

Protest and the Plaza: Engaging the Formal Public Sphere

In Chapter five, we saw how the presence of a mass audience is an essential ingredient of national rituals: the crowd legitimates the ritual, and at the same time reinforces individuals' sense of themselves as a people, sharing symbols and experiences to transmit to each other and to future generations.

Some kinds of purposive, political crowds are embraced by political leaders; others are not. The former include crowds that gather for officially sanctioned or organized celebrations. The latter include crowds that gather to challenge the official line, to undermine the state's self-celebration, or simply to demand official action on collective problems – that is, space for members of the *demos* itself to make public claims directly, rather than through their representatives. At times it has been taken for granted that the right to assemble as the latter kind of public is something that is essential to democracy; right now, in a state of official paranoia, that right is being denied and abrogated around the world. In Chapter four, I argued that a right to protest physically matters in a world in which the public sphere is a great deal more than physical, because the physical occupation of space sends signals that are harder to ignore. If we accept that claim, however, it is not at all clear what we should do about it. In this chapter, I show that while some cities lack space for mass public protest, or have space that is too 'arm's-length' to have much impact on important audiences, in cities *with* good space available protest can easily become ritualized and regularized to the point where it no longer matters very much. While this dilemma is inescapable, its implications can be managed; although, for reasons that may already be obvious, I suggest that this should be more a matter of tactical choice by protest organizers than official planning and sanction.

I start by comparing those cities that have traditional spaces and routes for protest, looking at what happens when those spaces are close to or separated from the assembly building sites considered in the last two chapters, as well as

what happens where there is no traditional or effective site. I also note some differences between cities that have traditions of mobile protest – marching – and those that have more static traditions. These sections reveal an interesting tension between the need for direct confrontation with the powerful, and the need to avoid predictability and ritualization, something that can greatly diminish the impact of protest. I then turn to consider the way in which space for protest is being constricted by two forces: privatization and changes in policing. While both of these topics have extensive literatures behind them, I concentrate on one particular issue in both: the way in which control mechanisms are predicated on recognizing the public only in its role as shopper and consumer; and an associated deligitimization of the public as active citizens. I conclude that the public provision of sites for engagement comes with strong positives and strong negatives, but that the only way at present to manage the negatives is for protest groups to (a) use mixed methods and (b) only use the large scale sites when they can demonstrate the scale of their support base, or when they can use a space persistently, visibly, irritatingly. In this, I set my face against current trends in the design of large, public, city spaces, which emphasize breaking up flat, featureless plains with furniture, trees and other ‘breaks’ to encourage casual, accidental encounters between individuals, but which thus make them useless for large, purposive, democratic publics.

The Ritual Spaces of Public Protest

Let’s start by comparing the space available for protest in the cities under study. I argued back in Chapter four that these spaces matter for four main reasons: presence, attention, membership, and dignity. The first concerns making physically explicit the range of ‘people, perspectives, and problems’ that make up the public and the public sphere (Bickford, 2000: 356), making one’s claims visible. The second is about attracting the attention of fellow citizens, decision-makers, attentive publics, and other onlookers to those public narratives and claims. The third is both about attracting and encouraging new claim-makers to join in and, from the individual protestors’ point of view, to demonstrate their membership of the *demos*, their dignity in dignified spaces, especially when they feel their views ignored or even existence overlooked. The fourth is about cloaking those claims in the symbols of authority (Hajer, 2009), making them more readily understood and accepted by the target audiences.

In some cities, that space is so obvious to locals and visitors alike that it hardly needs pointing out: Mexico City’s Plaza de la Constitución, universally known as the Zócalo, and Washington’s National Mall, for example. There are

plenty of other examples from Bucharest to Buenos Aires, Bangkok to Beijing. All these spaces are full of the symbols of nation and authority. Standing in them, one is surrounded by the facades of presidential palaces and town halls; there are national flags flying from gigantic central flagpoles or from the roofs and balconies of the surrounding buildings, bowsprits of the ships of national enterprise. In some – Mexico most obviously – traffic circulates so that, standing in the middle of the square, one is at the centre of a maelstrom of activity. The traffic helps define these squares as the hub around which the nation revolves. They are not so much a ‘still point of the turning world’ but bustling places with no restrictions on access, full of tourists sometimes, but plenty of locals too, and are used as centres of protest so that people can cloak themselves and their claims with the same symbols and dignity that the powerful do when claiming the symbols and status of high office.

In London, Parliament Square is often derided as a mere roundabout, but that is because it is small and almost completely cut off for pedestrians: there are no crossings to it, and no easy ways past the safety barriers. Even more restricted are Hong Kong’s Chater Gardens and Statue Square, so small and so full of seats and tables, arcades and planters, and fountains and pools that only around 5,000 people can use the pair of them at any one time (Figure 7.1). While under colonial rule, Statue Square fulfilled some symbolic, ritual functions; these days it is not expected to fulfil any particular symbolic role – it is a picnic and meeting spot for domestic workers, and while that gives it a role in the collective identity-building of *those* people, it says little to other Hong



Figure 7.1. Chater Gardens, Hong Kong, showing the largest open space
Author photo.

Kongers about their collective narratives. Thus, size matters – the number of people we can get into a square has an impact on the degree to which organizers can show the scale of popular displeasure with a government, and in London's Parliament Square that scale can only ever be relatively small, making it easier to dismiss even those demonstrations that manage to pack the square as unrepresentative of popular opinion. In Hong Kong, one could pack Chater Gardens to the gunwales yet the crowd would barely be noticed through the thickets of vegetation and covered seating.¹ By contrast, filling the Zócalo in Mexico is a much, much more impressive achievement.

In several cities, there is a single traditional space for protest that is somehow divorced from the sites of the public sphere. This divorce can be thanks to scale: in London, most protests gather not at Parliament Square but a mile eastwards in the larger and more accessible Trafalgar Square. Many very large protests in London occupy Hyde Park rather than the much smaller inner-Westminster spaces. Other divorces have happened gradually over time. In Santiago, the traditional centre for civic activity of all kinds is the Plaza de Armas, which once was *the* hub of government and military power, with the cathedral, town hall, army barracks, courts, governor's residence and city jails all clustered around the square – the legislature was one block to the west. Now only the church and the city authorities still occupy their old buildings, while other elements of the formal public sphere have drifted away from the plaza – as near as a few blocks or as far as Valpo on the coast. Nonetheless, the Armas remains the hub of civic activity, as it always has been, because, along with the presidential palace, it remains the symbolic centre of the Chilean public sphere.

Other divorces occur for mixed reasons of practicality, history and the convenience of the powerful. In Cape Town, for instance, the gathering place for protest is the old military parade ground, now market place and car park, in front of the old City Hall building. Parliament is a few kilometres further up the hill, behind walls and fenced-off streets, with the only accessible footpaths at the upper end of the complex accommodating only a few hundred people at best. The only reasonably sized public space nearby is Corporation Gardens, but that is a lush, densely vegetated space, more botanic garden than open plaza. Parliament Buildings have their backs to the Gardens rather than facing them, rendering the Gardens uncondusive to the symbolic politics of confrontation and protest.

¹ With apologies for intruding with a personal note, this has particular resonance for me. In the 1970s, my brother and I played in Billy Tingle's Saturday Morning sports on what is now Chater Gardens but what was then the open, grassy field of the Hong Kong Cricket Club. Hong Kongers of a certain age will know what I mean. A peculiar relic of a colonial past has gone, but so has a useful public space.

In Athens, we find yet another pattern, with two traditional protest routes, one of which has multiple gathering points. Large, non-party rallies tend to gather on Alexandras Avenue then down Patission (aka 28th October Avenue) to Omonia Square. The second route is more associated with political parties. It features a single marching circuit – down Stadiou Avenue and back up Panepistimiou² – but multiple gathering points and termini, each of which has particular associations with a given political party. Therefore, traditionally the socialist party, PASOK, gathers at Klafthmonos Square; the communists at Kotzia Square; the New Democrats at Syntagma and the left-green coalition Synaspismos at the University. Either way, political demonstration takes a highly predictable, ritualized form which emphasizes not just national symbols and concerns but partisan ones as well.

All this ritualization has clearly positive and negative effects. I have already mentioned some of the positives: directly confronting the powerful in the places where they work; dignifying one's claims by linking them visually with the symbols of the state and nation, or reinforcing more particular partisan identities. Regularity also has benefits when it comes to people joining in. Organizers do not need to give Mexicans detailed explanations of where exactly to gather – all that needs to be said is 'El Ángel' and everyone knows what to do. It can have benefits for onlookers too: as if banners and slogans were not enough, Athenians simply know that if there is a large group mustering at Kotzia Square they must be communists. However, therein too lies one of the problems, and it is a big one. Because of the ritualization, it is easy to pay no attention to the actual claims being made – 'There go the communists again', rather than 'Oh, a protest about wages' – or to greet the umpteenth protest march down La Reforma this month with a shrug, or not even have it register because one sees the same sight every other day of the week. A protest march in Mexico City, unless it really snarls up the traffic, is as much a part of La Reforma as the trees, the buildings, the roadway and the traffic lights.

In response, many protest organizers try to turn to new sites or new methods (Maddison and Scalmer, 2006) – scaling a building and draping it with banners, say – although whether local law and policing *allows* organizers to break out of traditional routes is something else again, and a point I will take up again later in this chapter. However, some organizers positively encourage a degree of ritualization. Unexpectedly, I found this in Washington, DC, where anti-war protestors reported that while the regular transgression of rules controlling protests meant the whole encounter between activists and the

² This is one of several examples in this chapter and the next of a street or locale having both an official name that no one uses, and a common-usage name. Panepistimiou Avenue was renamed Eleftherios Venizelos Avenue after a former Prime Minister, but no one, not even many map-makers, uses the new name. 'Panepistimiou' means 'university', after the main University of Athens site half way along its length.

state had become ritualized and thus lost some of its impact as a media and public spectacle; nonetheless, it served a purpose in that forcing police to arrest people for these infractions ‘jams up the court system’ and thus helps maintain public protest as an irritant to the state.

The one place I visited where protest is both ritualized and not (yet) problematic in the ‘fail to register’ sense is Hong Kong. The territory’s citizens have long been seen by internal and external observers as particularly apathetic (most notably by Lau, 1982), and yet Lam (2004) shows a more complex picture in which a succession of rulers have deployed a set of depoliticization tactics to dampen down the public expression of what is otherwise a highly active civil society. She gives a number of examples since the Second World War of activism bursting forth onto the streets, but since 1989 most of that activity has been focused on two days every year: 4 June and 1 July. The first commemorates the Tiananmen Square massacre, and a march and candle-lit vigil has been held in Victoria Park on or about that date every year since then. The 1 July marches began in 1997 with the return of Hong Kong to PRC control, and while every year they emphasize some different, particular claim, they are all focused on the relationship between Hong Kongers, their more-or-less-elected leaders, and the PRC leadership in Beijing. The march that really put 1 July on the calendar, as it were, was the 2003 event which attracted an estimated half-million people protesting the ‘anti-secession’ Article 23 of the Hong Kong Basic Law. The protest was, almost unbelievably, successful in forcing the abrogation of the law, and since then the ‘apathetic Hong Kong’ cliché has become harder to sustain (Cheng, 2005). But the important point here is, I think, that while the protests have become ritualized in the sense that they happen in the same places on the same days every year, they are not *daily* occurrences, and thus do not become part of the landscape. On the contrary, they become more like a public festival, things that happen just a few times a year, things that are looked forward to, that are written into journalists’ diaries and thus generate column-inches in the press for weeks before and afterwards. They are regular, ritual reminders to liberal Hong Kongers of the dangers of an overwhelming state. Their very regularity keeps them in the news and in people’s minds, but they are not so frequent as to become ignored.

Site-Less Cities

In other cities, space for protest is not at all obvious and its performance not ritualized in the same way. This can be for several reasons. For one, it can be that the buildings of the formal public sphere and the symbols of national significance are not all gathered together in one central location. Tokyo, for

example, has no obvious centre. Guide books often use Tokyo Station as a starting point, or label the surrounding district of Marunouchi, or the Imperial Palace, as the 'centre', but these are more for the convenience of visitors than categories that Tokyo's citizens recognize. Likewise, the sites of the formal public sphere are relatively dispersed, and so demonstrations tend to gather around whatever ministry or symbol seems appropriate at the time. Marchers sometimes gather in Hibiya Park but this is not so much because it is handy to the Imperial Palace – heavens forbid – but because of its proximity to the broad avenues of the Ginza. It is by no means the regular gathering place, and is not terribly big. There is no particular tradition of gathering near the National Diet building either: the nearby park is too hilly, too full of nooks and crannies, without any large open space. Among Tokyo's large parks, Ueno and Yoyogi parks are commonly used, and while they are both redolent with symbolic associations – Yoyogi hosts the Meiji Shrine, Ueno was Tokyo's first public park and the site of a nineteenth-century battle between Meiji and shogunate loyalists – they cannot be said to be the symbolic centres of the city. The end result is rather more pragmatism than tradition. With the odd exception like Yoyogi Park for May Day demonstrations, protestors choose whatever site suits their immediate purpose.

In Canberra, there is a different set of problems. While on the face of it there is abundant space for protest and eyeballing the powerful, in practice that space is strictly controlled and limited. In part, this is through policing and a permit system, to which I will return shortly. In part, it is due to the physical layout of the city, discussed in Chapter six, which means that activists face a dilemma in choosing whether to engage with fellow Canberrans and attract local media, which implies demonstrating in the commercial district of Civic; or whether to confront the powerful in their 'citadels' (Warden, 1995), which implies demonstrating 3 kilometres further south outside Parliament, the Prime Minister's residence and, often, the US Embassy.³ Another issue arises from the fact that Canberra has a small population – 350,000 people compared with the roughly four million each in Sydney and Melbourne – and so if the aim is to attract the national media or directly engage a large number of fellow Australians then one holds one's protest in those cities, 292 and 656 kilometres away, respectively.⁴ But even on the doorstep of Parliament itself,

³ Note here the importance that sometimes *other countries'* formal institutions play in a particular deliberative system. With respect to Iraq War protests, it was frequently the case in the cities under study that protests focused on United States embassies and trade missions, as much as that was possible given the security regimes in place.

⁴ The Australian media is quite regionalized, not to the same extent as in the United States, but much more so than in Britain. There are some genuinely national news programmes and one national newspaper, but even then they vary the offering, sometimes markedly, from state to state. The major media are largely headquartered in Sydney, with some broadcast national news delivered from Melbourne. Canberra offices are small, peripheral, and in some cases only staffed



Figure 7.2. Old and new Parliament House, Canberra

The Authorised Assembly Area is a small strip at the top of the largest grassed area between the two buildings. Photo by Nicholas Brown, licensed by Creative Commons.

protest is controlled through the very layout of the available space. Within the Parliamentary Precinct, protest is usually only allowed within the ‘Authorized Assembly Area’, a 27×87 metre strip of grass at the top of the Federation Mall Parade Ground (Figure 7.2). It is separated from the main, public entrance to Parliament by a full 150 metres, including the forecourt, a raised area of grass and shrubbery, and the circum-parliamentary road, and is set a good metre and a half below road level on ground that slopes firmly back down towards the lake (for regulations governing the space, see Parliament of Australia, 2007). Protestors are kept within those boundaries by thickets of police officers and parliamentary security. All this has important effects on protestors and their audiences. For both, protest can seem somewhat farcical – except for the flagpole, the low-slung Parliament House is not a dominant physical presence when seen from the Authorized Assembly Area, while the area itself is hardly visible from the building. There is little sense of taking one’s claims to

part-time. Thus, events in Canberra do not automatically make it onto Australian national news in the same way that events in London set the UK news agenda.

the powers that be, not least because members and senators rarely use the front of the building anyway; they use either the House or Senate entrances at the sides of the building or the Ministerial Entrance at the back, and are driven up to the doors through guarded barriers in limousines so that the chances of an encounter with a member of the public are slim. Protest organizers report that the sense of having an impact, of being taken seriously in the dignified spaces of collective decision-making, is simply not achievable under such conditions. For a protestor, the overwhelming sense is a strange combination of suspicion, surveillance, containment, and threat on the one hand, and pointlessness on the other. From inside the building, the impact of protest is similar – the tiny, distant space available makes protest groups seem small, and thus their claims small and unimportant too. Those who bother to turn up are clearly, to insiders, the lunatic fringe; rational, sensible people are inside the building wearing suits.

This makes quite a contrast between the old and new Parliament buildings. In the old, everyone used the same colonnaded entrance, and so it was frequently the case that one could bump into a minister – even the Prime Minister – coming through the doors. Although still separated from the building by a two-lane road, verge, car parks, and driveway, the broad, open grass between the portico and lake was both closer to the building – 35 metres instead of 150 – and flatter than the new arrangements, which gave protest much more of a sense of purposive confrontation than the new. As with the ability of backbenchers to encounter ministers noted in Chapter five, this ability to encounter the powerful easily was celebrated by some Australian politicians when plans for the new building were unveiled, plans that so obviously segregated the powerful and the powerless (Fewtrell, 1991).

Indeed, there is something mendacious about the new building. While its design is all, allegedly, about openness and the dominance of the people over their rulers (Giurgola in Fewtrell et al., 2008), the reality is one where the people and rulers are kept strictly separate, and the people clearly subordinate when they attempt to switch role from tourist to engaged citizen. As tourists, they can walk on top of the building and penetrate into its centre, but that centre is a blank space where no democratic work takes place. As citizens, those same people are confined to a small – humiliating, even – rectangle of grass, barely in eyeshot.

Static and Mobile Protest

Some places have static protest traditions while others have more mobile ones. In Ottawa, for example, people tend to gather at Parliament Hill and conduct their demonstration there; while there have been exceptions, they do

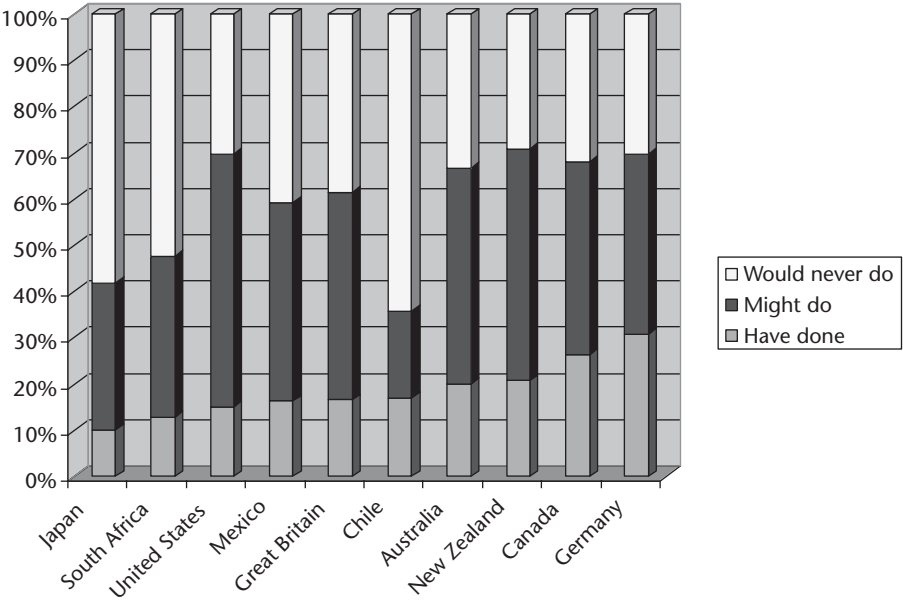


Figure 7.3. Anti-prorogation protestors, Parliament Hill, Ottawa

Note the steps to the bottom right are the main steps into the building, proximity that contrasts strongly with Canberra. Photo by Michelle Tribe, licensed by Creative Commons.

not tend to gather somewhere else first (Confederation Park, say) and then march, en masse, to the Hill (Figure 7.3). In other cities, it is not the gathering that matters so much as the getting there, and in those places there are often traditional marshalling points and marching routes as well. In some places, this is simply because there is no obvious terminus. Hong Kong has a good, although still-tight gathering point at Victoria Park; it has a marvellously broad and direct route from there down Hennessy Road to the Legislative Council chambers in Central; it just has nowhere for the crowd to gather at the other end, and this is one reason why in Hong Kong the protests are less about direct confrontation with the powerful, more about mobilization and making visible the dissatisfaction of the people in a state that would prefer such discontent remain invisible.⁵ Santiago faces a similar problem: Plaza de Armas is also a somewhat ‘programmed’ space, with trees and other plantings, benches and café seating, merry-go-rounds and donkey rides, and street artists and tourists all jostling for space, among which protestors have only relatively small patches of open ground in which to make themselves visible. Thus, protest becomes mobile, often gathering at Plaza Italia and sweeping down the

⁵ For a discussion of this and other reasons for the middle class preference for protest marches in Hong Kong, see Cheung (2005).



Graph 7.1. Willingness to attend lawful/peaceful demonstrations
Source: World Values Survey, question V98, www.worldvaluessurvey.org

broad avenue known on the maps as Avenida Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins but to everyone else as the Alameda, ending at the presidential palace of La Moneda, or wherever the police choose to intervene. For some issues and some people in Santiago, as in Athens, the running battle remains a key way of enacting public claim-making!

A different kind of mobility tradition is found in Wellington. There, standing still in Parliament grounds and yelling slogans at politicians has a long history but not a particularly respectable one. While it is a right that is respected by the powers that be,⁶ New Zealanders tend to have a cultural suspicion of the political, and confine their confrontations to the sporting field. Marching, on the other hand, is a bit more respectable, and something undertaken by young and old, progressive and conservative alike. Indeed, World Values Survey comparisons between the countries under study here show that New Zealanders are among the more willing to participate in peaceful demonstrations – see Graph 7.1. With a few

⁶ Speakers of the House have long protected the right of people to gather in front of the building against the urge of some security advisers who would rather impose an exclusive perimeter. It often happens that petitions are symbolically received on the steps of Parliament House, and that MPs address demonstrations from the same raised position. Demonstrators are now kept back from the driveway immediately in front of the steps where once they were able to swarm up them, right up to the doors, without anyone bothering too much. This has reduced the sense of proximity to power in Wellington, something that is maintained in Ottawa.

exceptions,⁷ political protests in New Zealand tend to be relatively quiet affairs, certainly by Chilean standards. In that context, peacefulness is an entry badge, something that says that is safe to join and show one's support for a claim or viewpoint by parading from Courtney Place (for a big protest) or Civic Square (for the smaller ones) down Lambton Quay and past all the shoppers and office workers that make up their public. The march usually ends at Parliament, and speeches are made in the grounds, but a lot of marchers wander off before then, having made their point by walking rather than talking.

There is a sense in which protest in Berlin takes this 'demonstration' to more abstract heights. The traditional gathering point for many protests is Lausitzen Park in Kreuzberg, but the first time I visited I was struck by how small and peripheral it felt. It also felt uncared-for space, with buildings covered in graffiti, the grass in a mess and rubbish everywhere. This was not space that would be instantly welcoming to the middle classes of Berlin, regardless of how passionately they felt about a topic. Still, it is important not to dismiss it, because while Lausitzen Park might not attract the bourgeois, it instead serves as a badge of identity for much smaller groups of radicals, activists, alternative life-stylers, and so forth – a home for alternative counterpublics rather than mainstream burgers, and a place where they feel in charge and powerful. Likewise, the modern Athenian district of Exarchia, full of squats, street art, and the flashpoint of the 2008 riots, serves a similar function, although I am starting to get ahead of the narrative here – I will return to Exarchia and Kreuzberg in the next chapter.

New Zealand, Australia, and the United States share another tradition: not so much marching *in* the capital but marching *on* the capital. In Australia, it has been farmers who have most used this tactic; in New Zealand, it has been mainly Māori lands rights campaigners using what is called the *hīkoi* (Harris, 2004). In the United States, the tradition is traced to 'Coxey's Army' in 1894, a 'petition in boots' from Ohio to DC by unemployed workers demanding community facilities and jobs through road building programmes (Barber, 2002). Given 100 years of contrary experience, it is surprising to learn that, before Jacob Coxey, it was illegal for citizens to use the Capitol grounds for political purposes, and that the march was seen as an invasion, a populist mode of action that would fundamentally undermine the principles of the republic (2002: 11–12, 27). Following Coxey, and reinforced by further marches by suffragettes, war veterans, civil rights campaigners, and more, the ceremonial, symbolic spaces of Washington came to be seen as spaces to

⁷ Most notably some of the protests against the visiting South African rugby team in 1981 (Chapple, 1984), and a number of violent incidents surrounding the 1951 waterfront dispute (Bassett, 1972).

which any member of the American public had a right to use and occupy, setting up a tension between the city's roles as national public space and home for its denizens that lasts to this day. But the point of the march is not just to eyeball the powerful, but to engage with as many people as possible in as many states as possible, gathering supporters along the way; and to generate news coverage that lasts not just for more than the day of a single, static protest, but for the days, weeks, even months of a grand tour.

However, static protests need not just be about a few hours gathered in front of a legislature chanting, waving banners, banging drums, and making speeches. Static protests can last for long periods too, and use a variety of tactics to confront leaders and maintain news coverage. The primary aim of Brian Haw's long-running anti-war protest in London's Parliament Square has been to confront politicians directly with visual images and aural annoyance, 'reminding those in power of the costs of their wars' (www.parliament-square.org.uk). In this Mr Haw and his supporters succeeded spectacularly, filling one side of the square with a huge array of banners and posters and so annoying the government that they tried repeatedly to remove him by a combination of legal instruments, intimidation, and harassment. I will have more to say about those actions later when discussing the policing of protest, and about the sometimes-laudable motivations for wanting to control it, but for now there are two points to make. The first is the degree to which the instruments are targeted at *physical* presence. Part 4 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (commonly known by its abbreviation, SOCPA) which targeted Mr Haw makes specific mention of 'the number and size of banners or placards used' (Section 134(4)(e)) and largely bans the use of loudspeakers on 'noise nuisance' grounds (Section 137) as ways of controlling the physical impact of his protest. The second point is that while Mr Haw's sprawling protest site was certainly unusual and thus likely to attract media attention in its own right, what has kept it newsworthy has been the astonishingly ham-fisted nature of the attempts to control the scale of protests. As activist Mark Thomas puts it, SOCPA has been a combination of the sinister and the farcical – it has led most famously to a woman being convicted under the act for holding an unauthorized demonstration when she stood next to the war memorial on Whitehall and read out the names of British soldiers killed in Iraq; by failing to act retrospectively, for nearly a year its provisions applied to everyone *except* Mr Haw; it has led to people being threatened with arrest for picnicking with a cake iced with the word 'Peace' (Thomas, 2007); to police not being able to decide whether the wearing of a charity red nose was a demonstration or not.⁸ In May 2006, police removed the vast majority of

⁸ Ireland (2008). See also www.repeal-socpa.info and the Parliament Protest blog at <http://parliamentprotest.org.uk>

Mr Haw's signs in a pre-dawn raid; in response, artist Mark Wallinger reproduced the display in its entirety and installed it under the title 'State Britain' inside the Tate Britain gallery,⁹ such that the raid had the effect of increasing the protest's visibility, not diminishing it. Indeed, the net result of all the efforts to contain Mr Haw's physical occupation of Parliament Square has been to help it spill out of those confines. At the same time, the square has become a focal point for many other interest groups concerned about the erosion of civil liberties in Britain, and to keep it in the news on and off from 2001 until the Labour government was voted out of office in 2010.

One might think that a better strategy, from the state's point of view, would be simply to ignore such long-term, static occupation of public space, and let it fizzle out as familiarity bred popular contempt. For example, consider the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra. First established by a small group of Northern Territory people in 1972 to protest government inaction on land and resource rights, the Tent Embassy has at various times provoked violent state reaction, broad-based mediation processes, and long stretches of indifference. Despite a few moves, it has been situated for most of its history on a patch of land across the road from the Old Parliament Building (shifted out of the direct line of sight so as not to spoil the view), and comprises a few tents and an old shipping container that served as the main office and reception room until destroyed in an arson attack in 2003. It is now 'part of Canberra's physical and political landscape' (Dow, 2000), but as such has largely lost relevance, something only made worse when parliamentarians moved up the hill to the new building, leaving the embassy to wave its flags in front of what is now a museum and art gallery, a building that is losing its symbolic power. The embassy was never popular with the local Ngunnawal people, some of whom considered it an affront to their standing as traditional custodians of Canberra, and while it has been linked to the successful placement of land rights on the political agenda in Australia, it has gradually lost its significance to white and black Australians following a series of legal decisions and negotiated agreements.

However, ignoring something is not always effective either. Consider the well-known case of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo who, Torre (1996) argues, were instrumental in undermining the military dictatorship in Argentina because of the persistence of their silent presence in the face of the security forces. Demonstrations were forbidden, so the Mothers did not 'demonstrate' in any standard sense – they quietly walked in pairs around the plaza's central obelisk wearing their distinctive white headscarves, and by doing so every Thursday afternoon for years on end drew local and international attention to

⁹ <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/wallinger/>

their claims. When all other avenues of claim-making were denied them, they used their bodies to occupy public, symbolic space. By walking around that obelisk every week, they ‘emplaced’ their claims, establishing them among the symbolic associations of that space. Now, there are reasons why the Mothers were successful in that particular context – the symbolic status of the plaza and the norms of respect for motherhood that operated in that time and place came together to make it more difficult for the security forces to intervene – and that should lead us to be wary of generalizations about the effectiveness of silent persistence. The Tiananmen Square occupation of 1989 too was persistent and peaceful, yet the Chinese leadership eventually sent in the tanks and reasserted their dominance not only over the square and protestors’ bodies but of the narratives that accumulate around that space. Twenty years on, however, Shanghai protestors are turning to a variety of the same tactic, the ‘collective walk’, in which large numbers of people simply gather together to occupy space, drawing attention to the scale of their displeasure not by holding a (forbidden) demonstration, but simply by coordinating a stroll in the centre of town (Li, 2009: 79). The particular context of the time and place matters at least as much as the physical constraints of the space.

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That last point about tactical flexibility raises the objection that many raise to the thoughts in this chapter: that these variations in the physical spaces of capital cities do not matter very much. Ironically, it is the opposite objection to the one most raised to the thoughts in the other chapters – surely variations in those contexts matter quite a lot! Still, it is not the case that there is substantially less contentious politics in those places that have no single site for protest, or whose major site is somehow divorced from the sites of the formal public sphere. Activists work with the places they have; they do not just give up and go away when unable to find a plaza in front of the presidential palace or a marching route conducive to high visibility. However, it is the case that the space available has an impact of which of the tools in their political repertoire activists select (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 16–17), and this in turn has an effect on the kinds of impacts they can have on particular audiences. Politicians, for instance, seem not to like being confronted directly; they expend an awful lot of effort keeping protest at arm’s length. Everything said so far about symbolic communication¹⁰ would suggest that this is because politicians want to control the messages that their physical settings send, something that is disrupted when activists have the temerity to unfurl their

¹⁰ Not only in this work but by Pitkin (1967), Weber et al. (1978), Edelman (1988), Barker (2001), Hajer (2009), and any number of scholars of symbolic politics.

banners on politicians' buildings. Of course, leaders themselves usually make a different claim, to do with protecting the peace and quiet needed for effective working (interviews, parliamentary officers in Ottawa and Wellington); or the dignity of the formal institutions (e.g. Parliament of Australia, 2007). In London, the effort that has gone into removing one man and his extensive construction of tents, banners, and placards has been extraordinary. The mere fact that politicians dislike it so much says that it matters; the people *should* be able to confront their leaders and make them uncomfortable; politicians *should* be forced to deal with the physical manifestation of the distress that people feel over their actions. For that reason alone, my account of democracy puts positive value on cities that have spaces where direct confrontation is possible and permitted. That means in principle positively valuing Ottawa, Mexico City, Washington, Wellington, and Berlin, with their open and accessible spaces closely surrounding the main sites of the formal public sphere; disliking the restricted or fragmented spaces of Tokyo, London, and Canberra (especially given Canberra's isolation from the major population and media centres); and being more ambivalent about Cape Town, Athens, Hong Kong, and Santiago. I will provide more of an evaluation in the final chapter when all the threads are drawn together.

Now, it will be clear from these examples that the pressure on decision-makers comes not just from the direct confrontation preferred by Brian Haw, but from the fact that confrontation attracts the attention of others: fellow citizens, journalists, campaigners, bloggers, and so forth who, if they care about the issue at hand, will start generating their own communication about the subject. It might be that they transmit the claims being made by the protestor; it might be that they disagree with those claims and rather transmit alternative claims, or dismissive gestures, but which, even if they do not advocate the same position on an issue, nonetheless widen the degree to which the issue is discussed. Given that, it is clear that using relatively 'formal' sites of protest, next to the sites of the formal public sphere, is just one means to that particular end, and that there are many other sites that can be used to attract media attention. Commercial centres, major roads, parks, or the workplaces of specifically targeted organizations might all be used, so long as the cameras can get to those sites fairly easily, or so long as citizen-journalists are around and can make their own footage – from mobile phones and iPods more often than traditional cameras – available to mass media. Remember too, however, that attracting media attention is just one of the aims of protest organizers. For some of the other purposes, the symbolic messages of the stage matters, and we will see a few more reasons for that by examining what happens when access is closed off to stages that use the formal public sphere as a backdrop. One of the ways in which that closure happens is through the privatization of public space.

Privatizing Space

The privatization of public space has attracted much discussion in the literature. The major points are these: there is space that *appears* to be public in sense 1 in that it seems to be open and accessible; and that might, because it is often full of fellow citizens, be useful in sense 4 for engaging with those citizens in some kind of public narration or claim-making; but that is really only public in sense 3, having common impacts. In every other way it is private space: privately owned, privately controlled, with only limited kinds of people allowed in and public, political purposes forbidden.

One of the common examples of this kind of space is the shopping mall. Barber (2001) is one of many writers who argue that when shoppers and shopping moved from Main Street to The Mall, what got left behind was public, civic space, space for encountering each other as citizen rather than dodging and competing with each other for goods and services. Shopping, on this account, used to be just one of several things that drew people into spaces that were controlled by publicly accountable authorities; classic plazas with a town square in front of the town hall; with shops side-by-side not just with cafes and barbers but local representatives' offices and libraries; with places to sit and feed the birds, play chess, kick a ball, and talk to the neighbours. Now, goes the argument, shopping and civic encounter have been divorced. Citizen-led political activity is explicitly forbidden in such spaces, and while elected politicians are often allowed to press the flesh in election campaigns, the unelected are usually barred from doing the same. Seating is removed, often to stop allegedly threatening youngsters and homeless people from congregating, but also because sitting people do not shop. Perhaps Barber's 'decline and fall' story is a little romanticized, but the overall point about commercially designed space is still valid. Dovey (1999: 130) describes the result thus:

The mall is a clean and highly designed place in contrast to a sometimes derelict context. It embodies the signifiers of class – terrazzo paving, brass and glass – and there are no signs of poverty. The mall creates a purified environment, not only physically and climatically, but also socially. The mall offers at least the illusion of a vital public life and harmonious community. . . . The mall establishes its meaning in opposition to the perceived dereliction, danger, placelessness and alienation of the public realm. Indeed, the more the public places of our cities decline in quality and safety, the greater the relative advantage of the private mall.

The mall is just one example of this particular drive that classifies and stratifies citizens as employees and shoppers. Other features achieve the same end. One such is the 'skyways' of Minneapolis which stratify people into street-class and upper-class (Byers, 1998), with besuited office workers

and (certain kinds of) shoppers having privileged access to the intricate network of bridges and first-floor shopping spaces, unmonitored or unhindered by the private security guards employed by the building owners. Other shoppers, politically-active citizens, the down-and-out and otherwise marginal tend to use the city streets, a cold and forbidding prospect in the Minnesota winter, but an alienating experience at any time of year. Even Nicollet Mall, the central, pedestrianized shopping street, has a clear upstairs/downstairs divide that was instantly noticeable to me as an outsider the first time I walked along it. Other means include the use of zoning laws, the private purchase of once-public land, and the gated community movement, which similarly privatizes streets in the name of security (Low, 2006). The point to emphasize is that while cities like Minneapolis certainly possess space of the kind I am advocating here – the streets themselves, and Government Plaza between City Hall and the county government office tower – these spaces have become marginalized, and public claim-making in terms of direct engagement with fellow citizens delegitimized. Dovey (1999: 126) suggests that this may well have been the opposite of the intentions of Victor Gruen, the planner credited with designing the modern mall. Gruen was interested in creating spaces where car-dependent suburbanites could rediscover community; what he delivered was pseudo-community, an anaesthetic, an apolitical therapy (see also Kohn, 2004). The road to this particular hell was paved with good intentions as well as terrazzo.

This situation has not gone uncontested in the United States. Particularly important has been a series of attempts at federal and then state level to designate malls as public forums and thus spaces where First Amendment freedoms of expression and assembly are protected. However, Zick (2009: 145–61) – in an excellent book – tells what is, from the present normative standpoint, the sad tale of how, in 1972, the US Supreme Court upheld a very limited right to picket a specific place of work, but otherwise upheld property rights over first amendment rights, holding that malls were private spaces whose primary purpose was profit-making in a ‘controlled, carefree environment’ (407 U.S. 553, 1972); that they and many other spaces – transport terminals, for instance – do not have and cannot ever gain the character of ‘traditional’ or ‘immemorial’ public forums and thus expression in them cannot be given basic protection under the US constitution. They thus implicitly applied an extremely limited definition of public space, focusing on type 4 space for public claim-making, yet limiting that further by applying an ownership criterion. The result is that one cannot even conduct voter registration drives in most American malls, let alone actively campaign for a candidate or on an issue. This applies to any new kind of space, and to any privatized space. As business consortiums take over the management of many open city

spaces in the United States, the spaces available for purposive expression and civic engagement are becoming fewer.

The gradual transformation of people from citizen to consumer is something that is pervading many kinds of public life. One of my interviewees talked about convention centres charging full rates for political purposes that once were free. It used to be something that was considered good corporate citizenship but now is a business opportunity, especially when public engagement itself is seen as a business like any other. Likewise, businesses are taking on the language and symbolism of publicness while providing little of its reality. Take, for example, the promotional campaign for a new shopping and residential development I saw in downtown Minneapolis whose strapline was 'creating community', or the shopping area in the skyways called 'Gaviidae Commons'.

This is not just a US phenomenon. When I visited in 2008, there was a building on the north-west corner of Syntagma Square in Athens which proudly called itself 'The Public', dressed in the orange livery of central and eastern European democracy movements, but basically a music, books, and IT shop with a small espresso bar on one level. There is 'The Forum', a small amphitheatre-type space between two of Hong Kong's World Trade Centre tower blocks, which is really just a place for office workers to eat their lunch; it is certainly *not* a space for public deliberation. Note too the appropriation not just of democratic language but pseudo-classical language, attempting to give the new and commercial an aura of antiquity and civic duty.¹¹ Similar problems occur in Canada, where one activist reported having to seek permission from local business owners' associations before they could demonstrate outside big hotels, convention centres, or even ordinary city streets, because of the particular extension of property rights onto the sidewalk that is upheld in the Canadian context. Likewise, some Wellingtonians complain about the commercialization and subsequent restrictions on the use of what once was fairly free, unconstrained waterfront space. The same story is heard in Tokyo, in Berlin, in Santiago, and all over the world.

Space for the pressing of public claims is problematic not just because politicians often want to insulate themselves from such claims; not just because suitable spaces might not be large enough or close enough to have an impact; and not just because some spaces' physical features militate against effective, large-scale expression; but because the entire ideal of the citizen as a purposive claim-maker is being undermined, to be replaced by the idealized citizen-shopper, who expresses him or herself purely through his or her purchases and presence in fashionable places, acting as what Benjamin

¹¹ For an entertaining but nonetheless insightful discussion of the appropriation of classical and other high-status symbolism in America, see Eco (1986).

(1999) called the *flâneur*. This is perhaps the more important challenge to space for making public claims; not just that its availability is more limited, but that the very performance of important public roles has become delegitimized in public discourse. Who cares about the public plaza as democratic stage when few value the performances enacted on it? This, I suggest, helps explain why it is that city authorities the world over have embraced forms of public spatial design that discourage the large-scale pressing of public claims, and encourage sitting with a sandwich. This is a movement that some writers on urban design have been complicit in: fixated on an account of the public whose emblem is unscripted encounters with strangers, they have recommended spatial design approaches that play into the delegitimization of scripted, purposive, democratic claim-making.

This is also one reason why those people who *do* occasionally want to press public claims face not just challenges of staging, but of access to those stages. I approach those issues by looking at the policing of politics.

Policing Politics

The policing of protest has rocketed up the media agenda in several nations in the last ten years, first in relation to a series of anti-globalization/anti-capitalist confrontations including the 'Battle of Seattle' in 1999 and the G20 Summit protests in London in 2009; and second in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC and the subsequent anti-war protests. The first set of protests have been seen as particularly significant because they led to a re-evaluation of what had been the dominant mode of policing protest for twenty years, negotiated management, something that has been seen as central to the reduction in violence of police-protestor interactions since the late 1960s (della Porta and Reiter, 1998; Soule and Davenport, 2009). Indeed, Waddington (1994) argues that this approach has allowed for the vast majority of protest to pass off peacefully, in an atmosphere of facilitation, even 'fun', as I witnessed when I visited City Hall in Mexico City and watched as protestors and a wall of police officers protecting the building laughed and joked with each other in between the serious business of slogan-shouting and drum beating.

Still, while negotiation about, even collaborative management of, protest continues, the model presumes the existence of organizations with whom police can negotiate, organizations that can direct and discipline their members (King and Waddington, 2005). This is not the case with many protests – there is no one organizer, no one manager. This is not just a matter of having protests in which there are groups actively hostile to the idea that the police should determine access to and claim-making in supposedly public streets

(Noakes et al., 2005). It is also the case that the lone, occasionally active citizen is not recognized in this model. For example, in Washington, DC, one must apply for permission to hold a protest, but figuring who to apply to, on what form, by what deadline, and with what information can be a daunting task given the sheer number of organizations that have overlapping jurisdiction over public space in the federal capital. Given the nature of the spaces involved, this often includes the National Parks Service, which owns around a quarter of the land in the District of Columbia, rather than the DC government; and one or more of a multitude of overlapping security services, including the Secret Service, the DC Metro Police, the Capitol Police and the Parks Police. While the American Civil Liberties Union produces a guide to managing these processes – although one seemingly not available on the organization's own website, www.aclu.org – it would be very easy for the ordinary citizen to fall foul of them. There are different deadlines by which applications must be filed, for instance; and there is no line on the sidewalk designating this stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue as falling under this jurisdiction, but that stretch falling under another; nor could there be, because the regimes differ not just by physical location but by issue and event type as well (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2005). Other permit regimes make similar presumptions that protest implies the organization, resources, and corporate knowledge required to figure out the sometimes-Byzantine rules and act on them. And this is at least partly why the Metropolitan Police in London tie themselves in knots over what individual actions – wearing a charity red nose, icing a cake – constitute a protest, and thus what requires prior approval from the Commissioner.

Given what police leaders around the world saw as the failure of this model to control violence at Seattle, Genoa, and elsewhere, the policing approach now is characterized by a mix of three elements: (a) the old negotiated management model; (b) the identification, containment, and isolation of potential troublemakers; and (c) pressing the very design of public space into service. The second element has attracted the most attention from the media and, to a certain extent, criminologists and sociologists of policing. The issues here are fairly straightforward. 'Trouble' gets defined in terms of potential threat to officers on the ground (Earl and Soule, 2006), and that threat perception is connected with perceptions of the kinds of people attracted to a given issue, based on experience of prior encounters (King and Waddington, 2005). The resulting judgements are often over-broad caricatures (Gorringer and Rosie, 2008) that can seem blackly humorous – because police forces have encountered deliberately transgressive action (which, *nota bene*, is not necessarily violence) at, say, environmental actions, they are now much more likely to treat any environmental group as a threat and any discussions of protest, or even owning copies of a mainstream political magazine, *The New Statesman*, as

evidence of intent to cause trouble.¹² When it comes to protest, this kind of information is used to justify pre-emptive arrest, the creation of heavily fortified 'free speech zones', and what in Britain is called 'kettling' – the surrounding and isolation of troublesome groups, preventing them from reaching and using symbolically useful stages. Because troublemakers are identified the way they are, these tactics are applied to a great deal more people than the rock-and-bomb throwers, and while the death of a bystander at hands of police at the London G20 protests has led to efforts to rework some of these tactics in *some* cities (HMIC, 2009; Rosie and Gorringer, 2009), they, and the intelligence-gathering processes that support them, are still widely applied.

While there are all sorts of fascinating avenues that could be explored here, for my purposes the point to stress is the degree to which this kind of action is about controlling and countering staging, and thus the symbolic messages that are conveyed to attentive audiences. Versteeg and Hajer (2009) use precisely this approach to analyse the G20 events, revealing the lengths that political leaders went to establish themselves on symbolically redolent stages in an attempt to boost the credibility of their claims that a 'new world order' was being fashioned behind the closed doors of the summit. In response, various protest groups tried to commandeer those stages; when they were prevented from doing so, they attempted to 'upstage' the officials, and in this were partly successful. Why 'partly'? Because the policing of protest became the story, not the original claims and counterclaims that brought the G20 leaders and the protestors to the streets of London in the first place. What was emplaced was a set of debates about access to public space and the rights of citizenship. Similar police reactions in other cities have provoked similar debates: the policing of the Republican Party Convention in New York in August 2004, or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Vancouver in 1997, for example. The official response to attempts to upstage leaders' presentations itself becomes the source of new public claims, although at the expense of the original arguments about globalization, capitalism, and the environment.

This analysis, however, makes the third element of the new approach more troubling. The spaces of cities themselves have become part of the control mechanisms; the streetscape has been 'deputized' (Krieger, 2003). Because it employs indirect means – bollards, building 'set-backs', seemingly natural barriers, lighting, surveillance points, and so on – it is less obvious, less visible, easily taken-for-granted, and thus less likely to provoke a public reaction and a

¹² Porter (2009). Video of the seizure of 'political material', including the *New Statesman*, referred to in Porter's column, is available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/video/2009/apr/19/police-activism> For a discussion of the impact of state surveillance on campaigning organizations in the United States, see Starr et al. (2008).

set of public claims. While urban geographers, sociologists, and some architectural theorists – but not political scientists, in the main – have noticed and roundly condemned these methods, they have largely gone unremarked in wider public debate except in their crude forms.

The ‘crude’ forms include things described in Chapter six: concrete or plastic Jersey barriers slapped up hurriedly around US government buildings following the Beirut and Oklahoma City bombings, then in many other cities following 9/11. Benton-Short (2007: 424) neatly sketches the situation and general reaction:

On 20 January 2005, at his second inauguration, President George W Bush took the oath of office and delivered a speech forcefully enunciating principles of extending democracy, freedom, and liberty throughout the world. This event took place amidst bollards, barriers, sentry boxes, more than 13 000 soldiers and police officers, and miles of security fences. The irony was not hard to miss.

In the public spaces around many of the buildings of the formal public sphere, some of the crudeness has been tidied up, but the key elements remain. The traffic barriers close to the Capitol now fall back into recesses in the roadway; the Jersey barriers along Constitution and Independence Avenues now sport pseudo-classical design features and planters in their tops, the flowers serving to prettify what is still basically an anti-car-bomb device (Figure 7.4). In many cities, roads have been closed, fences made more permanent, and surveillance cameras proliferate.

However, the crude barrier approach is gradually giving way to softer, more subtle means of protecting public buildings. One way of doing this is to disguise barriers not with flowers but as public art – one of the best examples comes from New York where massive bollards in Wall Street are designed as if they were somehow an avant-garde artistic installation than an anti-terrorist device. In Wellington too, there are bollards shaped like fern fronds, the softness of the shape belying the hardness of the barrier. But more subtlety again is found in documents like the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan for Washington, DC (NCPC, 2005), which sets out a number of tactics for securing public sites without jersey barriers by

- increasing building set-backs from the footpath and roadway;
- using trees, seating, planters, bollards and streetlamps as replacements for barriers; and
- using low retaining walls around monuments in open spaces to prevent car access.

A very similar plan was released almost simultaneously in Australia (National Capital Authority, 2003), which was no coincidence, as there is extensive collaboration between federal zone authorities in Canberra, Ottawa, and



Figure 7.4. Disguised Jersey barriers outside the Smithsonian, Washington, DC
Author photo.

Washington. Other design elements can be used as well – in Seattle, lots of breaks in level, furniture and fountains are used to break up space so that large crowds cannot easily manoeuvre in them, and to provide bastions behind which security forces can protect buildings and businesses.

Now, from a ‘pressing public claims’ point of view, some of these barriers might not be particularly objectionable on their own. Low retaining walls might stop cars but not protestors on foot, while increasing set-backs could be a positive move if it increased the amount of flat, open space in front of buildings that could be used for demonstrations. This is one of the major problems in Central Hong Kong: land values being what they are, open space is a luxury in which property developers rarely indulge. Thus, the de facto offices of the Beijing administration are in a building in Sheung Wan with a

tiny set-back on a busy road with a flyover right outside, and so the area is able to hold no more than a few dozen people in any safety.¹³ However, where set-backs are provided, they are *not* made available for claim-making purposes – they are fenced off, patrolled by guards, and overlooked by security cameras – while the other techniques can be used to render space useless for gatherings of more than a few thousand people, and thus useless for some of the reasons that protest organizers still value the mass demonstration.

Conclusions

To conclude, let us go back to the key question that underlies this chapter: why should democrats value public spaces that are both large and next to legislatures? In Chapter four, I argued that there are four answers to that question: presence, attention, membership, and dignity. One needs large spaces to impress upon target audiences – decision-makers, media, other citizens, other states – the scale of public displeasure on an issue. Protests are often dismissed by the powerful when they do not attract people in large numbers or from a broad enough spectrum of society, but in some cities, these dismissive acts are easier than in others, simply because their major forums cannot hold anything like enough people. While ‘enough’ is clearly a matter of context, filling a large plaza with hundreds of thousands of people is much harder to dismiss than a few hardy souls; although likewise, a persistent few, who occupy space over long, long periods of time, can prove just as effective, especially when the state massively overreacts. But whether it is small scale or large scale, one-off or long-standing, protest in places of national significance is important not just for making claims, but to cloak those claims in the symbols of national importance and dignity, and for reasons of democratic narration. Protest in such sites helps people feel that they are not alone, that others share their views, and that it is OK – even right and just – to express those views in public.

I have also argued that these needs stand in tension with at least one other significant consideration, and that is the dangers of ritualization. Ritualization makes control easier, and can lead to protest losing its impact. Protest can become so commonplace that it either fades into the background, or onlookers simply take in the membership cues and not the substantive points that the protestors are trying to make.

¹³ A ‘Democracy Now!’ protest on 1 January 2010 managed around a thousand – estimates varied – but that is an extraordinary number given the tiny space available (*South China Morning Post*, www.scmp.com).

Hong Kong protestors have overcome this to a certain extent by having two shared national days of protest, made easier by the fact that in Hong Kong there is one big issue: the relationship between liberal Hong Kong and a potentially, and sometimes actually, repressive government in Beijing. They also have two days, 4 June and 1 July, that symbolize that relationship because they are the anniversaries of key events that shape that relationship, namely the Tiananmen Square massacre and the 1997 handover. These features make it easier to get otherwise-disparate protest groups to work together and focus their energies on two key moments. But over time, those dates will probably lose some of their power. May Day marches used to be both widespread and huge; nowadays, they are seen as anachronistic in many cities.

Ritualization is not the only danger, however. Privatization and the policing of public space is having significant impacts on people's ability, perhaps propensity, to engage with the public sphere as citizens rather than as shoppers, sports fans, consumers, *flâneurs*. While the *Landsgemeinden* cantons in Switzerland have problems of their own, this is one major benefit of the annual gathering of citizens in the *Landsgemeindeplatz* every year: it shows people, physically and visibly, performing their citizenship role. This, it seems to me, is very important in a mediatized, digitized, and privatized era in which the only other times one encounters crowds is when those crowds are accidental, as in lots of individuals shopping in the same area; or leisurely, when crowds gather at sporting venues or parks for a good fireworks display. Without that, citizenship can easily be shifted online, such that people never *see* each other acting in concert on public, political issues, and that matters because it helps further delegitimize politics, and democratic engagement along with it. This issue of meeting the public is a major theme of the next chapter.

Active citizens are responding to all this in various ways. There are long-standing attempts in the United States to revisit the Supreme Court judgments on political activity in space that is, or should be, public on every one of my criteria (Barber, 2001; Zick, 2009). Protestors themselves are responding by using mixed methods: not just large-scale protests in the usual sites for purposes of visibility, dignity, and membership but also actions that target specific sites in order to upstage the performances of elites (Maddison and Scalmer, 2006; Versteeg and Hajer, 2009). In some cities, counterpublics have tried to set up sanctuaries and no-go areas, with more or less success. In my sample, these include the Exarchia area in central Athens, full of squats and communes and the flashpoint of just about any of the major confrontations that have rocked the city in recent years. Kreuzberg in Berlin fulfils a similar role every May Day. Outside my cases, notable examples include the Haight Ashbury area of San Francisco; The Block in Redfern, Sydney, one of the few aboriginal-dominant urban areas in

Australia, and frequent scene of conflicts between residents and police; and the once-self-governing but increasingly state-managed Christiania in Copenhagen. There are ideas at the other end of the direct confrontation scale, including movements to create new commons through such things as urban gardens and small-scale and small-number experiments with participatory planning and architecture (Towers, 1995; Cybriwsky, 1999).

The aim of these movements is to put residents in the driver's seat when it comes to the built environment rather than urban regimes of planners, developers, businesses, and architects. But what they tend not to do is successfully defend traditional, highly symbolic plazas. That, I think, is a great pity. Democrats should celebrate the Brian Haws of this world, willing to put everything on the line to defend people's right to act not as mere consumers but as active citizens, getting under the skins of the powerful. What we need less of is mendacious public space like the current state of the Australian Parliament House, full of symbolic gestures to openness and the primacy of the people, but too remote from them, and too full of mechanisms that aid the control of citizens with a point to make.