

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: AN ARCHITECTURE OF ACTIVISM:
GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING IN
THE DIGITAL AGE

Wadiah Akbar
Master of Architecture, 2018

Thesis Directed By: Lecturer, Lindsey M. May, School of
Architecture, Planning, and Preservation

This thesis responds to the culture of fear and division that is dominating American society today by asking how architecture can better facilitate debate and dialogue in the digital age. It aims to make a place for the often invisible infrastructure of grassroots organizing, in the public realm of the city. It recognizes that today, the public realms of the digital and physical worlds are intertwined, and the conversations and activities that happen on one, inevitably impact the other. By studying and cross comparing the ways we use physical and digital public spaces, we can pursue a more complete and effective model for the design of public urban places - for people from diverse backgrounds, views, and goals, to regularly meet, and engage in civic and community building activity. The design proposal builds on a sensitive and thorough understanding of the layered history of the city of Baltimore, and offers insights for similar postindustrial, gentrifying, politically active cities.

ACTIVISM DISTRICT
AN INCUBATOR FOR GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

by

Wadiah Akbar

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Architecture
2018

Advisory Committee:

Lindsey M. May, Chair

Professor Ronit Eisenbach, Committee Member

Professor Brian Kelly, Committee Member

© Copyright by
Wadiah Akbar
2018

Dedication

To the freedom fighters of today. Your courage, strength, vision, and creativity are worthy of celebration every day - and of a place to call home.

Keep tweeting the truth.

To my Nana, for seeing in me the architect and the person that I hope to become one day. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleader and always giving the best pep talks exactly when I need them most.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
List of Figures	iv
Figure 7: __Overall Structure of Women’s March (Source: Author)	iv
<i>Chapter 1: Public Space, An Overview</i>	1
Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Ancient Athenian Agora	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Public Sphere: Center and Periphery	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Performance as Informal Politics	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Car	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Printing Press	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Conclusion	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Chapter 2: The Nature of Dialogue in the Digital Age</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Digital Space as Analog for Architectural Space	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Key Characteristics of Digital Public Space	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Customization and Algorithmic Editing	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Anonymity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Asynchronicity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Conclusion	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Chapter 3: Civic Engagement in the Digital Age</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Digital First Activism	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Women’s March	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Pantsuit Nation:	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Pussyhat Project:	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Black Lives Matter	45
Online Personalities as Hubs of Community and Activity:	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Digital:Physical::Action:Reaction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Marking Place with a Hashtag:	50
Virtual Participation	51
Conclusions	53
<i>Chapter 4: Site and Program Strategy Explorations</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Public Space Approach	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Site Intervention	63
<i>Chapter 4: Design Proposal</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Design Process	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Orthographics	73
Perspectives	78

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Plan, Ancient Greek Agora (Source: Wikipedia).....	3
Figure 2:	From top, State Street in Madison, Las Ramblas in Barcelona, Wisconsin, and Camden High Street in London (Source: Project for Public Spaces)	11
Figure 3:	Stuyvesant Town, Manhattan, (Source:WWTW).....	14
Figure 4:	Customization into Filter Bubbles (Source: Author)	21
Figure 5:	Social Media Feed Before and After Customization (Source Eli Pariser)	23
Figure 6:	Anonymity (Source: Author)	25
Figure 7:	Perception of Social Media as Negative for Political Discussions (Source: Pew Research Center)	21
Figure 8:	Asynchronicity (Source: Author)	29
Figure 9:	Global Scale (Source: Author)	31
Figure 10:	Social Media Conversations About Race (Source: Andersen, Monica and Hitlin, Paul).....	33
Figure 11:	The Geography of Tweets (Source: Twitter Data Visualization Team)	34
Figure 12:	Overall Structure of Women’s March (Source: Author).....	43
Figure 13:	Local to National Activism (Source: Various).....	45
Figure 14:	Black Lives Matter Overall Structure (Source: Author).....	47
Figure 15:	Black Lives Matter Ego Network. Source Beyond the Hashtags, (Source: CMSI).....	48
Figure 16:	Twitter Volume and Physical Protests Related to BLM 2014-2015 (Source: Author).....	50
Figure 17:	Black Lives Matter Offices+ Pattern of Movement of Activists (Source:Author).....	53
Figure 18:	Program Categories (Source: Author).....	56
Figure 19:	Madison Square Schematic Design (source: Author).....	56
Figure 20:	Images of Current Community Activism Spaces in Baltimore (Source: Various).....	57
Figure 21:	Public Space Map of Baltimore (Source: Author).....	59
Figure 22:	Public Space Map of Site (Source: Author).....	60
Figure 23:	Existing Site Plan (Source: Author).....	61

Figure 24:	Community Assets (Source: Author).....	62
Figure 25:	Site Opportunities (Source: Author)	62
Figure 26:	Area Master Plan Summary (Source: Author)	63
Figure 27:	Site Interventions (Source: Author)	64
Figure 28:	Proposed Site Plan (Source: Author)	65
Figure 29:	Simultaneous Public Realm (Source: Author)	66
Figure 30:	Basic Building Axon (Source: Author)	70
Figure 31:	Platforms (Source: Author)	71
Figure 32:	Stages (Source: Author)	71
Figure 33:	Timeline (Source: Author)	72
Figure 34:	Promenade (Source: Author)	72
Figure 35:	Hashtag (Source: Author)	73
Figure 36:	Adjacency (Source: Author)	73
Figure 37:	Ground Floor Plan (Source: Author)	74
Figure 38:	First Floor Plan (Source: Author)	75
Figure 39:	Second Floor Plan (Source: Author)	76
Figure 40:	Longitudinal Section (Source: Author)	77
Figure 41:	Transverse Section (Source: Author)	77
Figure 42:	Eden Street Elevation (Source: Author)	78
Figure 43:	Chase Street Elevation (Source: Author)	78
Figure 44:	The Corner at Madison Square Park (Source: Author)	79
Figure 45:	The Advisor's Lounge (Source: Author)	80
Figure 46:	The Action Core (Source: Author)	81
Figure 47:	The Balcony (Source: Author)	82
Figure 48:	The Town Hall (Source: Author)	83
Figure 49:	Circulation Loop (Source: Author)	84
Figure 50:	Integrated Program (Source: Author)	85
Figure 51:	Programmatic Section (Source: Author)	86

Chapter 1: Public Space, An Overview

Introduction

Public space is the cornerstone of a democratic society. The creation of public space is an act of constant negotiation, between the government, the public, designers of the built environment, and private stakeholders. The edges of a public space are often tested by new ways of occupying, moving through, and engaging the space, as introduced by the people who use it. The success of a public space is also defined differently by different people. As a society, our collective ideas about public space, while perhaps constantly fluctuating, and always relative, have experienced a few major shifts throughout our history. These shifts in cultural consciousness are manifested sometimes in changed building codes or major developments, and sometimes simply in a gradual change in how we use the space.

It is useful to start by considering a brief review of key milestones in the history of public spaces, and our collective attitude toward/expectations of them. Which historical shifts in our society had what impact on the public realm.

Public space is experienced in both the corporal and cerebral realms of reality. The public sphere and physical public space are defined differently although each is dependent on the other. The overarching 'public sphere' encompasses all discourse - happening within or outside of the physical public space - that impact

public life, usually through political influence. Today, this includes the digital realm as well. Changing the public's expectation of space is an architectural problem. This is where architects can step in and precede expectations or spark expectations. Some of the examples below describe shifts in the built environment that directly impacted public space and some are focused on shifts in expectations of public space due to certain events.

Ancient Athenian Agora

The Ancient Greek Agora was the birthplace of democracy. Located in the heart of the city and composed of a range of institutional and market buildings, it was a dynamic and porous space that encouraged a range of civic, commercial, and social activities. All citizens passed through and gathered here to conduct business, share ideas, teach, argue politics and scientific theories, expound philosophy, participate in juries, enact dramas, gossip was the perfect setting where the idea of voting was born. The ancient Agora of Athens is the best known example of an ancient Greek agora. It is notable particularly for the mix of uses it accommodated, encouraging a diverse range of uses and users (of the already limited public composed only of private citizens).

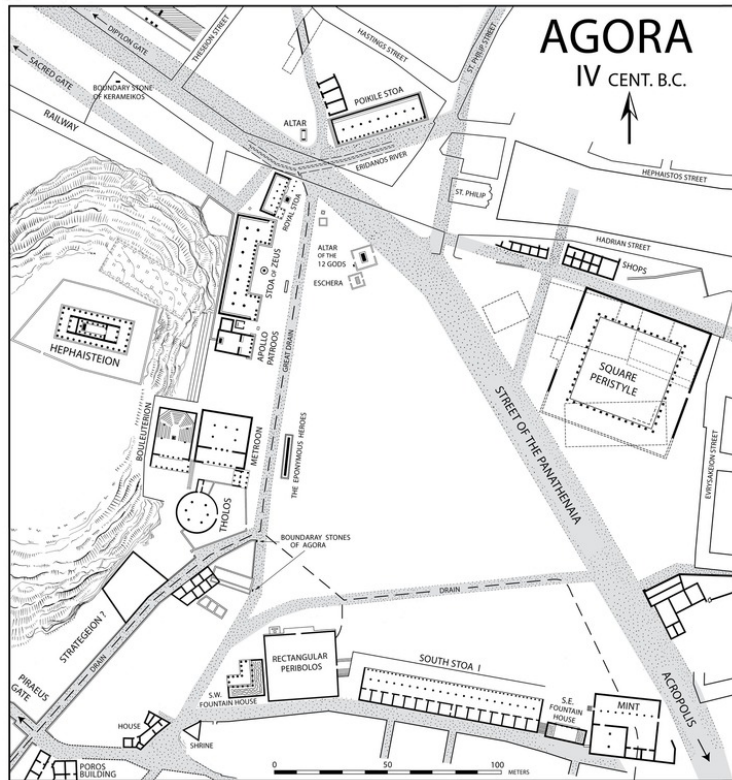


Figure 1: Plan, Ancient Greek Agora (Source: Wikipedia)

Image key

1. Peristyle Court
2. Mint - A **mint** is an industrial facility which manufactures coins that can be used in currency.
3. Enneakrounos
4. South Stoa I and South Stoa II The two-aisled stoa opened north, with a Doric outer colonnade, an inner colonnade of unknown order and sixteen rooms which lined the southern wall. Of the sixteen rooms, one narrow room must have served as a vestibule, while the other fifteen

square rooms were probably used for public dining. The rooms were probably outfitted for city magistrates fed at public expense.

5. Aiakeion
6. Strategeion
7. Agoraios Kolonos - meaning "the hill next to the Agora"), located to the south and adjacently situated on a hill near the Temple of Hephaestus, used to be the meeting place of the ancient Athenian craftsmen
8. Tholos - dining hall and some sleeping quarters for the senators
9. Agora stone
10. Monument of the Eponymous Heroes - a marble podium that bore the bronze statues of the ten heroes representing the tribes of Athens. Being an important information center for the ancient Athenians, it was used as a monument where proposed legislation, decrees and announcements were posted.¹
11. Metroon (Old Bouleuterion) - temple dedicated to mother goddess Cybele
12. New Bouleuterion - Senate house - assembly of the council of citizens for decisions
13. Temple of Hephaestus (Hephaestion) god of metal-working, craftsmanship, and fire - numerous potters' workshops and metal-working shops in the vicinity of the temple, as befits the temple's honoree.

14. Temple of Apollo Patroos
15. Stoa of Zeus - probably civic as well as religious purposes
16. Altar of the Twelve Gods - From at least the 5th century BC, the Altar became the zero point from which distances to Athens were calculated.
17. Stoa Basileios (Royal stoa) The Royal Stoa was the headquarters of the King Archon and of the Areopagos council (in charge of religious affairs and crime).
18. Temple of Aphrodite Urania
19. Stoa of Hermes
20. Stoa Poikile - Zeno taught and lectured to his followers from this porch. owing its fame to the paintings and loot from wars displayed in it.

The Public Sphere: Center and Periphery

The Ancient Athenian Agora is interesting for two particular reasons: the wide range of uses it hosted, and the harmonious intermingling of two public spheres - institution and periphery. Crucial to understand in what ways the “center” of Athenian politics, related to the “periphery”, the Streets. The existence of two public spheres. Informal forms and forums of communication presented a challenge to Athenian institutions and the status hierarchy they relied on. And yet the resources they provided were simply too important for politicians to ignore. The agora is

different from today's public spaces in this regard. Today, commercial plazas and civic squares are usually two entirely separate spaces in the city.

Athenian public life can be studied as an intense political education with multiple and overlapping opportunities for political discussion, such as in workshops and social gatherings. Interestingly, when orators refer to such discussions outside the political institutions it is almost always from a critical perspective.

Performance as Informal Politics

In Athens, street politics sought to put protagonists into certain familiar roles and identities: the victim, the transgressor, the champion, the leader. They sought to put the public in a particular mood that would make it receptive to subsequent arguments or ideas, influencing the outcomes of votes in the Assembly and courts. This mode of performance in politics has continued.¹

Today too, the informal forums of communication, of action and awareness, are threatening to the status quo. The power of citizen journalism is undeniable. In fact, storytelling in particular is increasingly a mainstream/legitimate mode of civic

¹ [Gottesman, Alex. *Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.](#)

engagement. The ‘periphery’ of American politics is as active as ever and, with new modes of communication, has an expanded impact on the ‘center’.

The Car

In 1908 Henry Ford introduced the Model T and William Durant founded General Motors. The popularity of the automobile surged after 1910 and soon ‘ increasing traffic congestion in cities, which reached a climax after World War II, led to a mass expansion of national road systems.’ Plans for a high-speed freeway system would culminate a decade later with the 1956 Interstate Highway Act, which would erect a 42,500-mile network of high-speed, limited-access highways that linked cities from coast to coast. [This expansion was uncoordinated at the regional level and with suburban sprawl continuing, did not even solve congestion issues. The extent of sprawl made traveling by anything but car virtually impossible]. This meant that society now traveled from one destination to another and, with priority overwhelmingly given to the car over the pedestrian, streets became dividers of public space. The suburban sprawl that highways enabled also led to lower density in urban centers, less people to enliven the city’s public spaces and keep them active throughout the day.

The Project for Public Spaces identifies their vision for the salvation of streets as public spaces - ‘for streets to truly function as public places, they have to do more than allowing people to safely walk or bike through them. When streets are great

places, they encourage people to linger, to socialize, and to truly experience the unique culture and character of a particular street.'

Examples of great street include: Las Ramblas in Barcelona, State Street in Madison, Wisconsin, and Camden High Street in London.



Figure 2: From top, State Street in Madison, Las Ramblas in Barcelona, Wisconsin, and Camden High Street in London (Source: Project for Public Spaces)

The Printing Press

Renowned sociologist and philosopher, Jürgen Habermas revolutionized thinking about the public sphere with his theories in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. He coined the term ‘public sphere’ and defined it as “a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space”. An area in social life where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. He observed that, in the 17th and 18th century, with the increased use of the printing press, [there was] a large and diverse reading public hungry for information and ideas ...for the first time in history a truly self-conscious public that was critical of political decision makers. In time the true public sphere was taken over by “special interests” advertising, opinion polls, public relations.² Continuing the theme from our discussion of Athens, Habermas also introduces the ways in which institutional and non institutional politics relate. He locates the bourgeois public sphere in coffeehouses, salons, and taverns. The printing press mediated the dissemination of information in volumes much greater than ever before. This expanded the public

² Habermas Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere : An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. 1st MIT Press pbk. ed. *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.

sphere manifold, as more people could confidently enter political and discussions. Public Space however, cannot expand so seamlessly. It is important to remember the critique that this In Rethinking the Public Sphere, Nancy Fraser argues that the bourgeois public sphere was in fact constituted by a "number of significant exclusions." this network of clubs and associations – philanthropic, civic, professional, and cultural – was anything but accessible to everyone. Today, many argue gentrification is having a similar effect by reducing access to pseudo-public spaces (like cafes and bookstores) for informal political discourse to the ‘cappuccinoed few’.

World War II

Post World War 2 urban renewal rapidly increased open spaces in American cities - [but for reasons such as to] separate functions, open up distance between buildings, allow for the penetration for sunlight and greenery, increase property values, recreation, not to provide extensive social contact.



Figure 3: Stuyvesant Town, Manhattan, NY (Source: WWTW)

Twitter prides itself on giving a voice to and connecting users from all around the globe. Twitter’s 330 million active users produce 1 billion tweets on average every week - that is equivalent to one tweet per every person in the world, in the span of only a month and a half³. These numbers are only growing. One of the key features of Twitter that helps connect global communities is the hashtag. “Historically, hashtags developed as an informal method of highlighting ideas in unformatted text and trying to grow conversation around a topic”⁴. Once Twitter incorporated hashtags into the system, in 2009, making them searchable, it became a way for users to seamlessly join global conversations and/or find out what was being said around the world on any given topic. This is an excellent example of a flexible public space that

³ “Number of monthly active Twitter users worldwide from 1st quarter 2010 to 3rd quarter 2017 (in millions)”. *Statista*. Accessed October 25, 2017

⁴ Andersen, Monica and Hitlin, Paul. 2016. “Social Media Conversations About Race”. *Pew Research Center, Washington DC*. August 15.

the users took ownership of and reconfigured to fit their needs, followed by a formal design update. In architecture, environmentally responsive, and modular designs embody the same principle but at a more modest scale. For urban public places to be truly effective in the digital age, perhaps they should aspire to be as impactful and seamless to join as a hashtag conversation.

Conclusion

The internet is a permanent fixture of our everyday, civic, and social lives. It is a powerful tool, platform, and *space* that stages huge, dynamic, exciting conversations. The quality of these conversations is intrinsically linked to the conversations we have in the public space of the built environment - and that we have been having in the agora, plazas, town squares, urban parks, city halls, street etc. for thousands of years. Good public places, especially in diverse urban centers, have the potential to be just the mediators we need between ourselves and the world - the vastness of which the internet has opened up to us. The structure and ethics of dialogue in the public space of our digital realm will continue to be refined but, in the meantime, we cannot neglect to continue to refine public spaces of our built environment.

Good urban spaces can mediate the gap in information and connectivity. They can help us become better informed, with more diverse and well-rounded sources of information by meeting the people from behind the screens, by expanding them from the soundbites and provocative slogans they are often reduced to online. Hear the

issues we may not even see. And understand the urgency of our actions by connecting them to real faces and lives. Architecture can and should do this.

Through studying and cross comparing the ways we use physical and digital public spaces, we can pursue a more complete and effective model. In an ideal world, dialogue on *and* off line will be excellent - inclusive, well informed, open-minded, and productive public discourse.

Chapter 2: The Nature of Dialogue in the Digital Age

Introduction

Today, the internet has a permanent, constant presence in our everyday lives. Digital connectivity has changed the way we work, shop, communicate, get our news, learn, teach, grow a movement, and on and on. With the ubiquitous presence of smart technology, the lag in feedback between lived and digital experience has become almost nonexistent, resulting in practically simultaneous experiences on and offline. The result is a digital realm of existence and activity that parallels our lived, corporeal experience. Architects are interested in how people inhabit, move through, and interact with space, and so must actively engage with this fundamental shift in our environment.

The public realm of the internet is growing exponentially. Millions of people exchange ideas across the vast landscape of the internet every day. Indeed, in the beginning of its life, the internet was idealized as an unobstructed, fair, civic forum, of the kind we hadn't yet been able to fully achieve in the 'real' world. However, concern about the misinformation that digital platforms amplify, and the toxic, trolling nature of dialogue that they often host, is rising. This concern is common among everyday users and internet scholars alike. While the mediums are different, designers of public space, in both the digital and built world, are wrestling with

similar questions of safety, freedom of speech, privacy, and diversity. The struggle to improve public spaces is important because good public spaces are important. Even if “political discourse has largely decamped to satellites and networks, democracies need actual physical places in cities where dissimilar people routinely see and interact with others”⁵. But today’s reality is that the two are intimately intertwined.

Interactions in one inevitably influence interactions in the other. Embracing this reality will help us design better, more effective, and impactful spaces for a changing society, in the digital age.

Digital Space as Analog for Architectural Space

In a very short period of time, the digital revolution has presented us with a whole host of new typologies of gathering spaces, each a unique venue for dialogue. We have collectively reorganized our civic potential around these spaces. One-in-five social media users (20%) say they have modified their views about a *political or social issue* because of something they saw on social media⁶. Researchers at the Center for Election Innovation and Research ran an experiment involving 61 million Facebook users during the 2010 and 2012 congressional elections. They estimate about 340,000 and 270,000 extra people respectively turned out to vote because of a

⁵ Goldhagen, Sarah Williams. 2010. “Park Here”. *New Republic*, October 7

⁶ Duggan, Maeve and Aaron Smith. 2016. “The Political Environment on Social Media”. *Pew Research Center, Washington DC*. October 25.

single election-day Facebook message⁷. For reference, the 2016 US presidential election was decided by about 100,000 votes. Even the language we use to describe digital spaces reveals a conscious recognition of the cross contamination in architectural space. We aspire to recreate the spirit of the great classical piazza in discussion ‘*forums*’; bemoan being trapped in the solitude of ‘*echo chambers*’; nod in agreement when told “the internet is becoming the *town square* for the global *village* of tomorrow”⁸; are as excited about exploring the infinite potential of ‘*cyberspace*’ as of the universe. In turn, architecture should recognize parallels in digital space. Public digital spaces hold valuable lessons on place-making and facilitating diverse dialogue that could prove very useful for architects in designing good physical public spaces.

The world's metropolises are increasingly multicultural. Online communities have a lot in common with our physical cities - a large and diverse population, conflict between safety and openness, and the influence of private interests on public space. These similarities make digital spaces an incredibly valuable case study for architects. That digital communities do not occupy physical space should not disqualify them as architectural models. In fact, this increases their value as spaces of study. Unlike a building, the structure of online spaces is malleable and easily tweaked to respond to changing conditions and test out different approaches. As a profession, architects have found the nimbleness of Building Information Modeling to

⁷ Backer, David. 2016. “Facebook Drives Record Voter Registration Activity at Deadline” *Center for Election Innovation and Research*. October 28, 2016. Accessed November 1, 2017. <https://electioninnovation.org/2016/10/28/facebook-drives-record-voter-registration-activity-at-deadline/>

⁸ Gates. Bill

be extremely useful in this regard. While on the one hand BIM models communicate essential information about our buildings' *systems*, digital platforms convey essential information about our *users*. Furthermore, the impact of different spatial configurations on the quality of discourse can be quantitatively measured, something that is still very difficult to do in built spaces. Thus, digital spaces offer a wealth of information about the very core of what architects and planners are interested in - how people occupy, move through, and engage with public gathering space.

Key Characteristics of Digital Public Space

The digital world is composed of a diverse constellation of public spaces, each structured in a deliberate way that fosters a unique nature of dialogue. The public spaces that stand out in particular are discussion forums, comments sections on news sites, and social media platforms. Discussion forums and comments sections are built on similar frameworks. Both allow chance encounters between strangers and are a platform for (at least initially) topic-driven discussions. Social media is more akin to a public-private space, with more limited access. However, as a communication tool, social media has completely transformed the volume and flow of information that shapes public opinion and drives civic engagement both on and offline. The key structural elements that shape the character of these spaces - and that distinguish them from their physical analogs - are: customization and algorithmic editing, anonymity, asynchronicity, and global scale and speed. The following sections will present the

definition and impact of each, drawing from research done by social scientists, web designers, and tech industry leaders.

Customization and Algorithmic Editing



Figure 5: Customization into Filter Bubbles (Source: Author)

With the exponential growth of internet access came the problem of *too much* information. As a response to the problem of information overload, the designers of our digital space introduced customization abilities so that we could express our preferences, curate our feeds, and see only the type of content that we want to. This tactic is primarily applied on social media platforms, where we can now prioritize the friends whose lives we are interested in staying updated on, or whose opinions we want to hear. The ones we do not want to hear, we can block, snooze, hide, flag, or unfollow etc. In theory, everyone else is still there, we will still encounter them — as

long as we scroll on. In practice, they have all but disappeared from our feeds, and with them, any opposing views or qualifying information they posted. Initially, social media connected us to diverse views and experiences. This exposure had the potential to have huge salutary implications for civic life. However, the customizations we make to our digital worlds accumulate to have invisible yet very consequential power over our social media lives. Unfortunately, too often the overall effect is that we find ourselves surrounded only by people who agree with us.

Before:



After:

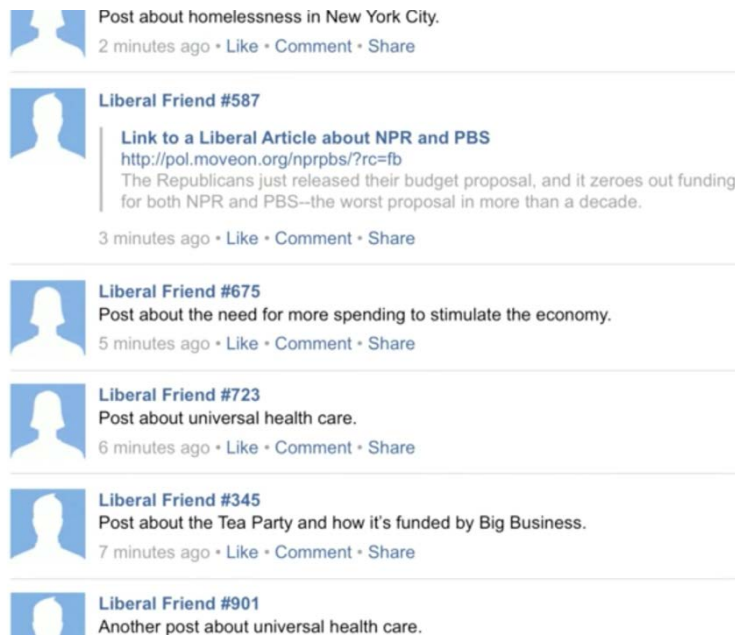


Figure 5, Illustration of social media feed before and after customization and algorithmic editing. (Source: Eli Pariser)

While customized social media allows us to exercise personal control in our digital spaces, machine learning algorithms were introduced as an *automatic* way to manage the flow of information we receive, based on preferences we implicitly express. Algorithms are used to target ads based on user behavior. This development in our digital public space allows the encroachment of private interests on public space.

Algorithms also affect search results. ‘Even if you’re logged out...there are 57 signals that Google looks at - everything from what kind of computer you’re on, to what kind of browser you’re using, to where you’re located - that it uses to personally

tailor your query results’⁹. This means, even when we attempt to be curious, to seek out differing perspectives, the structure of the internet today gives us biased results. Biased toward our online personalities. ‘There is no standard Google anymore...*and...* you can’t see how different your search results are from anyone else’s’¹⁰. This is what makes these filter bubbles particularly dangerous - that they are all but invisible. The customized space we occupy in the digital public realm - whether intentionally or by algorithms - has been named our ‘filter bubble’. ‘Your filter bubble is your own personal, unique universe of information that you live in online But, *you* don’t decide what gets in and, more importantly, you don’t see what gets edited out’¹¹.

⁹ Pariser, Eli. “Beware Online Filter Bubbles”. Lecture, TED2011, TED. March 2011.

¹⁰ Pariser, Eli. “Beware Online Filter Bubbles”. Lecture, TED2011, TED. March 2011.

¹¹ Pariser, Eli. “Beware Online Filter Bubbles”. Lecture, TED2011, TED. March 2011.

Anonymity

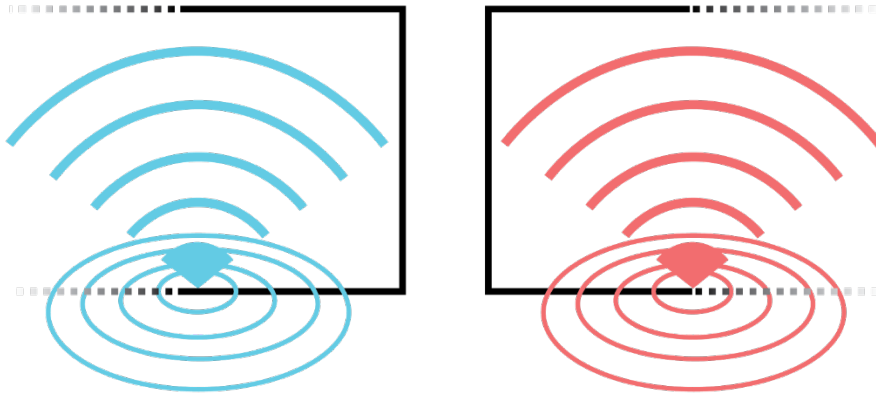


Figure 6: Anonymity (Source: Author)

Users of online discussion forums like Reddit and 4chan, and most online news sites, participate under pseudonyms. Their real identity, and any background information, is hidden. Anonymity was originally thought to allow more honest, unfiltered conversation, by a broader group of people, on sensitive topics. However, anonymity is the major factor that contributes to the ‘online disinhibition effect’ and is often being used as a ‘free pass’ to act as people rarely would in face-to-face conversations. Online forums that host anonymous users see a higher volume of what is known as flaming - hate speech, profanity, racist and misogynistic comments. Comments sections are frequently hijacked by “extremists and those who use the anonymity that the net allows, and they sadly outnumber the former [people with

substantive opinions]”¹². The prevalent and widely accepted theory that predicts a general ratio among types of readers is the 90-9-1 theory. Ninety percent of readers will read a post and move on. Nine percent will only occasionally leave a comment. The last 1% are the ones who truly rule online conversation¹³. James Janega who is responsible for coordinating communication between the Chicago Tribune’s newsroom and its audience calls anonymity ”the green light for incivility,”¹⁴.

Unfortunately, “the success of an Internet site often is judged by the number of comments and “hits” it attracts” and anonymity is a powerful incentive for attracting more commenters, which is why this has remained a feature of many of the largest discussion platforms¹⁵. Journalists themselves who oppose anonymity in user interaction sections often refer to the hypocrisy of allowing anonymous comments online while requiring the most stringent identification and accountability before publishing letters to the editor. Rather than eliminate anonymity, most news sites employ one of the many methods of moderation. These range from prescreening comments before publishing them, requiring that subscribers undergo an initial period of being closely monitored before any of their comments are posted, or deleting

¹² Reich, Zvi, and Singer, Jane B., PhD. “Participatory Journalism.” Essay. In *User Comments : The Transformation of Participatory Space*, 96–117. Wiley-Blackwell : Oxford, UK, 2011.

¹³ Alicia, Shepard. “Online Comments: Dialogue or Diatribe”. Article. *Nieman Reports*. Accessed December 1, 2012. <http://niemanreports.org/articles/online-comments-dialogue-or-diatribe/>

¹⁴ Janega, James “The post that may kill anonymous commenting at the Cleveland Plain Dealer” *Chicago Tribune*. 29 March 2010. Accessed 1 Dec 2012.

¹⁵ Santana, Arthur D., Russial, John. “Civility, Anonymity and the breakdown of a New Public Sphere” *University of Oregon. Academic Search Premier*. Accessed 29 Nov 2012.

comments explicitly reported by the audience as “abuse”. It is a delicate balance however, because too much intervention truly does discourage readers from entering the conversation. The struggle to find the perfect balance between openness and safety is one that architects designing public gatherings spaces are also intimately familiar with.

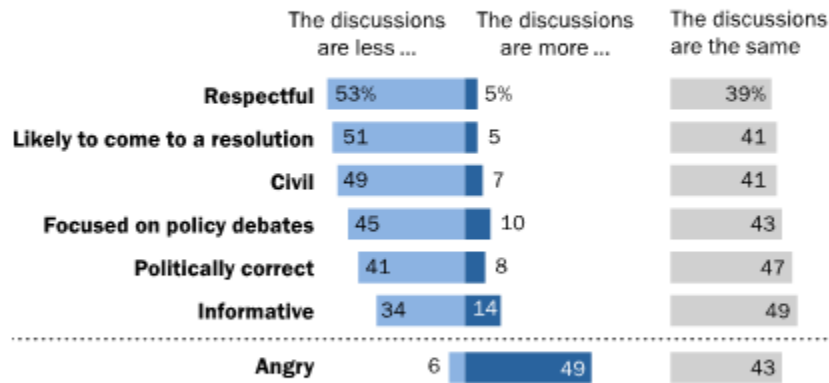
In the digital realm, the next step is to “try to find the equilibrium between freedom of speech and mutual respect, the essence of democratic ethics,” as suggested by a group of researchers exploring the capacity of online newspapers for democratic public debates¹⁶. When everyone has a name it creates the acute and undeniable awareness that we are all human and when everyone has an identity to build and protect, commenters censor themselves. Other aspects of online communication, such as lack of eye-contact and asynchronicity, also contribute to the online disinhibition effect but these reduce inhibitions in a more positive way, reducing shyness and making it easier to talk about sensitive topics rather than merely prompting incivility and intolerance¹⁷.

¹⁶ Ruiz, Carlos et al “Public Sphere 2.0? The Democratic Qualities of Citizen Debates in Online Newspapers” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 22 Sep 2011. Accessed Dec3 2012

¹⁷ Bertera, Elizabeth M., Melissa B. Littlefield. "Evaluation Of Electronic Discussion Forums In Social Work Diversity Education: A Comparison Of Anonymous And Identified Participation." *Journal of Technology In Human Services* 21.4 (2003): 53-71. Academic Search Premier. Web. 5 Nov. 2012.

Many users see social media as an especially negative venue for political discussions, but others see it as simply “more of the same”

% of social media users who say their political discussions are more or less _____ compared with other places people might discuss politics



Source: Survey conducted July 12-Aug. 08, 2016.
 “The Political Environment on Social Media”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 7, Perception of social media as an especially negative venue for political discussions. (Source: Pew Research Center)

Asynchronicity

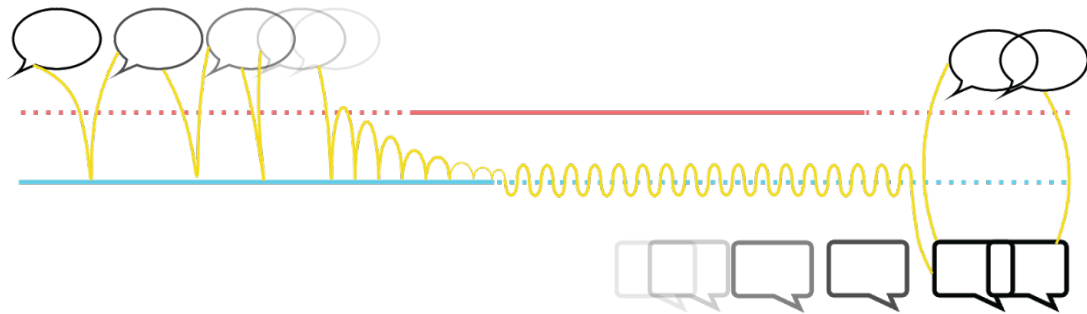


Figure 8: Asynchronicity (Source: Author)

Asynchronicity in online conversations means not having to respond immediately, as in face-to-face conversations. In theory, this gives one the chance to think through the topic at hand, research it, and return with a well thought out response, and questions. In practice, the speed and scale of the internet diminishes the usefulness of this feature. By the time one returns to the conversation with a thought-out response, the conversation may have completely shifted. In this way, asynchronicity may actually enable thoughtlessness, by allowing users to walk away from the conversation after they say what they want, with no obligation to listen to

the others' response. 'The art of conversation is being replaced by personal broadcasting'¹⁸. Because this pattern of fragmented communication does not encourage participants to elaborate, respond with qualifying statements, or to people's questions, it instead encourages us to speak in soundbites.

Asynchronicity is just one of the many ways in which technology is changing the nature of dialogue in the digital age and contributing to us 'losing our listening'. In addition to it, 'headphones break a shared soundscape into millions of tiny little personal sound bubbles. With the ability to record, the premium on accurate and careful listening has disappeared'¹⁹. This issue is urgent because consciously listening to each other is our access to understanding each other, and designers of good public spaces - both digital and physical - must take this phenomenon and its contributing factors into account.

¹⁸ Treasure, Julian. "5 Ways to Listen Better". Lecture, TEDGlobal 2011, TED. July 2011.

¹⁹ Treasure, Julian. "5 Ways to Listen Better". Lecture, TEDGlobal 2011, TED. July 2011.

Global Scale

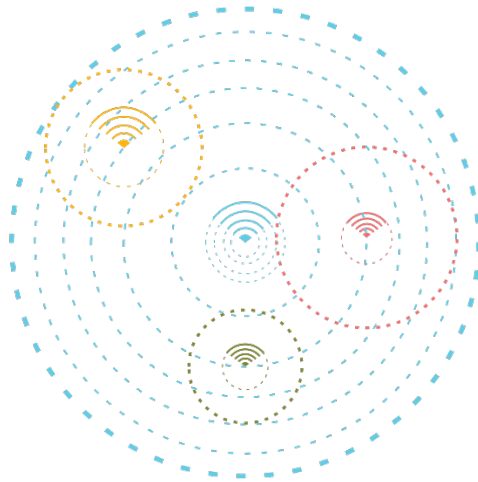


Figure 9: Global Scale (Source: Author)

The world population today is approximately 7.6 billion. Of these 7.6 billion people, 51% - more than half - use the internet. In other words, more than half of the world is gathered in the collective public realm of digital space. Specifically in America, in early 2000, about half of all adults were already online. Today, roughly nine-in-ten American adults use the internet²⁰. Seven-in-ten use some type of social media²¹. The global scale of the internet has inspired much visioning about its role in public life. Since its inception, the internet has been seen as a truly utopic, egalitarian, democratic society where everyone's voice is equal. This idealistic vision has come to fruition through the increasingly invaluable role of citizen journalism in providing personal, on the ground perspective to balance traditional news organizations.

²⁰ "Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet". Fact Sheet. *Pew Research Center, Washington DC*. January 12, 2017.

²¹ "Social Media Fact Sheet". Fact Sheet. *Pew Research Center, Washington DC*. January 12, 2017.

Traditionally, the news was conveyed through a top-down model, with news corporations and the government filtering the flow information. It was slow and hierarchical. Today, 67% of the American population gets their news on social media²². Twitter was designed specifically as a broadcast medium. Each user on Twitter effectively has access to its 329 million other active users²³. Everyone has an equal chance of ‘going viral’ and gaining an exponentially larger audience. Anyone can be as influential as a news anchor or editor. The notion that everyone with access to the internet has an equal voice has great implications for a democratic society and makes the internet a powerful place for civic engagement. Organized efforts online to inform, persuade, mobilize, grow a movement etc. have a measurable impact offline.

In 2014, 17 million people participated in the ALS Association’s #icebucketchallenge, helping to raise major awareness about Lou Gehrig’s disease and raise \$250 million for research efforts²⁴. In 2012, rapper PSY accelerated the Korean culture revolution around the world with his record breaking music video, ‘Gangnam Style’, which has been viewed on YouTube 2.9 billion times²⁵. “Organizers of Black Lives Matter made social media – and specifically the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter – a centerpiece of their strategy. As a result, the growth of the

²² “Social Media Fact Sheet”. Fact Sheet. *Pew Research Center, Washington DC*. January 12, 2017.

²³ “Number of monthly active Twitter users worldwide from 1st quarter 2010 to 3rd quarter 2017 (in millions)”. *Statista*. Accessed October 25, 2017.

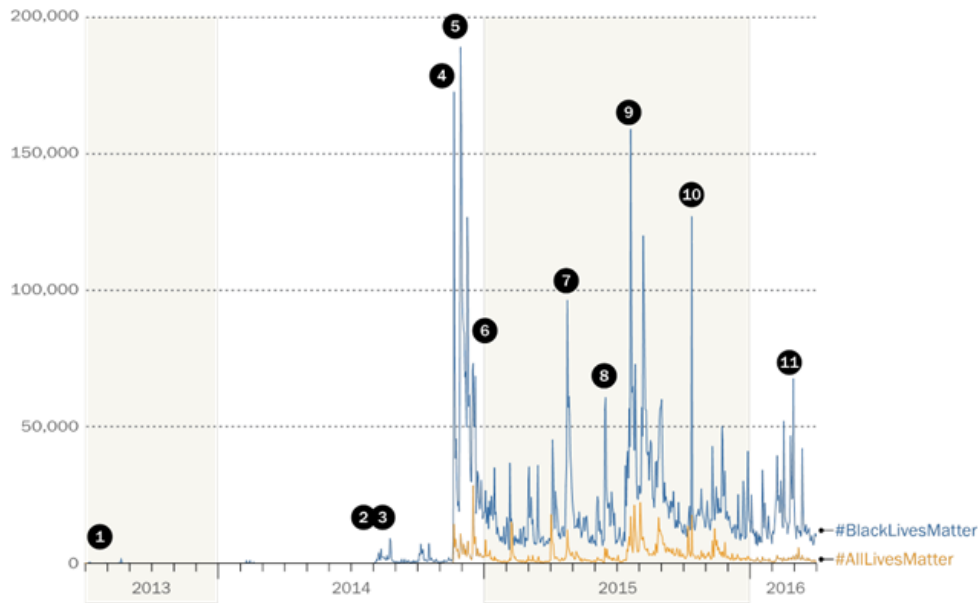
²⁴ “ALS Ice Bucket Challenge FAQ” *ALS Association*. Accessed November 1, 2017. <http://www.alsa.org/about-us/ice-bucket-challenge-faq.html>

²⁵ “Gangnam Style”. *Wikipedia*. Accessed November 1, 2017 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gangnam_Style#cite_note-france24-11

movement offline was directly linked with the online conversation”²⁶. The scale of digital space allows these movements the benefit of unprecedented speed and a vast audience.

From July 12, 2013, to March 31, 2016, #BlackLivesMatter was used eight times as often as #AllLivesMatter

Number of Twitter posts mentioning each hashtag: July 12, 2013, to March 31, 2016



- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 7/13/13 Hashtag #BlackLivesMatter first appears on Twitter</p> <p>2 7/17/14 Eric Garner dies in N.Y. after being arrested</p> <p>3 8/9/14 Michael Brown is killed during an encounter with police officer in Ferguson, Mo.</p> <p>4 11/22/14 Tamir Rice is killed by police in Cleveland while playing with a toy gun</p> <p>5 11/24/14 Prosecutor announces there will be no indictment in Michael Brown case</p> | <p>6 12/20/14 Two police officers are killed in N.Y. while sitting in their patrol car</p> <p>7 4/19/15 Freddie Gray dies in Baltimore while in police custody</p> <p>8 6/17/15 Shooting at church in Charleston, S.C., kills 9 people</p> <p>9 7/13/15 Sandra Bland is found hanged in Texas jail cell</p> <p>10 10/13/15 Bernie Sanders defends #BlackLivesMatter in debate</p> <p>11 2/28/16 2016 Oscars</p> |
|--|---|

Source: Pew Research Center analysis using Crimson Hexagon.
 "Social Media Conversations About Race"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

²⁶ Andersen, Monica and Hitlin, Paul. 2016. "Social Media Conversations About Race". *Pew Research Center, Washington DC*. August 15.

Figure 5, Relationship between offline events and online conversation in the Black Lives Matter grassroots movement. (Source: Pew Research Center)



Figure 11, The Geography of Tweets: Visualization: Europe (Source: Twitter Data Visualization Team)

Twitter prides itself on giving a voice to and connecting users from all around the globe. Twitter’s 330 million active users produce 1 billion tweets on average every week - that is equivalent to one tweet per every person in the world, in the span of only a month and a half²⁷. These numbers are only growing. One of the key features of Twitter that helps connect global communities is the hashtag. “Historically, hashtags developed as an informal method of highlighting ideas in

²⁷ “Number of monthly active Twitter users worldwide from 1st quarter 2010 to 3rd quarter 2017 (in millions)”. *Statista*. Accessed October 25, 2017

unformatted text and trying to grow conversation around a topic”²⁸. Once Twitter incorporated hashtags into the system, in 2009, making them searchable, it became a way for users to seamlessly join global conversations and/or find out what was being said around the world on any given topic. This is an excellent example of a flexible public space that the users took ownership of and reconfigured to fit their needs, followed by a formal design update. In architecture, environmentally responsive, and modular designs embody the same principle but at a more modest scale. For urban public places to be truly effective in the digital age, perhaps they should aspire to be as impactful and seamless to join as a hashtag conversation.

Conclusion

The internet is a permanent fixture of our everyday, civic, and social lives. It is a powerful tool, platform, and *space* that stages huge, dynamic, exciting conversations. The quality of these conversations is intrinsically linked to the conversations we have in the public space of the built environment - and that we have been having in the agora, plazas, town squares, urban parks, city halls, street etc. for thousands of years. Good public places, especially in diverse urban centers, have the potential to be just the mediators we need between ourselves and the world - the vastness of which the internet has opened up to us. The structure and ethics of dialogue in the public space of our digital realm will continue to be refined but, in the

²⁸ Andersen, Monica and Hitlin, Paul. 2016. “Social Media Conversations About Race”. *Pew Research Center, Washington DC*. August 15.

meantime, we cannot neglect to continue to refine public spaces of our built environment.

Good urban spaces can mediate the gap in information and connectivity. They can help us become better informed, with more diverse and well-rounded sources of information by meeting the people from behind the screens, by expanding them from the soundbites and provocative slogans they are often reduced to online. Hear the issues we may not even see. And understand the urgency of our actions by connecting them to real faces and lives. Architecture can and should do this.

Through studying and cross comparing the ways we use physical and digital public spaces, we can pursue a more complete and effective model. In an ideal world, dialogue on *and* off line will be excellent - inclusive, well informed, open-minded, and productive public discourse.

Chapter 3: Civic Engagement in the Digital Age

Introduction

In the past decade, the world has witnessed - and participated in - a series of major socio-political movements that grew from grassroots to national and even global scale. These movements have been game changers, landmark events in the history of civic engagement in the United States. Examples include The Green Movement (2009) the Arab Spring (2011), the anti-SOPA/PIPA movement (2011-2012), 15M/Indignados (2011-present), the Occupy movement (2011-2013), Black Lives Matter (2014 - Present), and the Women's March (2017). What these movements have in common are that they are centered around major historical protest events, made possible by mass communication and coordination on the internet. More often than not however, the deep impact made during the peak period of activity soon faded over time until there were only a handful of dedicated chapters left and - of particular interest to this thesis - limited presence in the public consciousness.

Large movements act as gateways to civic engagement for many people who are not usually actively involved in civic life. In order to investigate the role of public architecture in encouraging sustained civic engagement, it is useful to study the patterns and means of growth of grassroots movements. While an architectural/urban intervention aiming to galvanize grassroots organizing should accommodate every scale and stage of a movement, the abundance of data available for the large scale

movements make them a useful place to start. This chapter will present two case studies of ongoing movements - the Women's March and Black Lives Matter.

Questions this chapter attempts to answer:

- How and where is a social movement grown in the digital age?
- What opportunities and challenges do digital spaces offer that are different from or complementary to physical spaces?
- What gaps do they fill? In what ways do digital spaces and mediums provide impetus and momentum to civic engagement that traditional physical spaces didn't?
- How, when and why do people move from physical to digital space and vice versa?
- How has this fluid movement between these two spaces impacted civic engagement?

Questions this chapter presents:

- How can we make this even more fluid? Is this fluidity even a good thing for the democratic process?
- How can architecture **sustain** the growth of a social movement? Particularly one that started online or one that grew largely online.
- How can architecture play a role in making it easier and more attractive to move these conversations and activism offline more frequently? What would a building programmed for that look like? What would it be called? (case study: Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership, Studio Gang)

Digital First Activism

Movements grow in time, space, and public consciousness. The extents of these parameters have stretched as the reach of the internet is now exponentially wider than traditional modes of communication and organization. Recent scholarship in this area has observed that 21st-century youth may march to the beat of a different civic drum than earlier generations, preferring individually-motivated, digitally-enabled, cause-based activism to the more top-down, institution-centered, adult-directed civic styles of yesteryear.²⁹

Both Black Lives Matter and Women's March were built simultaneously in digital and physical space. Each used digital media, and inhabited digital space, in unique and compelling ways. They demonstrate a successful model of a 21st century movement, insofar as success is defined here not necessarily in terms of whether the movement's demands were met but by the fact that it engaged unprecedented numbers of people, and kept them engaged after the protests. The efforts continued, beyond the hashtags, and beyond the mass protest, manifested in a variety of different organizations that were founded during periods of peak activity. However, this thesis

²⁹ Freelon, Dean; D. McIlwain, Charlton, and D. Clark, Meredith. "Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #BlackLives Matter and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice". Center for Media and Social Impact, American University

contends - the effectiveness and sustainability of this growth is severely diminished and prevented from reaching its potential in part because it is placeless (especially for movements whose very identity is tied to a physical place and their occupation of space). Architecture should be ready to not only accommodate but continue to foster the offshoots from events like this.

The Women's March

The Women's March was a worldwide protests on Jan 21st, the day after the 2016 US Presidential election and the largest single day protest in US history, enabled by mass coordination via the internet. It grew from one post in one closed Facebook group, Pantsuit Nation, that called for a single march in Washington DC, to more than 670 events around the world attended by approximately 5,000,000 people. The march itself did not have any specific policy goal, and did not represent any single cause, but was meant to make a statement, to “be counted as those who believe in a world that is equitable, tolerant, just and safe for all, one in which the human rights and dignity of each person is protected and our planet is safe from destruction”³⁰. However, early on, the event organizers recognized the need for sustained action. ‘For now, they were united by their need for catharsis that social media alone couldn't provide... Without an executable plan, marching does about as much good as a hashtag campaign’ And they hope to see those who are new to activism join those they met through the march—both online and IRL—and continue organizing.

³⁰ Women's March www.womensmarch.com

While it is still known by name of the single day event, Women's March event is now a movement composed of hundreds of sister organizations, of which a handful were instrumental in the organization of the events and a handful that grew from the event itself. The executive team at the national chapter consolidated the common principles and goals that unite the different groups in the HERs framework or unity principles.

Two of the member organizations are studied here Pantsuit Nation and The Pussyhat Project.

Pantsuit Nation:

Birth of a Movement: From Private Facebook Group to the Largest Protest in US

History

Pantsuit Nation started as conversation between friends on a private Facebook group. It started as a clear idea of a physical statement that they wanted to make at a one-time event - women who supported Hillary Clinton would wear pantsuits to the polls to underscore their support for her and what she stood for. The structure of the group was closed - members within opened the door for new members, but even with this selective method it grew quickly. "In the span of twenty-four hours, the group exploded to 24,000 members (new members can only be added by friends already within the group). Within a few weeks, group membership exceeded 3 million people.

Current membership is over 3.8 million people around the world.”³¹ It is significant that the organizers decided to create a closed *group* rather than a public, easily shareable *event* on Facebook - indicating the need for a “troll-free” *space* that would be available, before and after election day, where supporters of Hillary Clinton would feel safe to unapologetically, and vocally, express their support for Hillary Clinton and what she represented. The character of this space was informal and focused on storytelling. “We believe in creating spaces for difficult conversations where we challenge each other, firmly but kindly, to see beyond our own lives and listen to the experiences of others”³².

Organization

It retained the character of an informal space for storytelling as it grew but, because the size immediately suggested the potential for women from diverse backgrounds to meet and mobilize for shared causes, it also took on a more actively political character. The organization is now composed of 48 regional chapters - each with their own Facebook group and/or page, while the original, national group serves as a central space to announce events and track general trends. “Pantsuit Nation is committed to balancing online engagement with in-person activism. With chapters across the country, we work to connect our members with opportunities to get involved in the political process and in their own communities. They provide

³¹ Pantsuit Nation Website. www.pantsuitnation.org

³² Pantsuit Nation Website. www.pantsuitnation.org

opportunities for members to connect, both online and in person, and to share resources and inspiration with other likeminded individuals in their geographic region.”³³ Events and meetings are organized one by one, physical place to meet selected based on need and availability for each individual event - often at bookstores, local libraries, and community colleges.

The physical manifestation of the conversations Pantsuit Nation fostered came in the form of a book of stories published by Flatiron Books in May 2017.

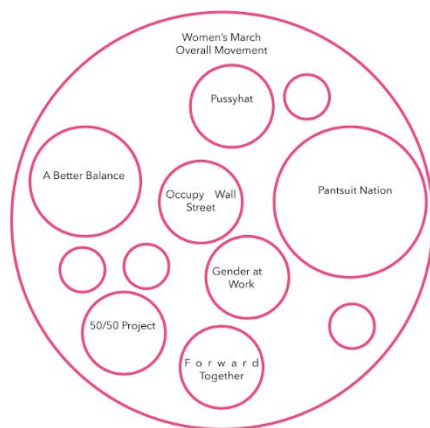


Figure 12: Overall Structure of Women’s March (Source: Author)

³³ Pantsuit Nation Website. www.pantsuitnation.org

#WomensMarch

When Donald Trump beat out Hillary Clinton for the presidency, first-time activist Teresa Shook, knew the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group would be the space to vent her frustration and make a call to action - for a pro-women march. Again, following the pattern of overnight exponential growth that its parent group had experienced, by the next morning 10,000 people had checked in as “Going” on the new Facebook group for the March. The rest is, literally, history.

One of the many creative elements that came out of the Women’s March was the Pussyhat Project.

Pussyhat Project

The Pussyhat Project grew from another safe space (this time a physical one) for women to share the intersection of their personal stories and politics - The Little Knittery in the Atwater Village neighborhood of Los Angeles. “The cozy space brims with colorful yarns, and warm scarves. For these women, it provided a peaceful, safe sanctuary -- a place where thoughts and ideas can be shared without fear of judgment.” The idea was for women around the world, who could not participate in the physical marches, to knit pussyhats - bright pink wool hats with cat ears - to send to women who would be at the march, thereby being present in another way. Similar to the idea of wearing pantsuits to the polls, the pussyhats would make an unambiguous symbol of women’s power. The project re-appropriated an insulting

phrase - “Grab em by the pussy” - and turned it into a symbol of empowerment and a clear political statement.

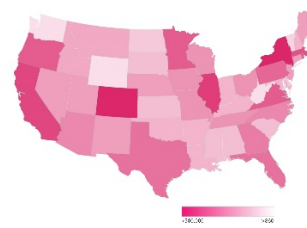
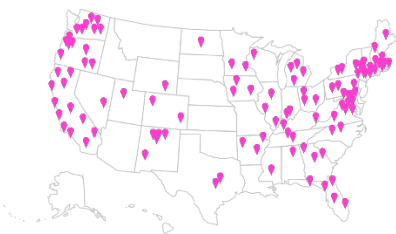


Figure 13: Local to National Activism

Women's March 2017 Source: USA Today usatoday.com/women's-march-took-over-world-numbers

Pussyhat Hub at local Yarn Store. Source: KQED News www.kqed.org/new/1-a-s-pussyhat-project-crafts-a-political-statement

Pussyhat Project Hubs; Location + Volume of Women's March (Source: Author)

The project reflects a sensibility that was cultivated in this particular space - an appreciation of handicraft, the need felt by women around the world to *do something* productive to counter the existing climate and tension. The execution of this idea is particularly interesting as it consciously and very successfully hybridized digital and physical space in a variety of ways. The pussyhat project grew in the context of an already massive digitally grown movement and therefore with confidence in the potential of digital media to make the idea a success. It modeled

new modes of civic engagement that operated simultaneously in multiple spaces - both digital and physical, global and local.

Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter is an international activist movement focused on the specific goal of ending systemic racism and violence toward black people. It has been centered on particular cases of police brutality against specific individuals. It is driven by action primarily in the form of protests following these incidents, and awareness about injustice spread primarily through social media, using the hashtag #blacklivesmatter. The contours of this movement, in time, space, and public consciousness, are relatively clearer and easier to trace than the Women's March and other movements.

Structure

This movement operated at three nested scales, each with its own role and character: "Black Lives Matter", the official organization; "#Blacklivesmatter", the online community centered on the hashtag; and "BLM" the overall movement, that had existed before it had a name. "*BLM [is the] sum of all organizations, individuals, protests, and digital spaces dedicated to raising awareness about and ultimately*

ending police brutality against Black people”³⁴. In the case of police brutality against black people, the issue, and the movement, was an old one but the new medium allowed Videos, images, and text narratives of violent encounters between police and unarmed Black people to circulate widely through news and social media in the summer of 2014.

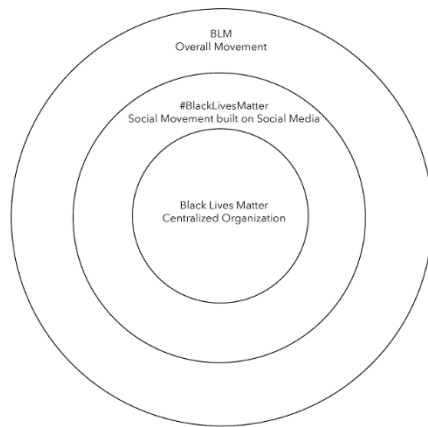


Figure 14: Black Lives Matter Overall Structure (Source: Author)

³⁴ ³⁴ Freelon, Dean; D. McIlwain, Charlton, and D. Clark, Meredith. “Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #BlackLives Matter and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice”. Center for Media and Social Impact, American University

Web

The BLM Network is a News Network

Figure 1: Blacklivesmatter.com ego network

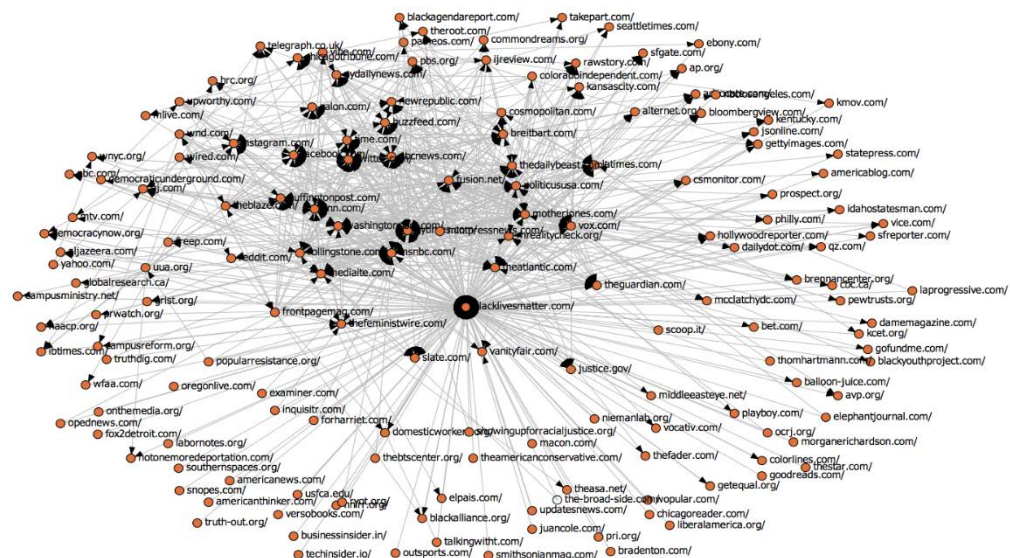


Figure 15: Black Lives Matter Ego Network. Source Beyond the Hashtags, (Source: CMSI)

The network built around Black Lives Matter on the Web is clearly conducive to broadly distributing and circulating information. The network is extremely diffuse - this means few sites have multiple links to any one site. It could be a dense network with many reciprocal ties—conducive to building trust between connections. Such trust would be necessary if what those trafficking in Black Lives Matter-related content on the Web were trying to do was, say, organize clandestine gatherings, or circulate ideas for how to mobilize, or develop strategic action plans. These kinds of

actions require strong ties between network members that mirror those of offline social networks, which tend to be smaller in number and consist of ties between people or groups who are already familiar with and intimately connected to one another

Given the direct linkages between Twitter and the open Web, and the reciprocal flow of Black Lives Matter-related news and information through each, we can see how the structure and constitution of the Black Lives Matter Web network has assisted in keeping police brutality consistently in the public eye. The Black Lives Matter network is structured to distribute related content among and between news sites that are in a position to maximize and amplify visibility.

Online Personalities as Hubs of Community and Activity

Twitter activity for the Black Lives Matter movements centered around what are known as Hubs. These are users who, by the popularity of their tweets, became activist leaders of the movement. Twitter signifies something slightly different than sharing on Facebook. Because twitter is a more conversational medium, that invites users to think out loud, retweeting signifies that this person and what they have said, speaks for you. It indicates a shared identity and views. So, communities of twitter users are composed of people who retweet and mention similar sets of these very popular users, or hubs.

For example, Deray Mckesson soon became a defacto leader of the organization. As he moved from retweeting others to reporting from protests to inspirational declarations that “the movement lives,” McKesson publicly documented his own transformation from concerned onlooker to committed activist, which probably reflected many other similar transformations occurring across the country at the same time.

Digital/Physical; Action/Reaction

“Getting something trending on Twitter means that people are talking, they are conscious. And that consciousness can lead to action”- Shree

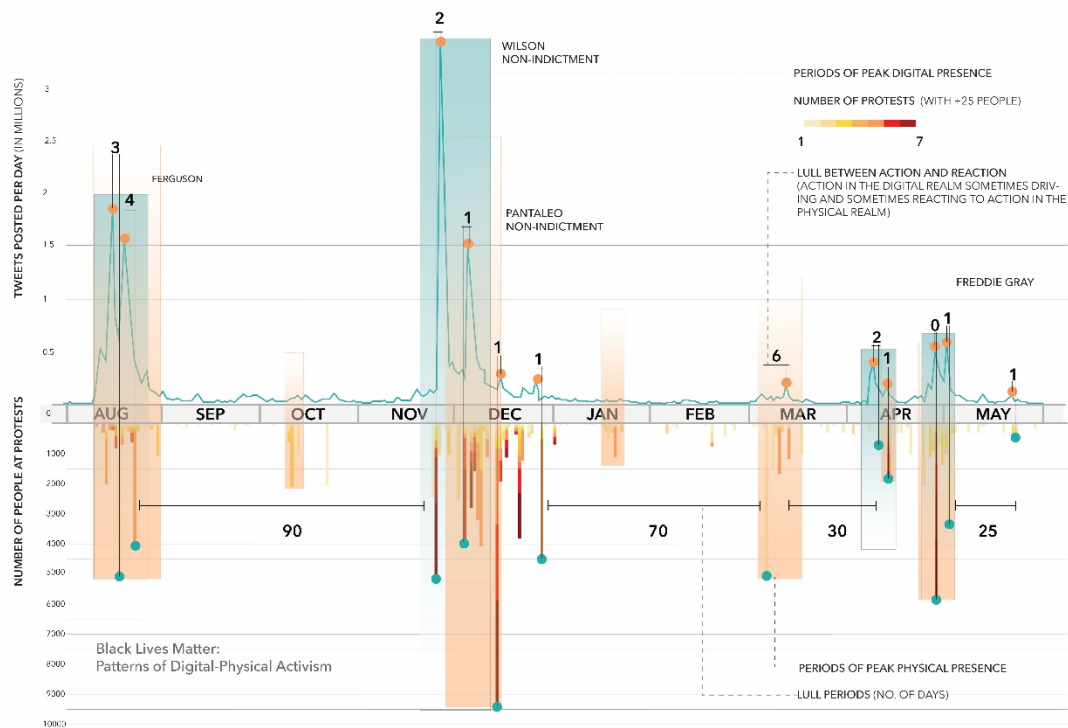


Figure 16: Twitter Volume and Physical Protests Related to BLM 2014-2015

(Source: Author)

This diagram demonstrates that as the movement gained momentum and identity, the manner of engagement of Twitter changed. In the initial stages, the twitter activity coincides with the physical protests - primarily being used to share live videos and pictures from the protests. Later, as the movement matured, twitter activity precedes physical protests, indicating that conversation in the digital realm (about additional incidents of police brutality) drove/incited/provoked/inspired protests in the physical realm. Also noteworthy is what you don't see on this diagram - absence of activity either on the digital or physical realm, in the periods between the peaks. Of course, this does not mean that activity was not ongoing - core activists and community leaders no doubt continued their work throughout - but that it was not manifested in the public realm. How can architecture intervene at these lulls in the growth of a movement, to provide public space for the 'missing middle' of movement building?

Marking Place with a Hashtag

The Twitter data show that the hashtag initially migrated from its online birthplace to offline protests on Ferguson's streets, then surged in popularity online based in part on social media coverage of the protests. In this case, the movement had existed and been struggling before Ferguson but - almost as if it had been waiting for this moment, when it could take and claim a place - the Ferguson protests emerged as the threshold before the apex of the movement - a place-based event that solidified

the movement. This development reaffirms the importance of a physical place in movement building - one that can be identified with the movement, even if it is a movement that grew online. The fact that #ferguson drew much more attention than the hashtags based on Brown's name suggests a greater emphasis on the physical protests and resulting police response than on the victim. Additionally, #Ferguson - the name of a city, of a place gained significance because using that meant you were talking about *all* that the forms of racial injustice that place - that is identifiably majority African-American - represented. After being 'taken' by the movement, the identity of the place is permanently linked to it. The act of taking a place and marking it by extended occupation, such as with Occupy at Zuccotti Park is longstanding tradition in socio-political movements. In the digital age, this phenomenon is extended to digital territories, tagged by widely shared hashtags and iconic images. Twitter is the realm of BLM, but may not have happened without also having taken the streets of Ferguson.

'The practice of hashtagging the names of police killing victims had become entrenched enough to render visible on Twitter the systemic scourge of anti-Black police brutality.' In this way hashtagged conversations can also have a similar effect as temporary art installations, often used for public placemaking.

Virtual Participation

Twitter is a platform that activists have widely adopted as a platform for participatory journalism to track and report from events. Deray Mckesson was

moving between cities where protests were happening and live streaming them to his massive and growing Twitter audience - replacing traditional media but also - because it was first hand - providing more of a sense of virtual participation than of news coverage. Similar to the Virtual Global March run by the Pussyhat Project, many ‘hashtag activists’ around the world who could not physically be at the protests followed along with developments in the protests through live tweets. By retweeting images, videos, and testimonies from the protests present on the streets, they gave them a presence on the public space of social media.

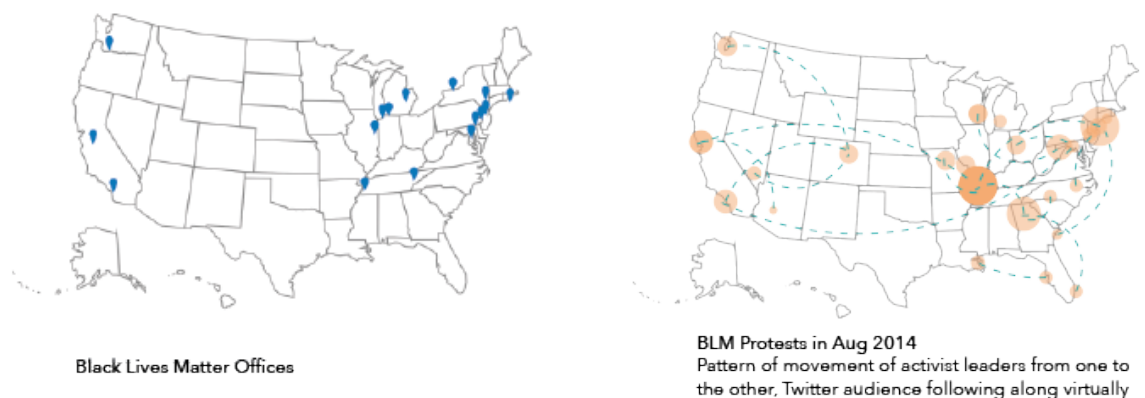


Figure 17:
Black Lives Matter Offices around the country (Source: Author)
Pattern of movement of activist leaders between protest locations (Source: Author)

“McKesson and a core group of other activists have built the most formidable American protest movement of the 21st century to date. Their innovation has been to marry the strengths of social media — the swift, morally blunt consensus that can be

created by hashtags; the personal connection that a charismatic online persona can make with followers; the broad networks that allow for the easy distribution of documentary photos and videos — with an effort to quickly mobilize protests in each new city where a police shooting occurs.”³⁵

Digital Shortcuts to Physical Spaces

The hashtag operates as a shortcut and a wayfinder in digital space. It can lead you quickly to the event or community you want to check in on - both digital and physical. From an interview with an attendee of the Eric Garner protests. “With the Eric Garner protests, I left work, and I did not know where the protests were going to be. I did not know what website to go on to. I typed in #EricGarner, and without that, I was not going to be able to find it – Rick³⁶. In this way, participants of the Black Lives Matter movement often used Twitter to physically locate communities, solidarity, and action.

Conclusions

³⁵ Caspian Kang, Jay. “Our Demand is Simple: Stop Killing Us” The New York Times Magazine. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/magazine/our-demand-is-simple-stop-killing-us.html>

³⁶ Freelon, Dean; D. McIlwain, Charlton, and D. Clark, Meredith. “Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #BlackLives Matter and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice”. Center for Media and Social Impact, American University

Both of these movements demonstrated unique patterns of hybrid civic engagement. The digital age has reached an age of maturity. This means that activists are armed with the digital savvy, and lessons learned from previous movements, to build on the different strengths of digital and physical spaces. At the peak of each movement's life, activities in one realm were consciously echoed in the other. However, movements need momentum, and the absence of / the difficulty of acquiring a public space in which to continue to be present and do the myriad activities needed, often leads to movements losing steam and fading out, before having even realized their initial goals in a significant way. Dedicated activists and community organizers do the hard work of trying to keep up momentum of a movement. While the power of grassroots movements is inarguable, it is not always possible to engineer the critical mass needed to pass the initial threshold. An additional public space is needed that is larger than the rented back offices and school cafeterias used for organizing meetings, and smaller than the one-time protests that temporarily take over streets and city squares. A place that is identifiable for the work of continuing the connections that are often made at mass events.

Chapter 4: Site and Program Strategy Explorations

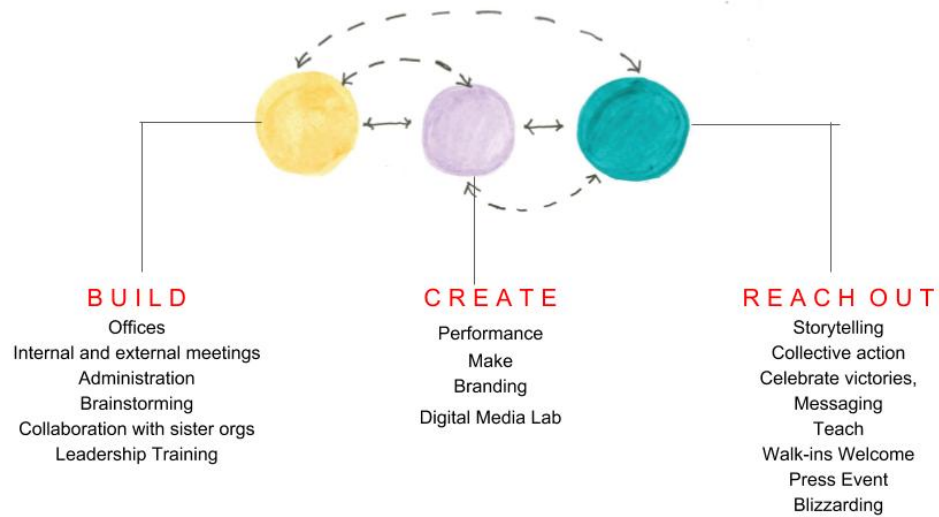


Figure 18: Program Categories (Source: Author)



Figure 19: Madison Square Schematic Design (Source: Author)

The city of Baltimore is a good testing ground because it has a strong existing network of non profits and community advocacy organizations but lacks the space worthy of the work they are doing



1.Freddie Gray Empowerment Center



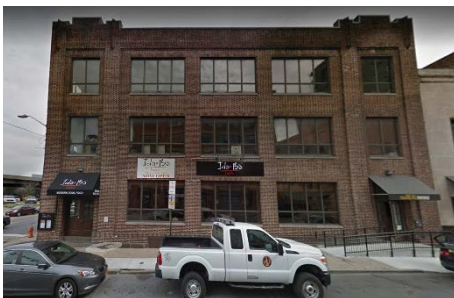
4.Meeting at the Living Well



2. The Tubman House



5. Leaders of the Beautiful Struggle



3. The Living Well



6. Meeting at the 2640 Space

Figure 20: Images of Current Community Activism Spaces in Baltimore

1. (Source:
2. (Source: The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/23/freddie-gray-baltimore-harriet-tubman-house-community>)
3. (Source: Google Earth)

4. Source: The Living Well Facebook Page
5. (Source: NBC <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/baltimore-change-makers-leaders-beautiful-struggle-example-n572561>)
6. (Source: 2640 Space Facebook Page)

Currently, activist spaces in the physical realm often occur in the uninviting ignored spaces of school gyms, church basements and behind anonymous facades. At this moment in time this can no longer be acceptable. We must engage the invisible infrastructure of activism and bring it into the public realm and celebrate and empower the neighbor the volunteer and the leader at the local level.

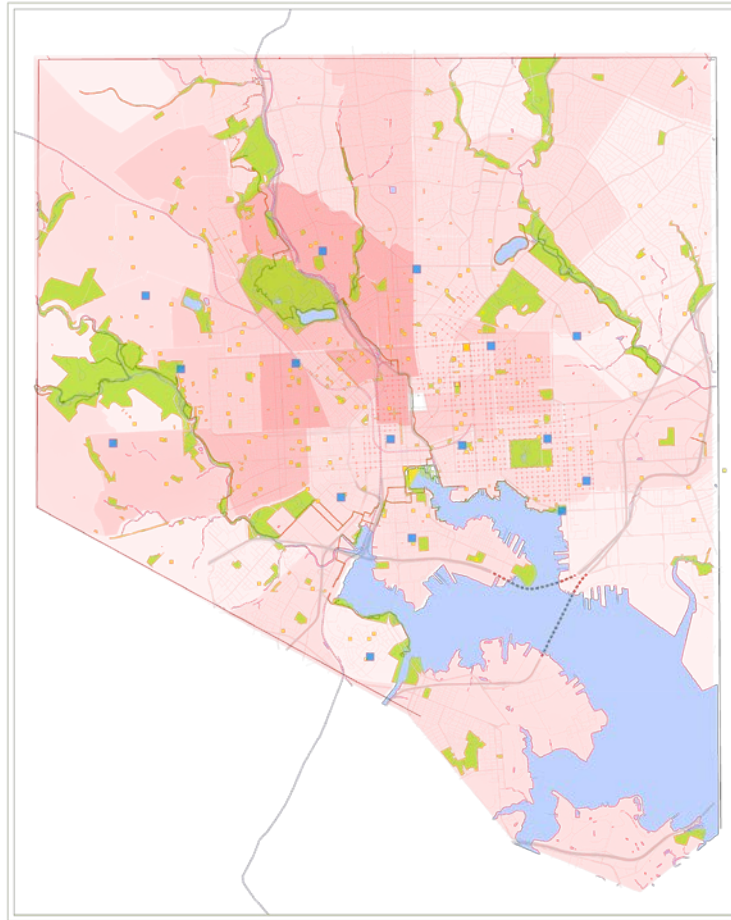


Figure216: Public Space Map of Baltimore (Source: Author)

Baltimore Public Space Map

We must start to look at the public assets of the city - this image illustrates levels of community engagement in Baltimore neighborhoods as well as public amenities available to them.



Figure 22: Public Space Map of Site (Source: Author)

Then we can intervene at a neighborhood level, in this case, the Gay street neighborhood in East Baltimore centered at Madison Square Park, and nestled in between zones of influence - institutional and cultural influence of Johns Hopkins and cultural corridor of Charles Street and the emerging one at North Avenue.

There are several hubs for activism exist nearby, as well as a strong network of schools, libraries and recreation centers. All of these public spaces can be used collectively by the community to advocate for themselves and causes that matter to them. However, having a central place to come together that isn't simply adapted

from its primary use but is in fact designed and programmed for this activity, can help strengthen the network.

The typology of this site - a residential square with a park is common in Baltimore and so can be a valuable to test out the prototype of a new public building.



Figure 23: Existing Site Plan. (Source: Author)

MADISON PARK SITE COMMUNITY ASSETS

- Proximity to ongoing East Baltimore Development
- Direct connection on Eager Street which could be developed as an important institutional/cultural street
- Active recreation center
- Potential for important new public space that could also serve institution's goals

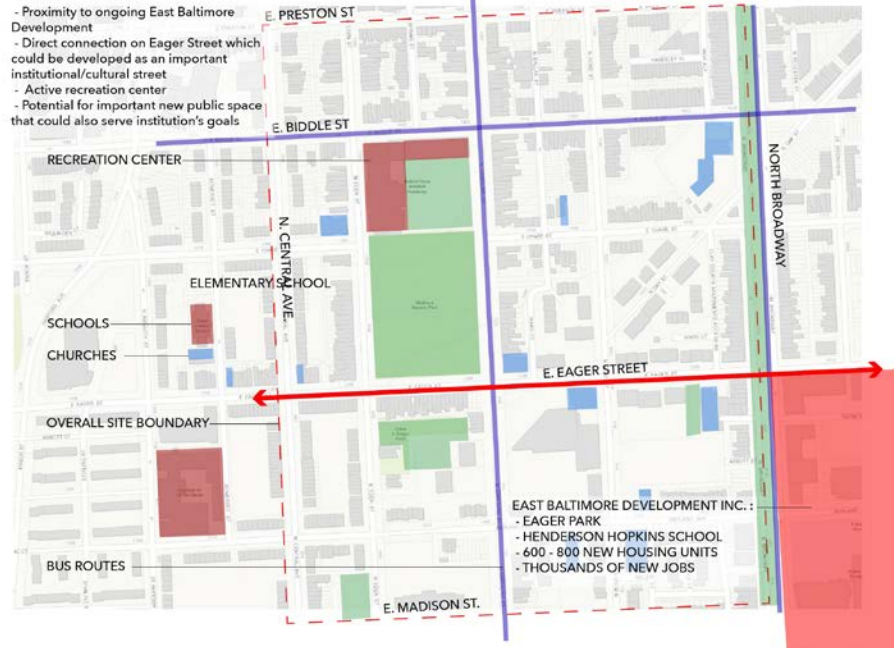


Figure 24: Community Assets of Site (Source: Author)

MADISON PARK SITE OPPORTUNITIES

- Opportunity to restore historic Madison Square Park as a public open space of which there are not enough in the city
- Design interventions could occur in several dispersed vacant spaces, encouraging a variety of opportunities for gathering in addition to the main, centralized one
- Large, regular open space available - flexibility for variety of programs

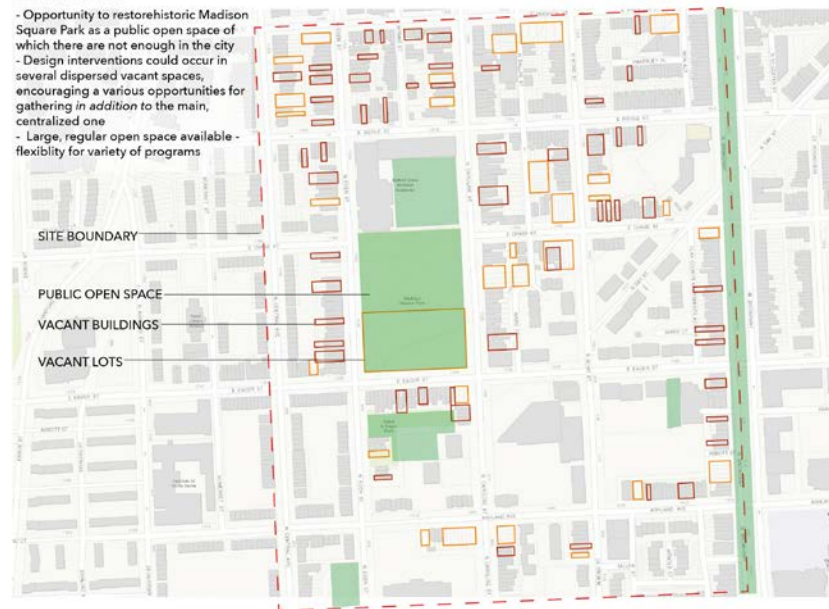


Figure 25: Site Opportunities (Source: Author)

MADISON PARK SITE
AREA MASTER PLAN - SUMMARY

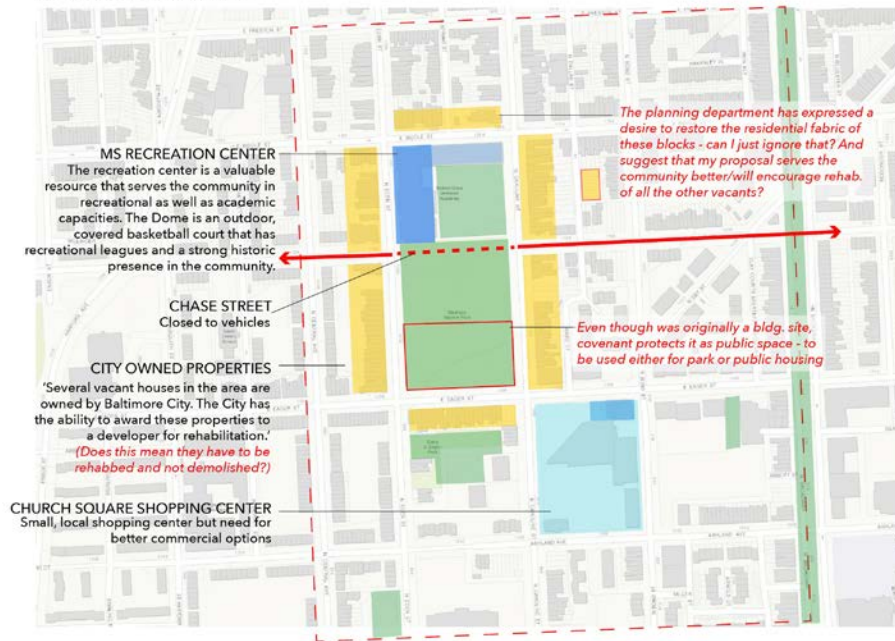


Figure 26: Area Master Plan Summary (Source: Author)

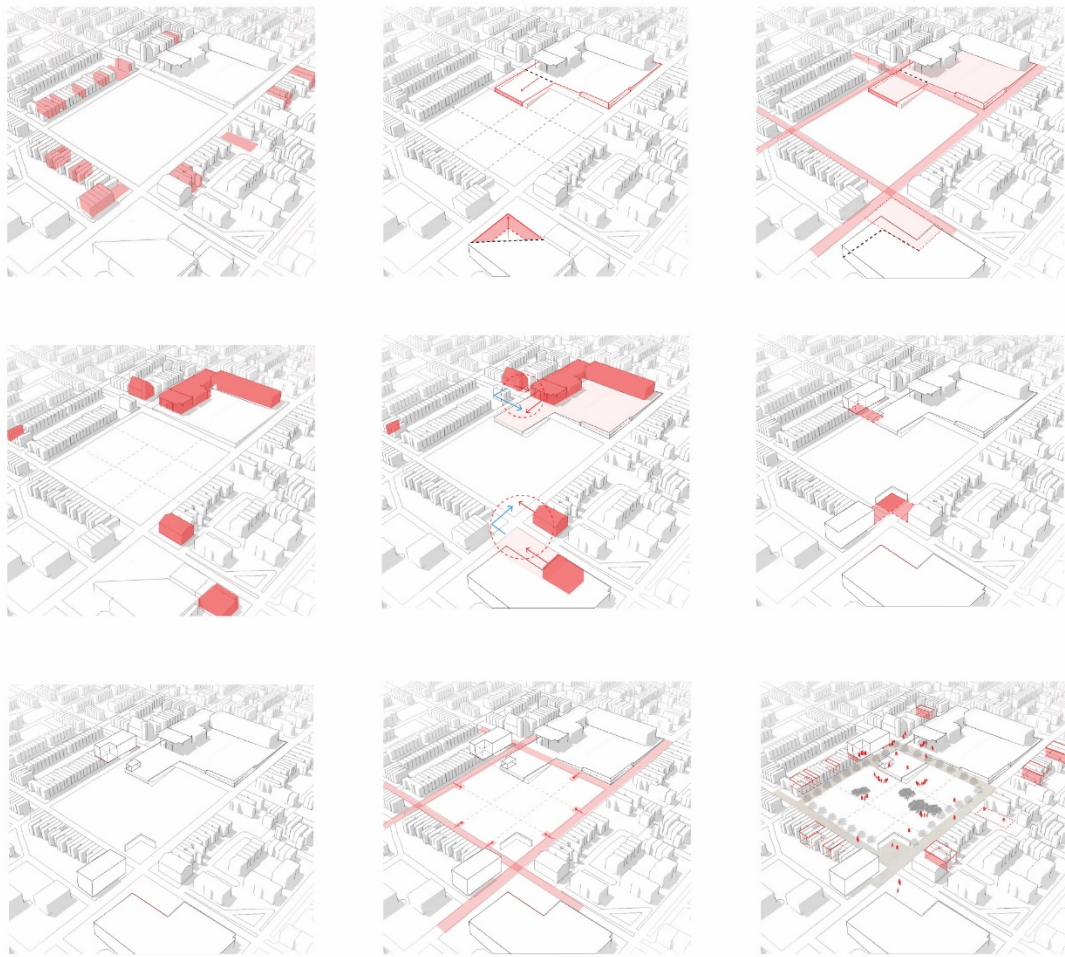


Figure 27: Site Intervention (Source: Author)

There are already several community functions around like churches, a recreation center and a school that this new program would complement.

By completing a series of simple moves can help scale down the size of the site and extend the space of public buildings into public space, resulting in a more unified and productive space for the community.



Figure 28: Proposed Site Plan (Source: Author)

Chapter 5: Design

Introduction

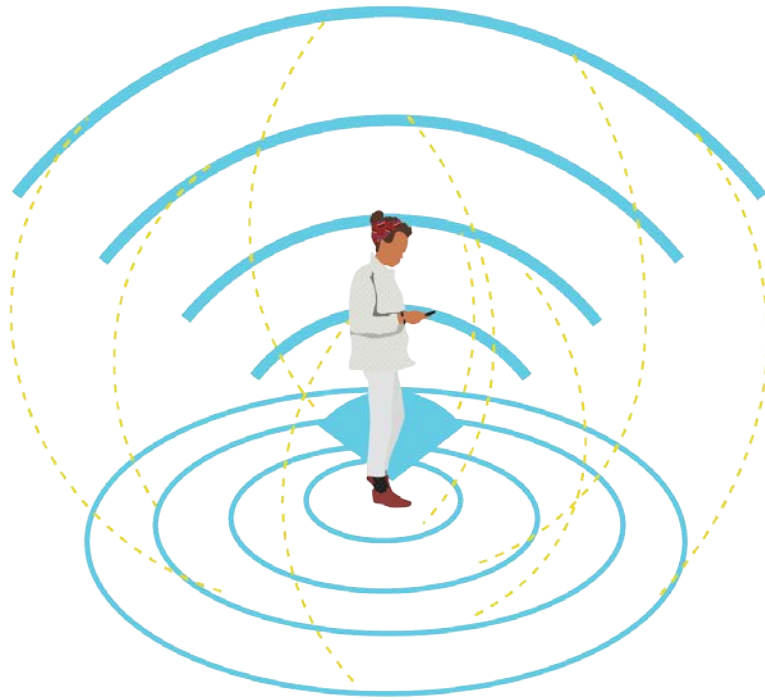


Figure 29: Simultaneous Public Realm (Source: Author)

The moment we live in today is an intense moment, of urgency and constant action. The past couple of years have felt eventful to say the least. At times this is a moment of full of confusion, fear, and exhaustion. It feels as if we are irreparably divided. At other times it can feel full of hope and energy. Most importantly however, this is a moment when people are continuing to come together in unprecedented numbers. To fight for what they believe in, to stand up for their friends and neighbors, to protest injustices that have gone on too long.

While there are many different factors, historic and social trends that brought us to this moment, what it is worth investigating what in particular has enabled the degree and nature of activism that we are engaged in today. The answer is two pronged. The first essential element, as always, is the people, who work tirelessly behind the scenes to coordinate the events that draw out masses, to sustain the conversation and lead the action. The other element, that is unique to today, is the internet and its incredible potential to connect people and raise mass awareness. Activism today happens and will continue to happen simultaneously in the digital and physical public realm. In order to accommodate this sea change, physical public space must also be adapted to accommodate and encourage action or we risk losing momentum, and limiting all this valuable energy to hashtag activism.

This thesis explores the unique nature of grassroots organizing in the digital age and proposes an architecture of activism that reflects lessons learned from digital space and how we organize today.

Design Process

In order to propose a design for the digital age we must understand how the digital realm is different from the physical realm, particularly in terms of facilitating dialogue and action. The characteristics that stood out as unique to digital space and that are explored in Chapter 2 are:

Customizability, Anonymity, Asynchronicity, and Global Scale.

Next, to understand what this means for activism today we must look at movements that grew in this moment. Two prominent movements of our times are the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Women's March movement. Both of these are explored in depth in Chapter 3 however were repeatedly referred to during the design process to extract spatial design principle from and so are revised here:

Black Lives Matter is a movement that grew out of a hashtag to raise awareness about police shootings of unarmed black men. This movement was truly grown by individuals who drove the online conversation and took their Twitter followers with them as they traveled to protests happening around the country. By visualizing and understanding the relationship between the conversation in digital space and action in the physical space we can see just how intrinsically connected they are. At times the conversation drove the action and at times the other way around. However it is the moments in between these surges is what this thesis aims to engage. This leads us to our first spatial principle for an architecture of activism in the digital age. The phenomenon of Black Lives Matter demonstrated the power of the hashtag at gathering community around a conversation. Physical spaces for activism should be as seamless to join as a hashtag conversation and extend their influence beyond the immediate location, pulling people in and pushing action out.

The Women's March is a movement that grew from a Facebook group - a digital safe space for conversation. Participants brought this essence into the physical realm by establishing physical safe spaces at local yarn stores, and then further to the actual marches with Pussyhats. These bright pink idiosyncratic hats acted as a very real tangible symbol of a movement that grew in the digital age. The organizers created a network of online and physical yarn stores and real and virtual marches. This and the current MeToo movement are movement built on storytelling, something that's made infinitely easier by the landscape of platforms that social media offers to everyone. Since grassroots activism is driven by individuals speaking up, a space dedicated to this activity would naturally benefit from similar a similar landscape of platforms.

Finally a principle that spans all digital spaces of activism is the linear experience offered by the timeline structure of all most social media sites. A public space for community action can embrace a similar linear experience of discovery.

With these principles in mind we can now question how they can be applied in the physical realm of activism.

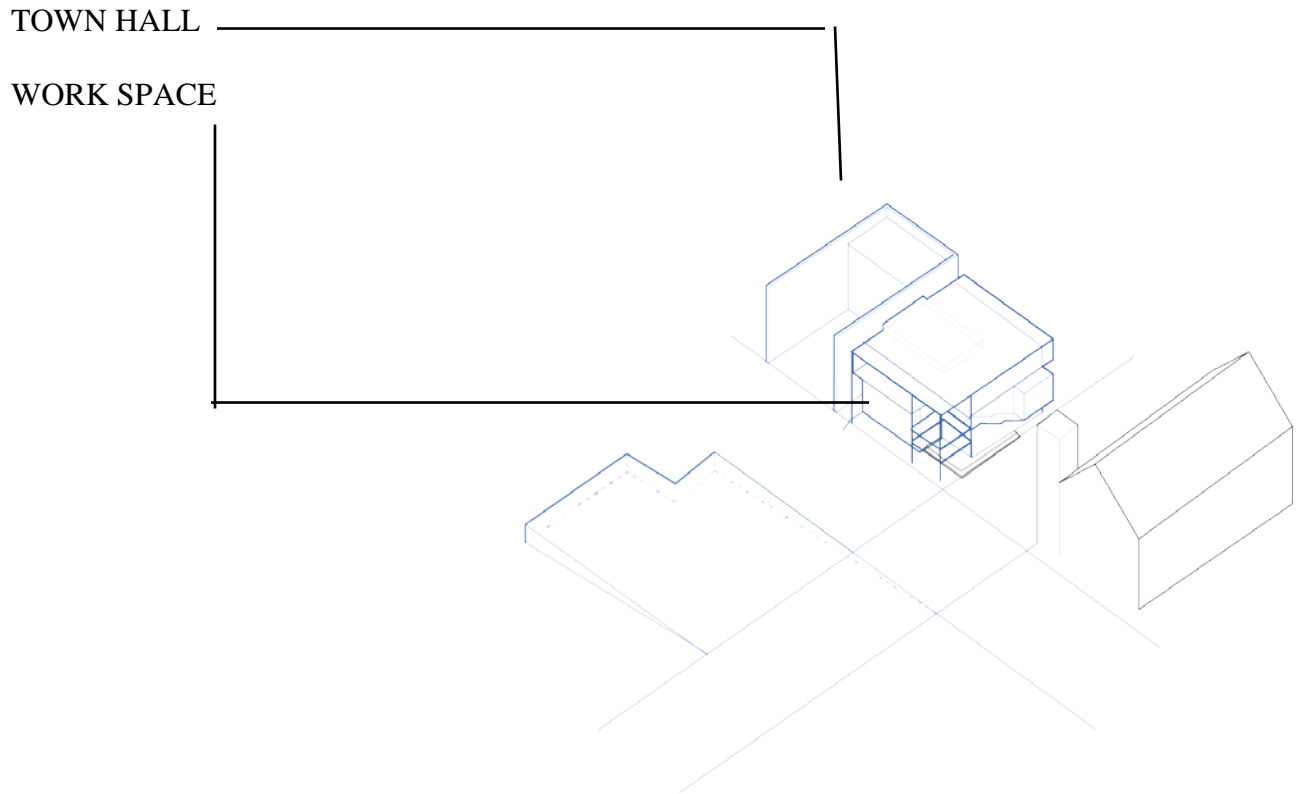


Figure 30: Basic Building Axon (Source: Author)

The proposed neighborhood activism center is comprised of two connected blocks of program, the work space and the town hall.

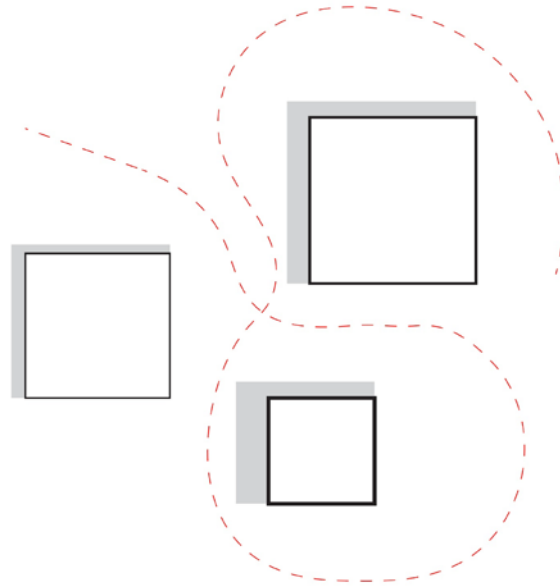


Figure 31: Platforms (Source: Author)

Platform

Multiple stages at the building and the park level allow an individual to easily claim a space of their own and address a group or make a call to action.

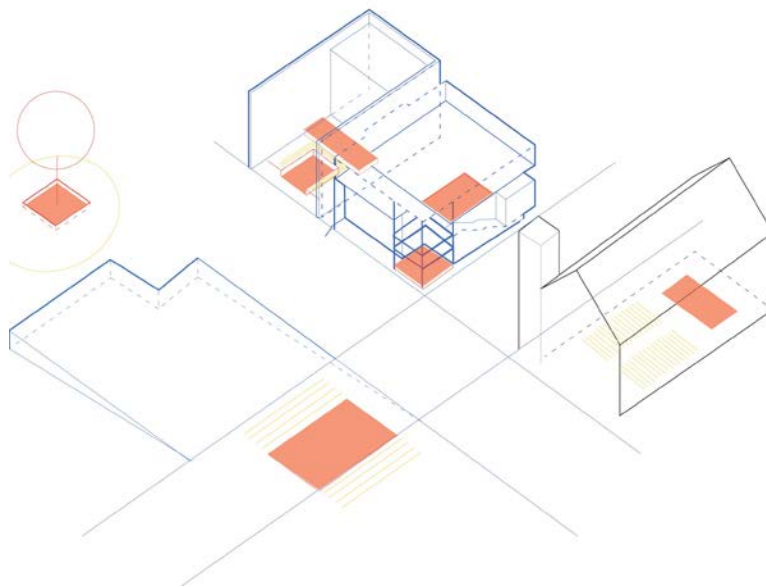


Figure 32: Stages (Source: Author)

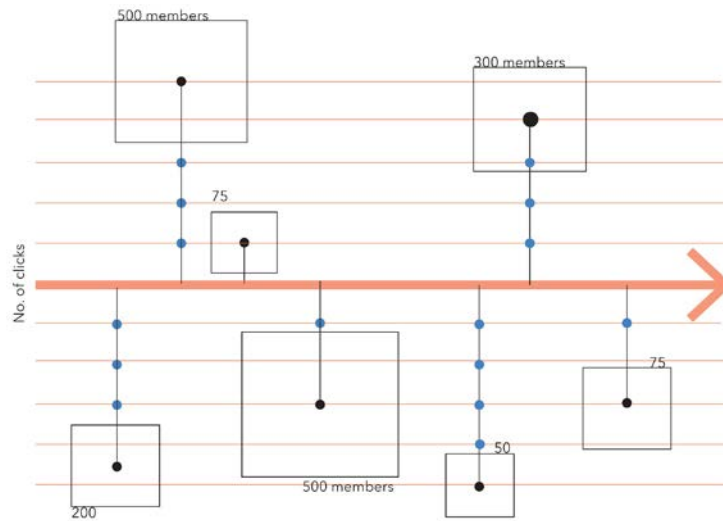


Figure 33: Timeline (Source: Author)

Promenade

The neighborhood activism center of today embraces principles derived from digital spaces of activism in the form of a promenade that allows the individual to discover causes and organizations they are interested in.

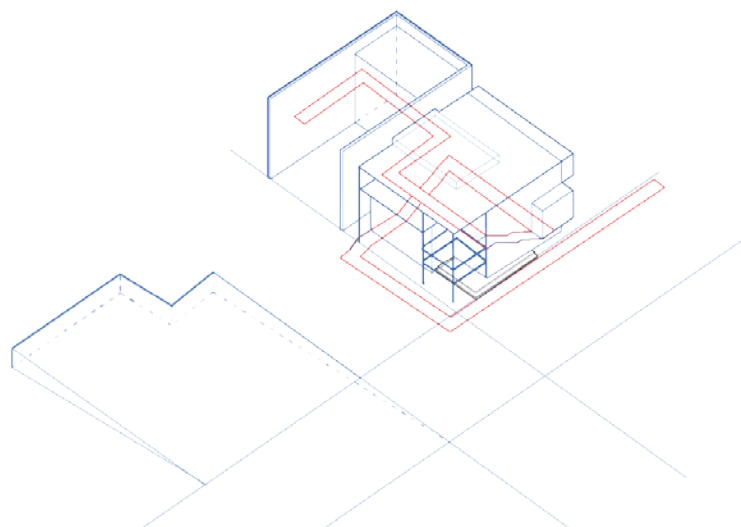


Figure 34: Promenade (Source: Author)

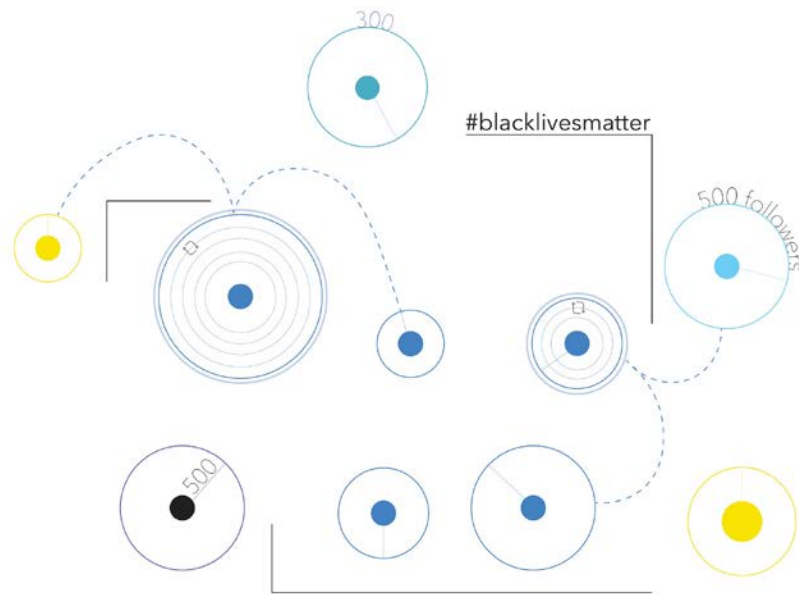


Figure 35: Hashtag: (Source: Author)

Hashtag Adjacent social and work spaces allow people to easily turn an exciting conversation into a plan that they can execute, all in the same space

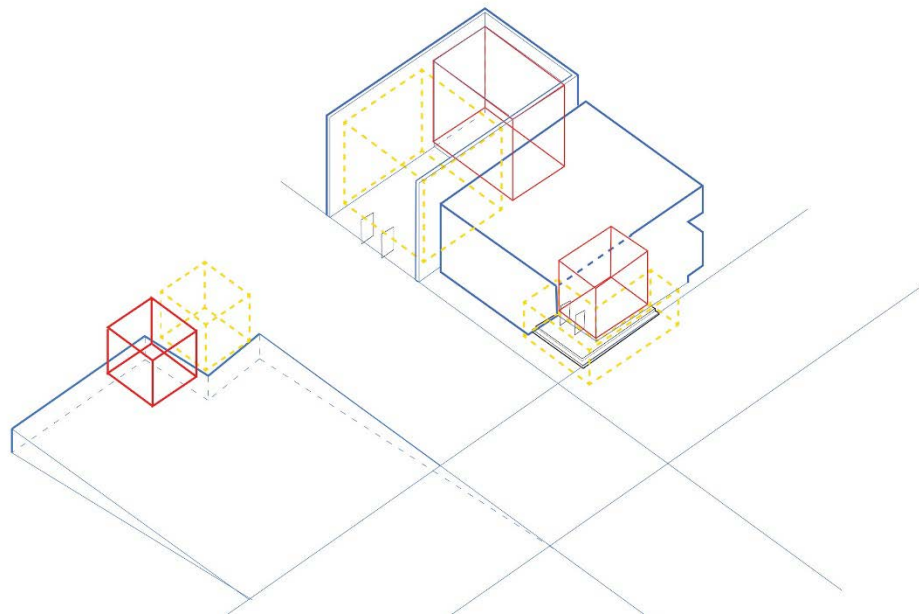


Figure 36: Adjacency (Source: Author)

Orthographics

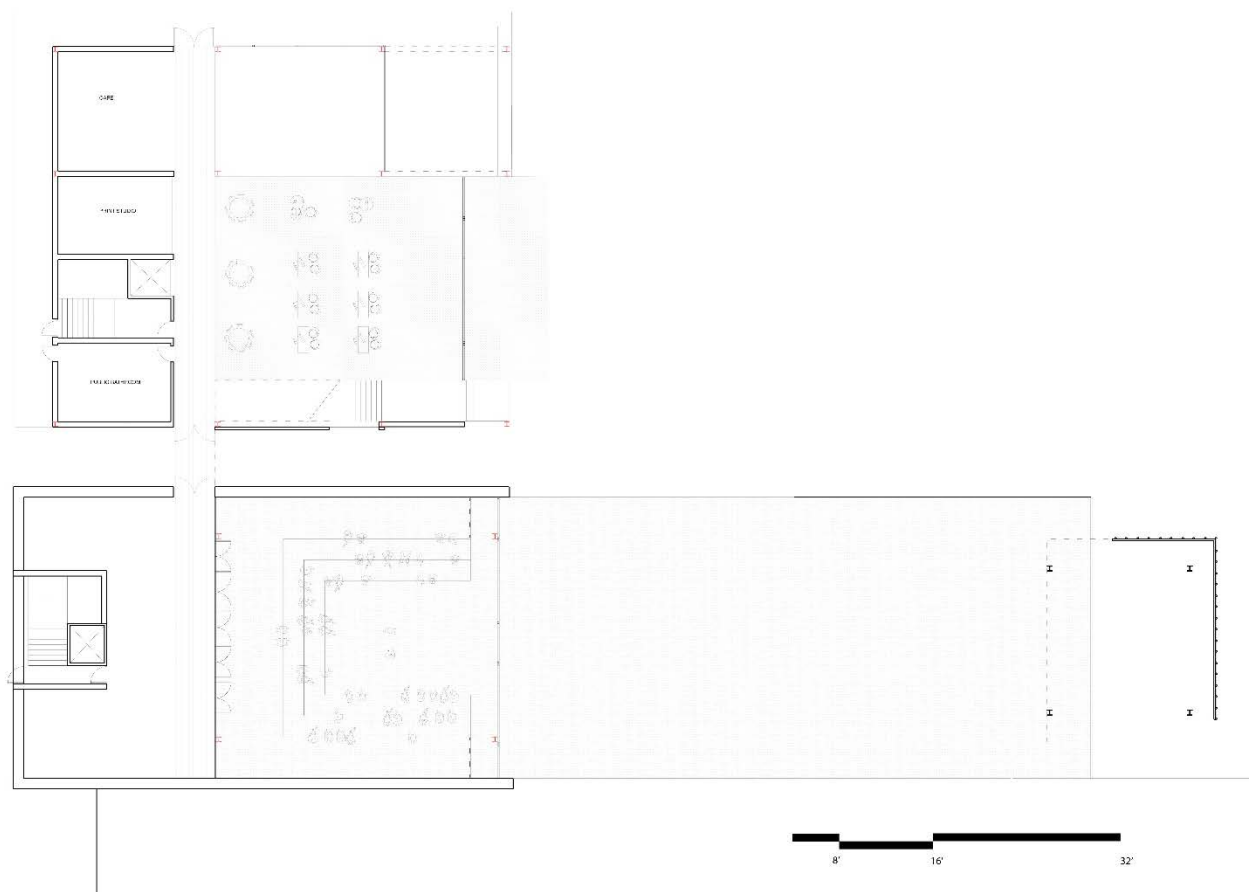


Figure 37: Ground Floor Plan. (Source: Author)

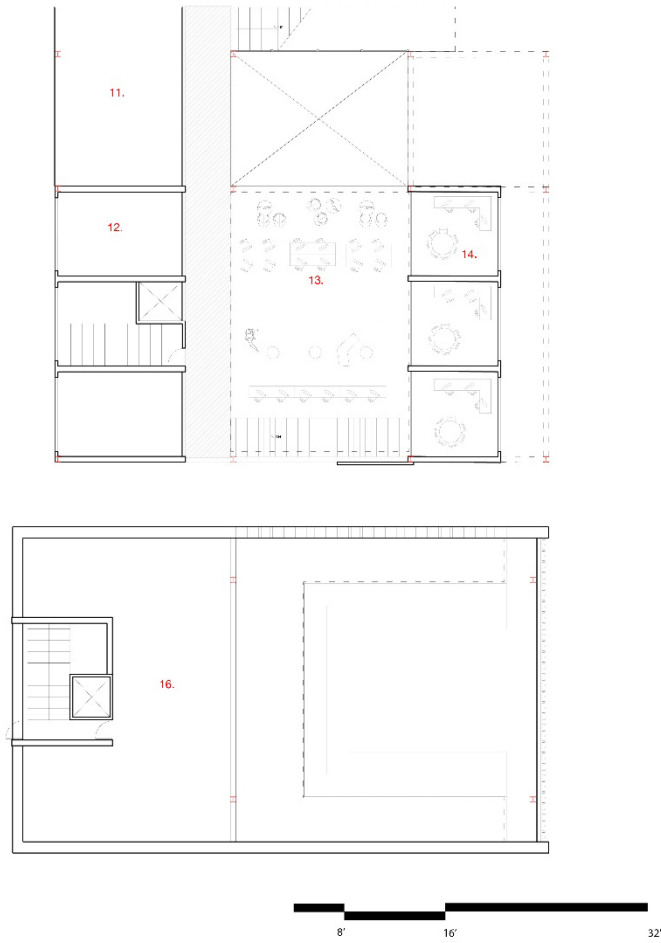


Figure 38: First Floor Plan (Source: Author)

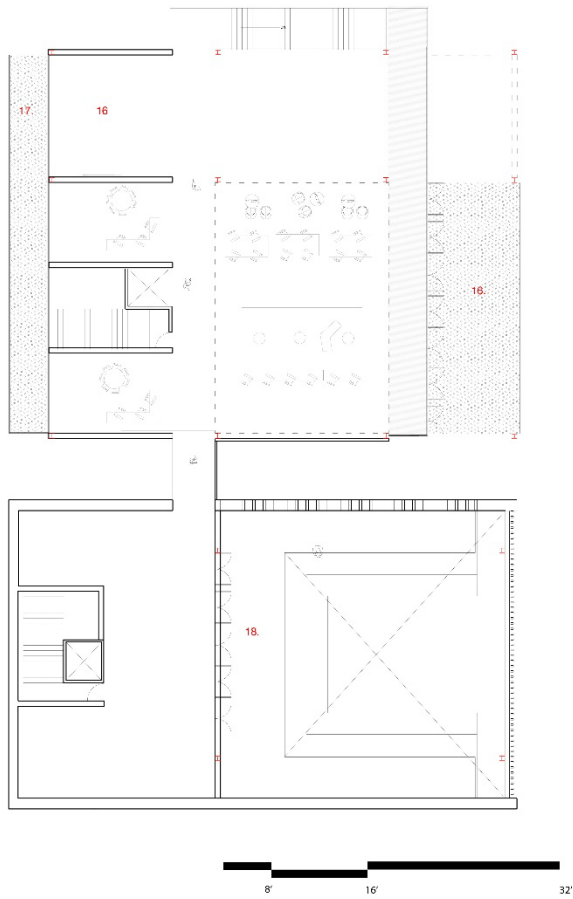


Figure 39 Second Floor Plan. (Source: Author)

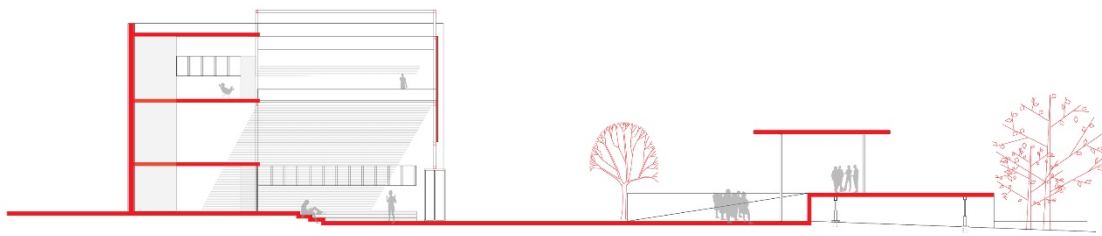


Figure 40: Longitudinal Section through Town Hall (Source: Author)

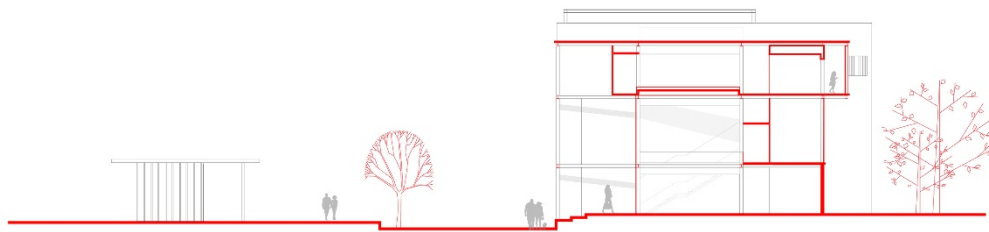


Figure 41: Transverse Section through Digital Lab (Source: Author)



Figure 42: Eden Street Elevation (Source: Author)

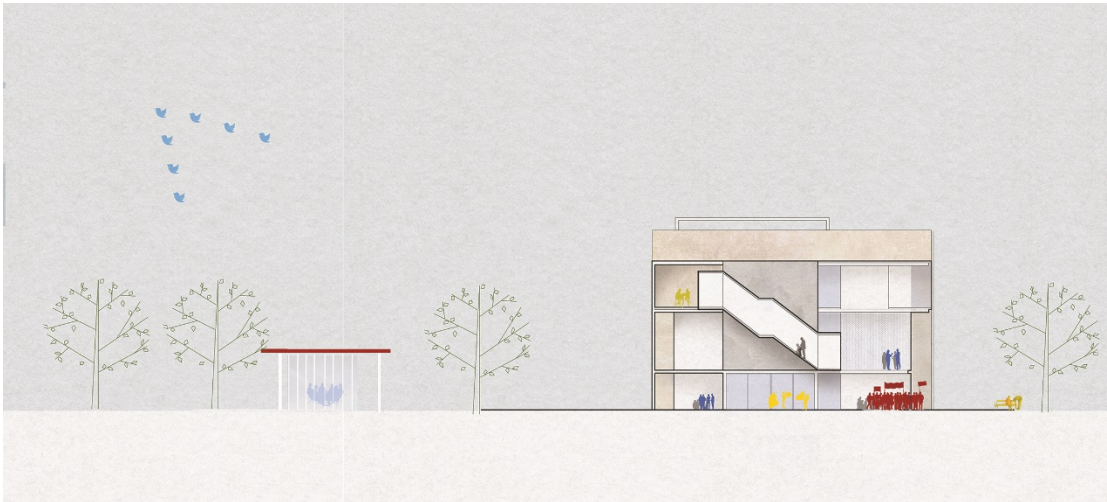


Figure 43: Chase Street Elevation (Source: Author)

Perspectives



Figure 44: The Corner at Madison Square Park (Source:Author)

Because this is a local institution, this is a humbly scaled building partnering with rather than negating the role of existing neighborhood institutions like churches. It welcomes people onto a wrap around porch and stoop that mimic the typology of the rowhomes next door and extends the public realm indoor and outdoor.



Figure 45: The Advisor's Lounge (Source: Author)

The Advisor's Lounge on the ground floor is a space to engage with the most important resources for grassroots organizers - other people - for advice and guidance in building an organization. Here they also have access to digital resources, training space and public bathroom among other things. This is also where the promenade begins, inviting people to explore.



Figure 46: The Action Core (Source: Author)

The central work space that anchors the building - this is a shared work space with offices and meeting rooms branching off of it. The promenade wraps around this space on each floor of the building - both defining and extending its volume. Here, the individual can walk past and observe the exciting work being done without feeling obliged to participate. The promenade is also a classic opportunity for chance encounters, between new volunteers and veteran activists, or members of different organizations.



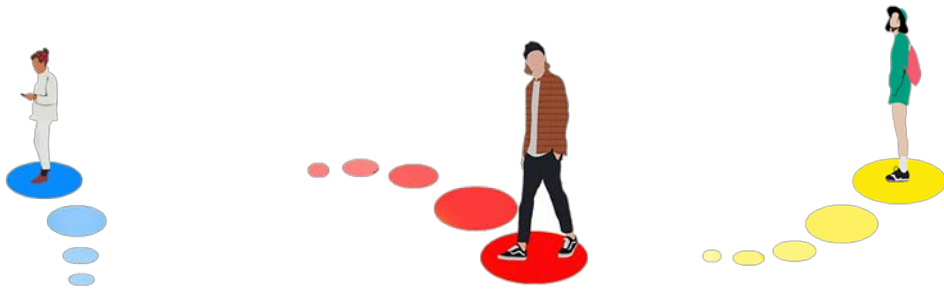
Figure 47: The Balcony (Source: Author)

At the top level the balcony provides outdoor spaces for work and expansive views of the park and the city beyond.



Figure 48: The Town Hall (Source: Author)

The town hall grounds the main community gathering space and connects it to the park. Galleries and a bridge connection to the workspace building overhead allow an alternative vantage point from where to experience events.



THE VOLUNTEER

THE LEADER

THE NEIGHBOR

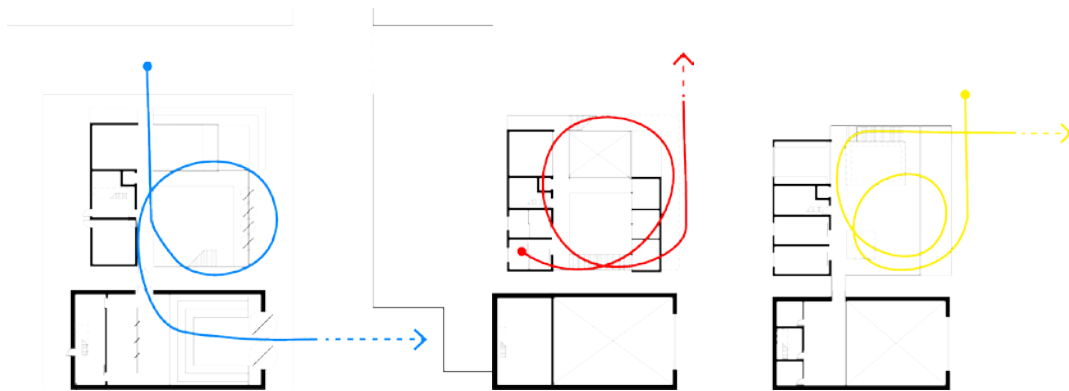


Figure 49: Circulation Loops (Source: Author)

The overall role of the building is to bring activists at every level in, provide them with the resources and community for action they and then reconnect them back to the community.

Conclusion

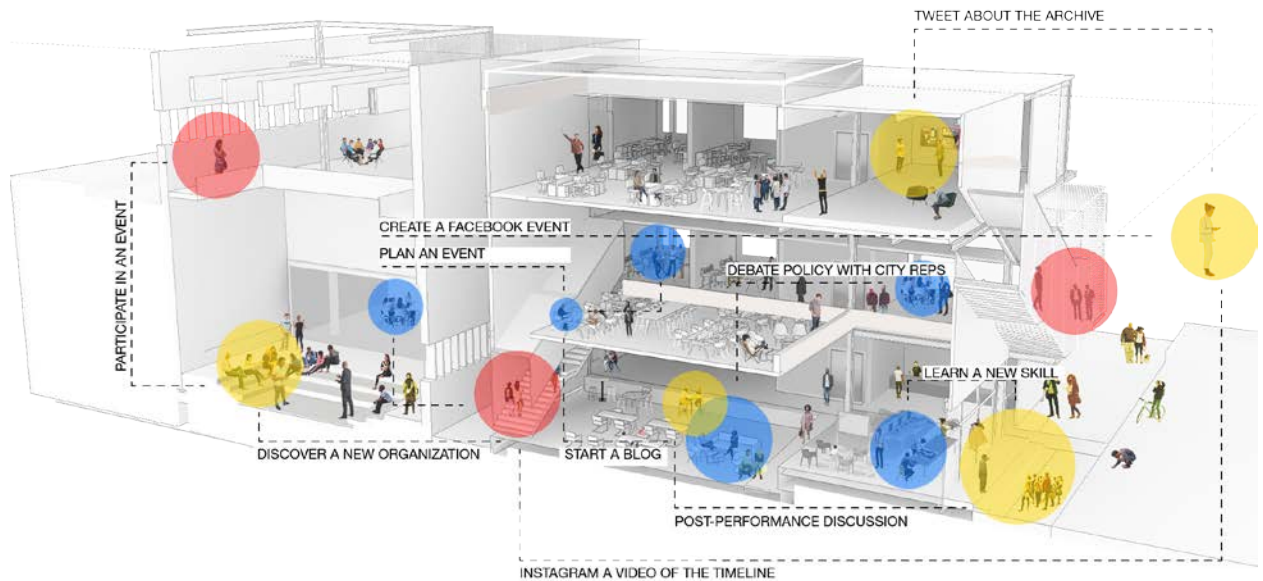


Figure 50: Integrated Program (Source: Author)

In a day in the life of the proposed Neighborhood Activism Center:

- An individual can experience the space through the promenade, without ever engaging in activity if they are not yet ready but curious,
- Can develop their plans at a desk, with a small group, or host meetings with other
- Engage with the community through events or everyday conversations.

Through a series of spaces programmed specifically for activism, strong connectivity between these spaces, and thoughtfully designed communal gathering spaces that

engage and empower, this can be a new paradigm for sustained activism in every neighborhood.



Figure 51: Programmatic Section Perspective (Source: Author)

The Neighborhood Activism Center can be a place where an individual can go through the journey of becoming an activist just as an organization can go through the journey of building a movement. This is the beginning of an architecture of activism that caters to the moment we are in today.

The conversation at the final review was an exciting one. This thesis became two-pronged – one exploring the potential of spatializing digital environment we inhabit and the other proposing a new public building typology, dedicated to activism. The

architectural response to the first need not be a building – a point that was enthusiastically debated at the final presentation. The second aim does require a building but the scale and monumentality of that building is still something to grapple with. This thesis was successful at accomplishing its two main goals:

- Encouraging architects to look at the built environment from the lens of its users – who today inhabit the digital and physical realm simultaneously.
- Producing a successful and thoughtful architectural proposition for a neighborhood center of activism.

References

- “ALS Ice Bucket Challenge FAQ” *ALS Association*. Accessed November 1, 2017.
<http://www.alsa.org/about-us/ice-bucket-challenge-faq.html>
- Alicia, Shepard. “Online Comments: Dialogue or Diatribe”. Article. *Nieman Reports*.
Accessed December 1, 2012. <http://niemanreports.org/articles/online-comments-dialogue-or-diatribe/>
- Andersen, Monica and Hitlin, Paul. 2016. “Social Media Conversations About Race”.
Pew Research Center, Washington DC. August 15.
- Backer, David. 2016. “Facebook Drives Record Voter Registration Activity at
Deadline” *Center for Election Innovation and Research*. October 28, 2016. Accessed
November 1, 2017. <https://electioninnovation.org/2016/10/28/facebook-drives-record-voter-registration-activity-at-deadline/>
- Bertera, Elizabeth M., Melissa B. Littlefield. "Evaluation Of Electronic Discussion
Forums In Social Work Diversity Education: A Comparison Of Anonymous And
Identified Participation." *Journal of Technology In Human Services* 21.4 (2003): 53-
71. Academic Search Premier. Web. 5 Nov. 2012.

Caspian Kang, Jay. "Our Demand is Simple: Stop Killing Us" The New York Times Magazine. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/magazine/our-demand-is-simple-stop-killing-us.html>

Duggan, Maeve and Aaron Smith. 2016. "The Political Environment on Social Media". *Pew Research Center, Washington DC*. October 25.

Freelon, Dean; D. McIlwain, Charlton, and D. Clark, Meredith. "Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #BlackLives Matter and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice". Center for Media and Social Impact, American University

Gates, Bill

Goldhagen, Sarah Williams. 2010. "Park Here". *New Republic*, October 7

Gottesman, Alex. *Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

"Gangnam Style". *Wikipedia*. Accessed November 1, 2017

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gangnam_Style#cite_note-france24-11

Habermas Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere : An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. 1st MIT Press pbk. ed. *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.

“Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet”. Fact Sheet. *Pew Research Center, Washington DC*.
January 12, 2017.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/>

Janega, James “The post that may kill anonymous commenting at the Cleveland Plain Dealer” *Chicago Tribune*. 29 March 2010. Accessed 1 Dec 2012.

“Number of monthly active Twitter users worldwide from 1st quarter 2010 to 3rd quarter 2017 (in millions)”. *Statista*. Accessed October 25, 2017

Pantsuit Nation Website. www.pantsuitnation.org

Pariser, Eli. “Beware Online Filter Bubbles”. Lecture, TED2011, TED. March 2011.

Reich, Zvi, and Singer, Jane B., PhD. “Participatory Journalism.” Essay. In *User Comments : The Transformation of Participatory Space*, 96–117. Wiley-Blackwell : Oxford, UK, 2011.

Ruiz, Carlos et al “Public Sphere 2.0? The Democratic Qualities of Citizen Debates in Online Newspapers” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 22 Sep 2011.
Accessed Dec3 2012

“Social Media Fact Sheet”. Fact Sheet. *Pew Research Center, Washington DC*.

January 12, 2017.

Santana, Arthur D., Russial, John. “Civility, Anonymity and the breakdown of a New Public Sphere” *University of Oregon. Academic Search Premier*. Accessed 29 Nov 2012.

Treasure, Julian. “5 Ways to Listen Better”. Lecture, TEDGlobal 2011, TED. July 2011.

Women’s March www.womensmarch.com

Bibliography

Shiffman, Ron. *Beyond Zuccotti Park : Freedom of Assembly and the Occupation of Public Space*. 1st ed. ed., Oakland, CA, New Village Press, 2012.

Childs, Mark C. 2004. *Squares : A Public Place Design Guide for Urbanists*. 1St ed. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Mitchell, Don. 2003. *The Right to the City : Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: Guilford Press.

Parkinson, John. *Democracy and Public Space : The Physical Sites of Democratic Performance*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Kingwell, Mark, and Patrick Turmel, eds. 2009. *Rites of Way : The Politics and Poetics of Public Space*. Canadian Commentaries Series. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Zuckerman, Ethan. 2013. *Rewire : Digital Cosmopolitans in the Age of Connection*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

