

Beyond Zuccotti Park: Freedom of Assembly and the Occupation of Public Space

Eds. Ron Schiffman, Rick Bell, Lance Jay Brown, and Lynne Elizabeth
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Reviewed by Matt Wade

The occupation of Zuccotti Park and the Occupy Wall Street Movement inspired a flurry of ideas and excitement, and led to a cacophony of debates about public space, protest, and the meaning of the movement. A year later, our tents long stashed away, many of us imagined that the conversation was closed. Instead, just a year after OWS led to public encampments in cities across the US, *Beyond Zuccotti Park* provides a fantastic collection of celebrations and criticisms of OWS. This collection of essays includes contributions from notable academics, activists, city officials, social service professionals, and design practitioners. The diversity of authors mirrors the broad range of debates that the movement inspired, and the pieces in the volume address themes ranging from public space and democracy, to New York's privately owned public spaces, to populist design.

The contributions at the beginning of the book focus on the occupation of public space and the rise of an occupation movement in cities across the globe. Occupation is itself an ambiguous term, with progressive as well as colonial implications. Some authors celebrate the transformative experience of the occupation of Zuccotti Park and the community that was produced by addressing the challenges of an ad hoc habitation, including the provision of food and latrines and engineering bike-powered energy sources. Other authors reflect upon the meaning and symbols of occupation. Jeffrey Hou¹ examines the distinction between the politics of what he terms "institutional public space" and "insurgent public space," suggesting that transformative actions result from the appropriation of space beyond the intent of its design or beyond the boundaries of the appropriate. Saskia Sassen further argues that the occupy movement constitutes what she calls the "global street," a critical "part of our global modernity" that has arisen in the age of global finance, as a tool for the voiceless to make demands upon power. Finally, some critical pieces question the occupation of the center, the financial district and symbolic hub of global capitalist power. These authors contend that even this radical space contains racial coding,

1. Volume 25 of the *Berkeley Planning Journal* features a review of Jeffrey Hou's *Insurgent Public Space: Guerilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*. This review is available at: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5990f284>

and that the actual practices of OWS structurally excluded lower income people and people of color.

Another theme occurring throughout the collection is the specific history of New York City's privately owned public spaces, or "POPS." These spaces were largely born from the "bonus plaza" program that gave allowances for extra floors atop new buildings in exchange for the provision of public spaces on the street level. The movement chose Zuccotti Park for a particular reason: it was legally required to remain open 24 hours a day, whereas city-owned parks close at night. Profound issues of democracy and design arise from a movement based on public congregation within this unique public/private framework. Arthur Eisenberg shows that POPS are an ambiguous and yet unresolved legal problem for First Amendment protections. Peter Marcuse argues that New York should have a Public Spaces Plan to support free expression in public as much as it supports farmers markets and public parades. Finally, architects and designers demonstrate urban design aspects that make public space more accessible and flexible for use by a democratic public.

In a clever piece, Julian Brash analyzes how Mayor Bloomberg used the problem of sanitation to delegitimize and evict OWS from Zuccotti Park. When OWS set up its encampment in the middle of the financial district, it challenged the values of finance capital and the spatial order of the city. Mayor Bloomberg used the metaphor of "dirt"—matter out of place—to draw the boundaries between what is and what is not an acceptable expression of public voice. Even though OWS cleaned, recycled, and composted, the City persistently represented the movement as a pollutant that required sanitizing—the restoration of a symbolic order. Most authors in *Beyond Zuccotti Park* celebrate the movement's public expression, the "politics out of place" that disrupted the symbolic order of global finance. The editors' concluding piece cites the Statement of Support for the Occupy Movement by the Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR), which calls for the further democratization of our cities through the design and function of urban public space.