any more than Los Angeles in this regard (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banjeree 1998, 300).

Finally, with regard to regulation of public space, both cities employ a demonstration permitting process, though some differences are evident. In San Francisco, no permit is needed to protest in public space, as long as no sound-amplifying equipment is used. Permits for processions are required if they extend for more than one block and interfere with the normal flow of vehicular traffic. The San Francisco Police Department stresses that it is not very strict about enforcing permit applications (Cheung 2002, 4–9). Los Angeles requires permits for stationary and marching events if they interrupt the normal use of streets or sidewalks, or occupy city-owned parks or certain federal parks and plazas (City of Los Angeles Human Relations Commission 2009). Los Angeles seems to take a somewhat stricter approach to regulating protest than San Francisco, though the difference is more of degree than kind.

The year 2006 was chosen, as it included massive protests regarding federal immigration legislation and the Iraq War within one cycle of the calendar, which eliminates duplication of annual events. The analysis involved mapping all protest events involving ten or more participants that were reported in the major newspapers for each metropolitan area, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Los Angeles Times*.⁴ The following sections examine the content and location of stationary protest events within the cities and within the civic centers, and the content and location of marching protests within the cities.

Location and Purpose of Protests—Stationary

This section examines the distribution of stationary protests throughout San Francisco and Los Angeles. Maps were developed to show the size and location of pickets, rallies, and other stationary protest events that were reported in the major newspapers for each city. Continuous pickets that ran for several days or weeks but were reported in just one article in the newspaper were shown only once in the map, while events that occurred over several consecutive days but achieved newspaper reportage each day were counted as separate protest events.

The maps (Figures 1 and 2) reveal a high degree of clustering of protest activities. Most protests were grouped in a limited number of areas, while vast expanses beyond the urban core were free of protest. Protest events were held on or in front of commercial, industrial, mixed-use and civic land uses, but were largely absent from strictly residential streets. This is noteworthy, as law professor David Kennedy (1995) and sociologists McCarthy and McPhail (2006) observe that gated communities have severely reduced the size of the public forum. However, both cities encompass considerable swaths of residential land that is not gated and has public streets, but did not include protests. Thus, it seems that assertions regarding the loss of public space in suburbia as consequential for protest are greatly exaggerated—though myriad other negative consequences can be found (Low 2008).

In San Francisco, a monocentric pattern is evident with protests heavily concentrated along the Market Street corridor between Civic Center and Embarcadero. Of the thirty-six protests staged at fixed locations, twenty-two were located in front of government offices or in associated public spaces. Seven were located in public plazas and parks not directly associated with government, including two at

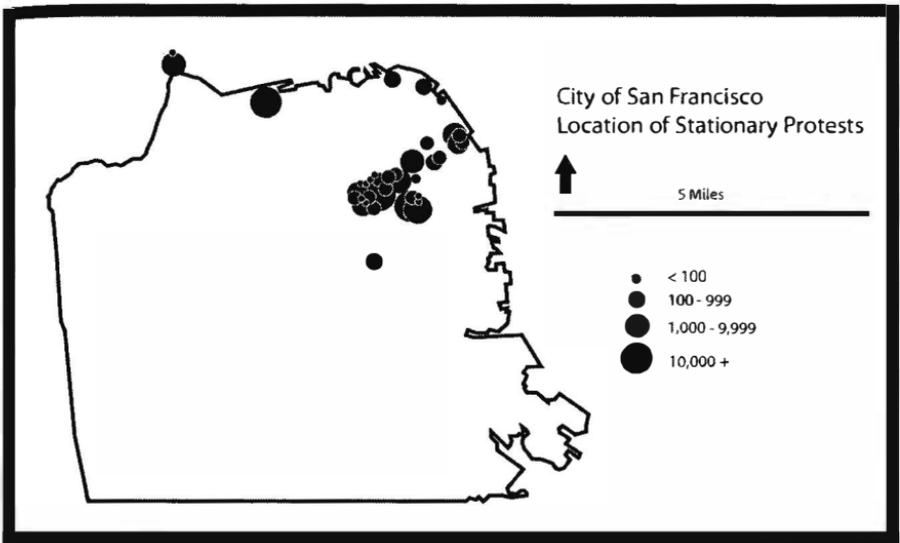


Figure 1.—San Francisco Stationary Protests. Protests were heavily concentrated along the Market Street corridor, most notably in and around Civic Center.

the iconic Golden Gate Bridge. Five were located at sites of private property; three for labor actions; one outside of a Gap store to call for a store boycott due to the owners' dedication of funds to oppose Proposition 82, which would offer free preschool to all in California; and one on a sidewalk in Chinatown to oppose the exclusion of the Falun Gong from the Chinese New Year's parade (Gordon 2006, Hua 2006). These locations reflect that nearly all reported protests in San Francisco were in regard to government policies and actions, or lack thereof, and secondarily, labor issues. The targeted governments included local, state, federal, and foreign, and in most cases the protests were sited at buildings associated with the particular government involved. The protests at privately owned property normally were directed at the occupant or owner of the property. However, in Chinatown the identity of the neighborhood provided a symbolic link to the protest target. Most protests were located in heavily travelled public spaces, whether at a site associated with the protest target (e.g., School District Headquarters), or a traditional forum for expression (e.g., Civic Center Plaza). Downtown San Francisco appears to provide a number of symbolically charged spaces in high-density areas that are accessible to protesters. Thus, the separation of public space from heavy pedestrian traffic areas may not be as significant in San Francisco as in other metropolitan areas.

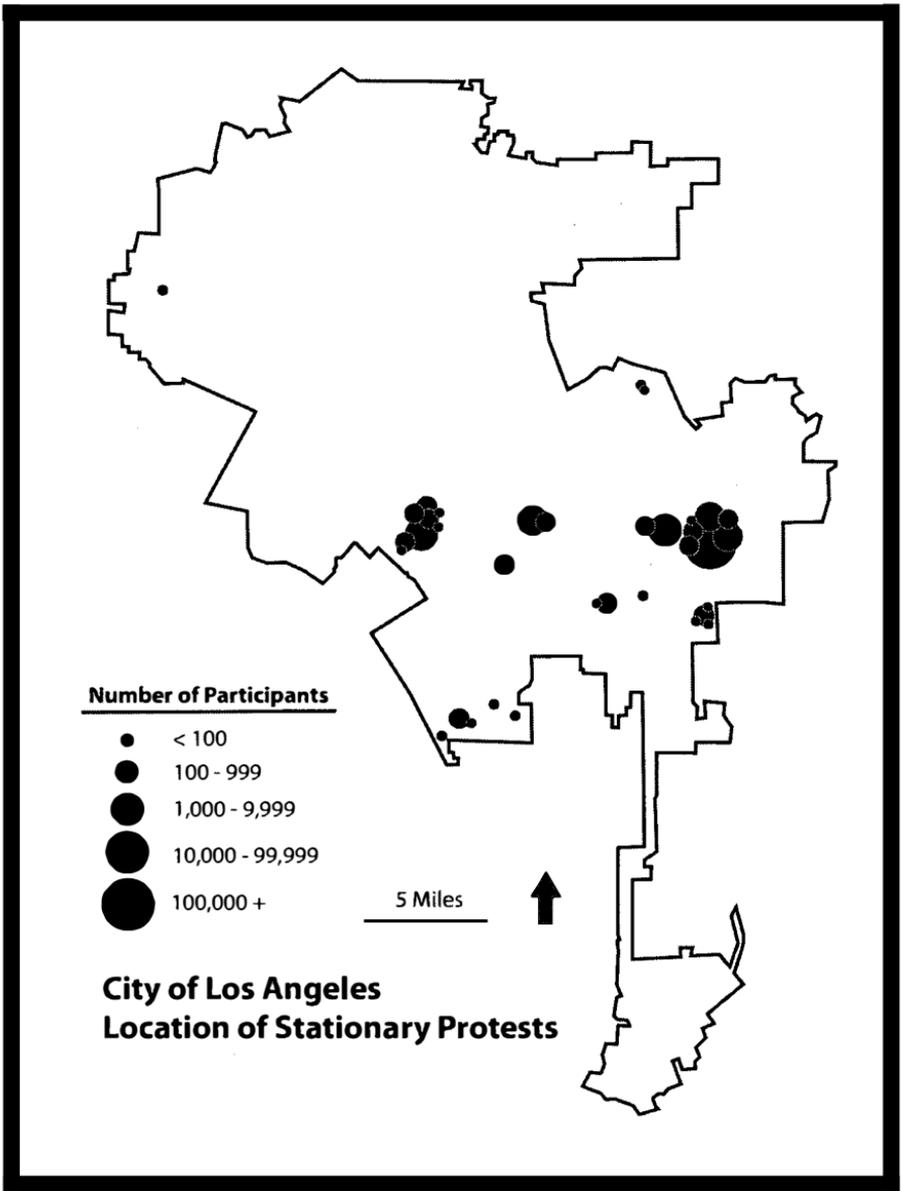


Figure 2.—Los Angeles Stationary Protests. A more decentralized pattern is evident in Los Angeles, though they are still found in clusters.

Protest in Los Angeles displays a more polycentric pattern, with clusters found in and around Civic Center, in and around Los Angeles International Airport, and at University of California (UCLA) and Wilshire Boulevard in West Los Angeles. The largest protests can be found in an axis from Civic Center along Wilshire Boulevard to West

Los Angeles, though with considerable distance between them. The locations of the thirty-five protests in Los Angeles show a bit more diversity than those in San Francisco. Government offices and associated public spaces accounted for nine protests, and government institutions and authorities such as the Los Angeles Zoo, UCLA, a local high school, and the Port of Los Angeles/Long Beach account for an additional ten protests. Of these latter protests, four involved labor disputes; two involved demands related to an elephant's death at the zoo (Gorman 2006; Doan 2006, June 21); and at UCLA, two opposed state Proposition 209 regarding admissions policy (Doan 2006, April 28; Trounson 2006), one demanded an investigation into campus police use of a taser on a student (Winton et al. 2006), and one picketed a meeting between the state governor and stakeholders in state healthcare policy (Matthews 2006). This represents a more decentralized approach than San Francisco, as many of these events were directed at city and state government, and thus could have been held at City Hall or the nearby State Building. Nine protests were located at privately owned sites, five being labor disputes and four in opposition to the development of an urban farm. Of the remaining six protests, all against government policy and action, three were in parks, two on streets and sidewalks, and two at religious institutions. Two protests were held in Leimert Park, surrounded by an African-American neighborhood, to draw African-American support for anti-immigration legislation (Kaplan 2006, So 2006). MacArthur Park was the site of an anti-war protest, most likely due to its spatial capacity and centrality, though the military namesake may have been considered (Lin and Schoch 2006). Finally, a pro-Israeli rally and counterprotest "clogged" a central portion of Wilshire Boulevard (Watanabe and Rietman 2006), maximizing visibility and providing a degree of disruption, but with no apparent symbolic connections to U.S. or foreign governments. The use of neighborhood and regional parks for protests, and the use of the street where no sufficient plaza was available, evidences the considerable utility of a dispersed network of public spaces for accommodating protest. Taking to the street and obstructing traffic may be an option for forceful expression, but it should not be a necessity.

Classifying stationary protests according to Zick's typology reveals an additional contrast.⁵ San Francisco protests include twelve in embodied space, twenty-one in contested space, and twenty in inscribed space. Los Angeles protests include seven in embodied space, twenty-four in contested space, and seven in inscribed space. The most striking difference is the relative dearth of protests in inscribed

pace in Los Angeles, due in part to a lack of “adequate” civic spaces and in part to the lack of a deep tradition of protest.⁶ San Francisco’s civic center and nearby public spaces adjoining government buildings accounts for many of the protests in inscribed space in that city, thus a comparison of protest activity in the two cities’ civic center merits closer examination.

Both cities provide publicly owned plazas in their civic centers, though the difference in the number of protests held there is striking. In San Francisco, twenty-one protests were held in the Civic Center.⁷ Fourteen of these were in public plazas (though one spilled well beyond the plaza), and five smaller protests were held on the steps of City Hall. In Los Angeles, only three protests were held directly in the Civic Center, all on the lawn adjoining City Hall. This raises the question as to why Los Angeles’ public plazas were used far less than those in San Francisco. Both cities provide ample space: allowing seven square feet per person,⁸ Civic Center Plaza in San Francisco can accommodate over 33,000 protesters, while the plaza adjoining Los Angeles City Hall accommodates over 12,000

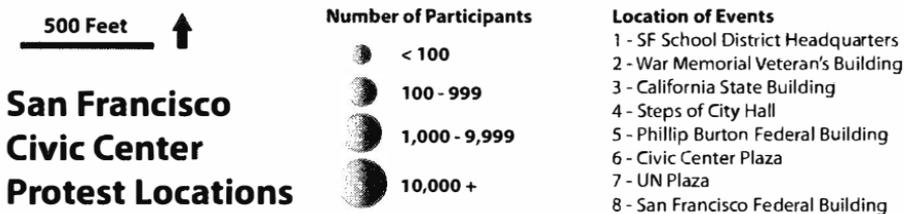
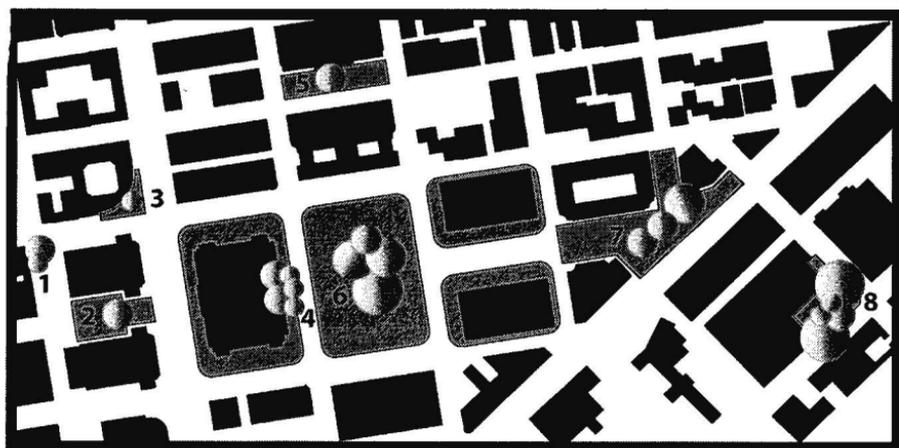


Figure 3.—San Francisco Civic Center Protests. Protesters made considerable use of the plazas adjoining government buildings for their protests.

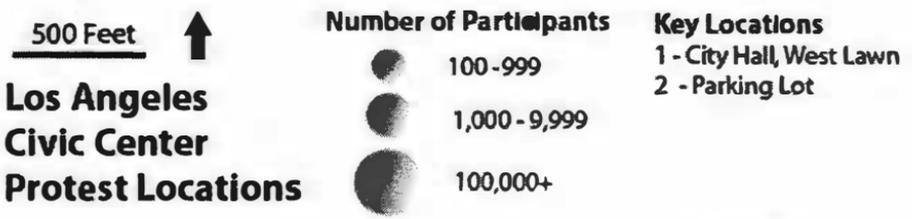
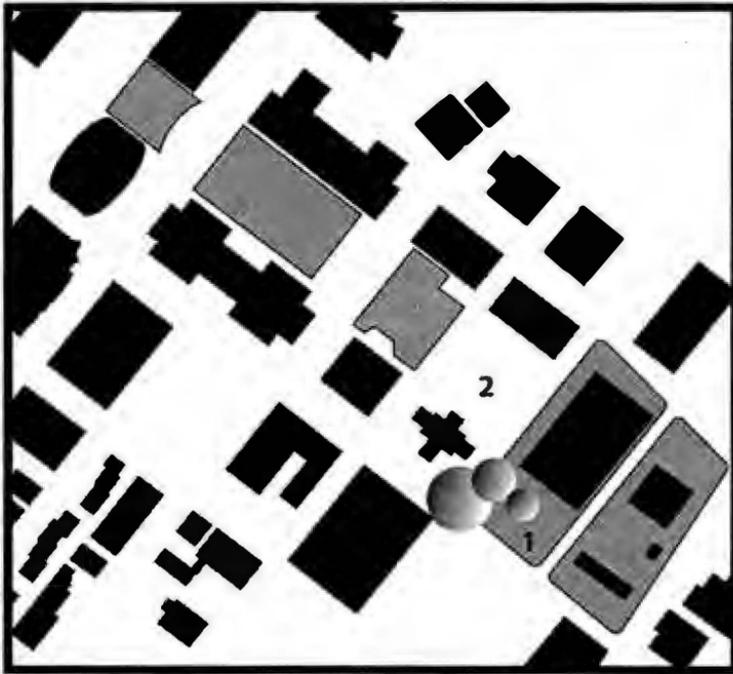


Figure 4.— Los Angeles Civic Center Protests. In contrast to San Francisco, Los Angeles protesters made little use of the plazas in the Civic Center.

protesters—sufficient for all but the largest protest events. The answer may have to do with the factors other than spatial capacity. At the metropolitan scale, the tremendous expanse of Los Angeles sprawl and the relatively poor public transit system translate into a considerably larger “friction factor” for protesters travelling to the center—especially the poor. In fact, the organizers of one massive immigration protest planned a series of smaller protests in suburban centers such as Pomona, Santa Ana, Pasadena, Long Beach, etc., stating, “A lot of people don’t have the means to get to Los Angeles, especially students.” (Lin and Gencer 2006). In San Francisco, commuter rail lines provide quick access to the Civic Center from around the region—an asset for the poor and all involved in large-scale protests. However, morphology and urban design appear equally important

to the “access” issue. Civic Center Plaza in San Francisco sits in front of City Hall, and several other government buildings (local, state, and federal) face public plazas. In Los Angeles, the largest public spaces are distant from City Hall, and a large parking lot sits directly across from the entrance. The only open space adjoining City Hall sits around the corner from the main entrance. During a student gathering to protest potential anti-immigration legislation, crowds assembled on the open space, and when the mayor appeared in front of the building, they quickly rushed around the corner to the main entrance (Cho and Gorman 2006). Christopher Hawthorne (2006), architecture critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, notes that “there’s no obvious place for citywide gatherings” and regarding the open space adjoining City Hall, “There is no plaza to receive [protesters], just some steps, sloping lawn and a clump of trees.” During the largest protest, crowds not only filled the plaza but the street in front of the building and surrounding streets (Gorman, Miller, and Landsberg 2006). Hawthorne noted that the lack of a plaza did not deter them; they simply filled the streets. However, this is not a sound option for protests sans the critical mass to take over the streets. They can only tuck themselves away, around the corner on the lawn, possibly mistaken for picnickers.

In sum, Civic Center design should consider the relationship of adequately sized public spaces to the entrances of key government buildings, and especially consider the provision of a large plaza directly in front of City Hall. In Los Angeles, plans for the Civic Center, now shelved, had called for a network of public spaces extending from City Hall that would have remedied many of these problems (DiMassa 2009). However, the lack of a vital pedestrian realm and auto-centric metropolitan land-use patterns and transportation systems also have large impacts, but require great lengths of time and tremendous investment to change.

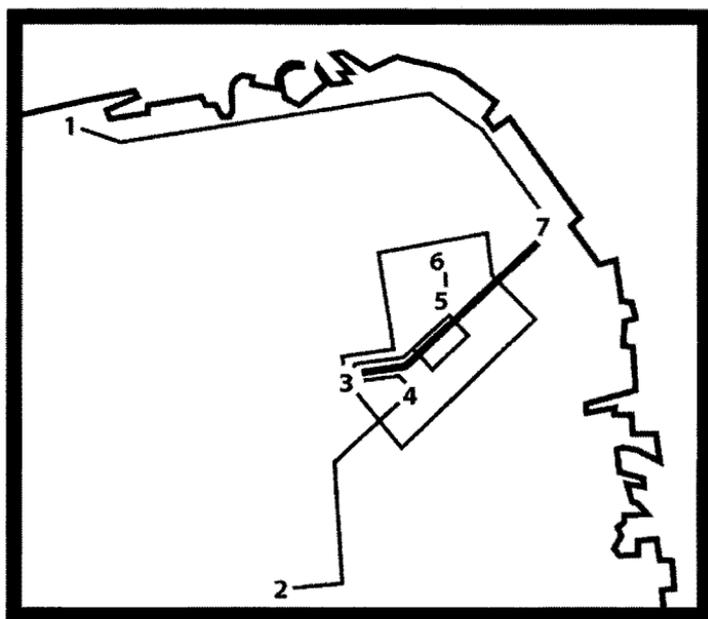
Location and Purpose of Protests—Marching

Marching protests through public streets, sanctioned and unsanctioned, interrupt the normal use of these spaces, providing a very strong statement. In both cities, the size of these protests varied considerably, but they tended to be larger than stationary protests, and included the very largest events. Though San Francisco had only marginally more stationary protests, it had considerably more marching protests—fifteen versus nine for Los Angeles. According to Zick’s typology, approximately half the protests in both cities were held in embodied place and about half in inscribed place. Many of

the largest protests were held in inscribed space along routes associated with protests, and many ended at another type of inscribed space, the civic center, where rallies were held. Contested place was insignificant for marching protests, though the rallies at their conclusion were sometimes held in front of government offices associated with the issue being addressed. Figures 5 and 6 represent the routes of all protests involving 1,000 or more participants. In each city a “primary route” is designated, due to its use for numerous and especially large protests.

In San Francisco, six of the ten marches involving over 1,000 participants took place on Market Street—the broadest, most densely built thoroughfare through the downtown. Many started at Justin Herman Plaza proceed along Market Street before ending at Civic Center Plaza, though some use only part of this route. In fact, Civic Center (City Hall in particular) functions as terminus and/or starting point for the majority of the routes and most of the marches. The Federal Building, just south of Market, was the end point for several protests regarding immigration legislation, including one originating in the Mission District, the heart of the city’s Latino community. Two marches began at City Hall and proceeded through downtown streets before returning to City Hall.⁹ The two remaining routes each involved one protest: an anti-abortion march from Plaza Justin Herman along Embarcadero, and a labor protest from Union Square to the Grand Hyatt hotel. The pattern in San Francisco indicates the effectiveness of Justin Herman Plaza as a staging ground,¹⁰ and the physical and symbolic effectiveness of Market Street and the Civic Center as route and terminus, respectively.

The pattern of marches in Los Angeles shows some similarities and differences. The largest protests here were of a considerably larger magnitude due to the immense population, especially Latinos, who led the protest against anti-immigration legislation—which accounted for all but one of the marching protests involving more than 1,000 participants. The primary route, along Broadway to City Hall, contained two of the five protests involving more than 1,000 participants and several smaller protests. Broadway is not the most significant thoroughfare in Los Angeles, though it has some of the most intense pedestrian activity in downtown, as it is a working-class shopping street known as “Latinoway” (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banjeree 1998, 156). Notably all of the protests following this route were against immigration legislation. This primary march route, then, is more similar in nature to the route from Mission District



Primary Route
 Secondary Route

2 Miles



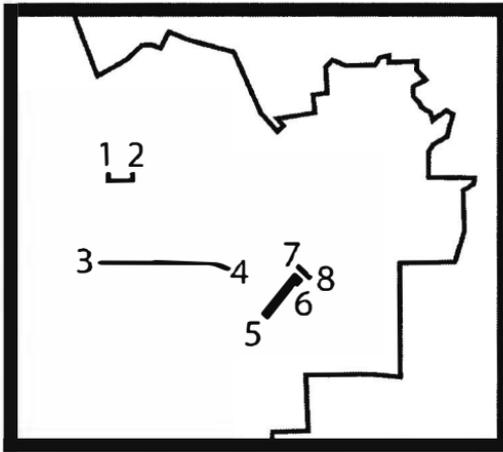
- 1 - Marina Green
- 2 - Mission Dolores Park
- 3 - Civic Center Plaza
- 4 - Federal Building
- 5 - Union Square
- 6 - Grand Hyatt Hotel
- 7 - Justin Herman Plaza

City of San Francisco Marching Demonstrations

Figure 5.—San Francisco Marching Demonstrations. Marching demonstrations were also heavily concentrated in the core. Market Street served as the route for the most frequent and largest demonstrations.

to Civic Center in San Francisco than to Market Street. The second-largest protest involved 400,000 and followed a densely settled portion of Wilshire Boulevard. This route is similar to Market Street in terms of being a long boulevard of very high density and heavy traffic, but it does not connect directly to the Civic Center. Due to its great length, portions are so distant from Civic Center that it is an unreasonable destination.

As with San Francisco, City Hall was the primary destination for marches, though every one of these was about immigration legislation. Another immigration march began at the Federal Building and



- 1 - Kodak Theater
- 2 - Hollywood Blvd. & Vine St.
- 3 - Wilshire Boulevard & La Brea Ave.
- 4 - MacArthur Park
- 5 - Broadway
- 6 - City Hall
- 7 - Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels
- 8 - Federal Building

5 Miles



City of Los Angeles Marching Demonstrations

Figure 6.—Los Angeles Marching Protests. The pattern of marching demonstrations is not strikingly different from that in Los Angeles. The primary route here follows Broadway to the Civic Center. It included the largest protest, as it linked a large Latino commercial center with City Hall for the massive immigration legislation protests. Central Wilshire Boulevard was also notable for its protests but is too distant to link with City Hall.

ended at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels, both a few blocks from City Hall. Additionally, an unauthorized, spontaneous immigration march involving 40,000 students materialized along diverse routes throughout the city (which were only partially reported), but ended in a rally at City Hall (Cho and Gorman 2006). The students walked out of classes and found their way through the city, and the schools sent buses to bring them back to campus later in the day. Finally, one massive immigration march proceeded from MacArthur Park down mid-Wilshire Boulevard before ending at La Brea Avenue (Gorman, Miller, and Landsberg 2006). The sole major march not addressing immigration issues was a march against the Iraq War beginning at Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street and ending at the Kodak Theater (Lin and Schoch 2006). These last two

marches were in extremely dense, heavily travelled areas, but were far removed from Civic Center. It seems the distance between the most densely settled, well-known streets and the civic center contributed to a more decentralized pattern of marching protests than in Los Angeles.

In both cities, marching protests were able to accommodate the largest crowds. This was particularly evident in Los Angeles, where immigration-focused protests drew from the metropolitan area, as crowds of more than 400,000 and 500,000 took over the streets on separate occasions. No reasonably sized plaza could accommodate such crowds, and the occupation of the streets makes a forceful message. In fact, conflict with cars appears in reports in both cities. Even a small group occupying a public plaza may decide to interrupt traffic, as did the anti-war demonstrators near Senator Feinstein's office in a small plaza at Market and Montgomery Streets, which they abandoned to block traffic (Garofoli 2006). In Los Angeles these reports and concerns about blocked traffic seem especially prominent. On several occasions demonstrators made efforts to hinder traffic, and at one event teens even walked onto the Hollywood Freeway and Harbor Freeway, briefly blocking traffic (Cho and Gorman 2006). Though the interruption of traffic makes a statement in any city, in Los Angeles, where the auto, the strip, and the freeway are entwined with the identity of the city, the interruption of traffic resonates most deeply. An article dedicated to this topic noted that Wilshire Boulevard had "spent most of the 20th century as a shrine to petroleum-based civilization," but the immigrant marchers "turned the cradle of American car culture upside down" (Reynolds 2006).

Conclusions

Contrary to claims that the internet is replacing the physical space as the forum for public dissent, robust levels of protest were found in both San Francisco and Los Angeles. These were reported on in many forms of media, including newspapers, Web sites, and blogs, evidencing a symbiotic rather than competitive relationship between protest in public space and protest in cyberspace (see Zick 2006, 481–84; Goheen 1998, 494). In some cases, simply occupying a public space with considerable visibility to passers-by was sufficient to determine choice of site (embodied place); in other cases, occupying a site with particular symbolic meaning was also important (contested and inscribed space). If, as Zick suggests, the government accepts responsibility to provide access to public space for civil and

uncivil dissent, multiple dimensions of access need to be considered. First, the provision and regulation, or nonregulation, of inscribed space is essential. Many protest events in San Francisco occupied plazas in front of City Hall, the Federal Building, and other government buildings, suggesting the importance of providing adequate “inscribed place” or public spaces in a civic center. The second factor involves morphology and urban design. A comparison of the relationship between City Hall and its associated public spaces and uses in the two cities indicates the importance relating the public spaces directly to the building entrances, and designing them in such a way that they are useful for protest and not just viewing from the street. Many of the largest protests involved marches through the city, and again high visibility and symbolic associations were both important, though it was sometimes easier to obtain both of these at the same place in San Francisco. The apparent demand for a network of decentralized public spaces to stage marching protests and hold stationary demonstrations reinforces concerns about the “privatization” and “regulation” of public spaces beyond the civic center, and more importantly concerns about the relative location and design of these spaces, in particular their connection to the public realm. A network of unrestricted public spaces in neighborhoods throughout the city, linked into and supporting densely settled, heavily travelled areas connected by a substantial pedestrian network, is an asset to dissent in public space. In downtown Los Angeles, much of the urban form is not conducive to a vital pedestrian life, and is thus less attractive for protest. The third factor involves metropolitan land use and transportation patterns. Travel to the center is far more difficult in Los Angeles, especially for the poor, which evidently contributed to the more decentralized pattern of protest. The centrality of protest in San Francisco reflects the benefits of compact, well-designed urban form and effective regional public transportation—just one way the transit metropolis and traditional urban form contribute to the socially just city.

Endnotes

1 According to the 2000 US Census, the greater metropolitan area populations of Los Angeles and San Francisco are 16.4 million and 7 million, respectively, and the city populations are 3.7 million and 0.8 million, respectively. Metropolitan Los Angeles has a land area of 35,000 square miles and a population density of 482 persons per square mile; the San Francisco Bay area has a land area of 8,800 square miles and a population density of 955 persons per square mile.

2 For comparison, consider off-peak transit trip times from San Jose to downtown San Francisco and from Mission Viejo to downtown Los Angeles, both of which are approximately fifty miles. The former has an estimated travel time by car of approximately one and one-half hours, whereas the latter is estimated at two and one-half hours. Accessed 2 September 2010 from http://tripplanner.transit.511.org/mtc/XSLT_TRIP_REQUEST2?language=en and http://socaltransport.org/tm_pub_start.ph

3 San Francisco's downtown blocks measure 275' x 412'; Los Angeles shows more variability, though nearly all blocks are more than 300' x 575'. More significantly, San Francisco has far more doors and windows on the street, while Los Angeles is known for its "fortress architecture." (See Davis 1992)

4 Goheen (1998) observes that the occupation of symbolic physical space is a powerful means of obtaining media exposure. Mainstream media reaches vast audiences, and these two newspapers are the primary news sources for the two cities, thus reported protest activity in these papers have achieved a high degree of success in terms of exposure.

5 Classifying the protests required some degree of interpretation, and some were counted under more than one category, as Zick suggested.

6 Both of these characteristics of Los Angeles were observed by Hawthorne (2006) in his reflections on the immigration protests.

7 Though not part of the original Civic Center design area, the recently constructed federal building and adjoining plaza across Market Street is considered an extension of the Civic Center, due to its function, adjacency, and design.

8 It is possible to pack people at a density of three square feet per person, but seven square feet allows enough space so that persons are not "touching." See Fruin, Time Saver Standards for Urban Design, C3.3-6.

9 All the routes shown are approximations based on newspaper descriptions, and are stylized for increased legibility. The shorter loop is a relatively close approximation of the streets indicated in the newspaper article. The larger loop was based on an article with a relatively vague description of the route followed, but accurately depicts the sequence of districts involved.

10 Justin Herman was the first director of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, and no significant civic buildings adjoin the plaza, thus it is unlikely that symbolic associations play an important role in the choice of this space as a starting point.

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