



# Mapping of an occupation: A graphically rendered statement

Mapeamento de uma ocupação: uma declaração renderizada graficamente

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## RESUMO

O artigo oferece uma análise sociológica de uma experiência performativa de mapeamento no movimento Occupy Wall Street (OWS) de Nova York em 2011. Ele delinea a transformação da declaração do OWS em uma "lista de grievances [demandas-sofrimentos-queixas]" graficamente representada pela artista Rachel Schragis por meio de um processo participativo no espaço ocupado do Parque Zuccotti. Baseando-se na transição contínua entre as ideias, o espaço tridimensional vivido e a superfície plana bidimensional da cartografia gráfica, ele demonstra as maneiras pelas quais a cartografia coletiva-performativa incorporou e transcreveu a interconexão entre o percebido, o concebido e o(s) espaço-tempo(s) vivido(s) (Lefebvre 1974, Harvey 2006) no interior do espaço ocupado do OWS.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Performatividade, mapeamento, cartografia gráfica, Occupy Wall Street, espaço-tempo

## ABSTRACT

This paper offers a sociological analysis of a performative experience of mapping in New York's Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement in 2011. It delineates the transformation of the declaration of the OWS into a graphically rendered "list of grievances" by the artist Rachel Schragis through a participatory process in the occupied space of Zuccotti Park. Drawing on the continuous transition between the ideas, the three-dimensional lived space, and the two-dimensional flat surface of graphical cartography, it demonstrates the ways in which the collective-performative map-making embodied and transcribed the interconnection between the perceived, conceived, and lived space-time(s) (Lefebvre 1974, Harvey 2006) within the occupied space of the OWS.

## KEYWORDS

Performativity, mapping, graphical cartography, Occupy Wall Street, space-time



This paper offers a sociological analysis of a performative experience of mapping in New York's Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement that occurred in Fall 2011. This performative act concerns an artwork created by a visual artist Rachel Schragis during the occupation of Zuccotti Park in Wall Street district of Manhattan. However, as both an artist and an activist, Rachel was not the only one who put into practice this artwork; the creative act rather entailed a participatory process through which the official “Declaration of the Occupation of NYC” issued by the General Assembly of the movement – which was a written text, was transformed into a graphical rendering and became subsequently one of the notorious artworks of the OWS.

The context in which the artwork was created, put into practice, and eventually printed as a poster was the occupation of Zuccotti Park in the middle of Wall Street district of New York City for three months. As of September 17, 2011, the occupied park appeared as the space of deliberative process of decision-making and hosted the meetings of General Assembly (GA) as well as a multitude of artistic practices, creative and performative actions. In this context, Rachel's “mind map” occurred as a graphical response to the undiscovered question of what Occupy movement was at that particular moment inasmuch as it visualized the issues tackled throughout the meetings of the GA.

The graphically rendered “list of grievances” reiterated the continuous transition between the ideas, the three-dimensional lived space, and the two-dimensional flat surface of graphical cartography and made it through the performative practice. Therefore, this transitional process appeared in the making of the artwork as collective action and also in the final printed mind map. The map on two-dimensional surface as a consequence of the experience in the lived space of the occupation and the movement revealed the intertwinement of multiple space-times within the OWS. As a matter of fact, the contents of the map, map-making, and map-reading are notions susceptible to change and interpretation as well as to maintaining a certain political and social utility (Lefebvre 1974) and to enacting power relationships (Schechner 2002). In this respect, I would like to question in this paper the ways in which this collective-performative map-making embodied and transcribed the interconnection between the perceived, conceived, and lived space-time(s) (Lefebvre 1974, Harvey 2005) within the occupied space of the OWS.

In the wake of this interrogation, I will methodologically adopt a relational approach where the space appears not merely as a background or a support for action, but more of a performative act. In other words, spaces emerge with the relational arrangement of living beings and objects (Löw 2016) through action. Finally, the fieldwork includes a semi-structured interview conducted in-person with the artist that allows the comprehension and interpretation of the creative and participatory processes in the making of the mind map. While the first section provides a background on the context in which the artwork was created and performed, the second concerns the creative process of the mind map within the OWS. Those two sections project the circumstances under which the artwork originated and the ways in which it is created and connected to the OWS's overall organization. The third part accordingly involves the dialectic interrelation of the lived, conceived, and perceived spaces to understand the connective tissue between the lived space-time and the cartographical flat surface. Lastly, the mind map is discussed through its assembling feature of gestures and words during the creative process and also as a communicative tool for the OWS.

## The occupation of Zuccotti Park

The occupation of the park started off on September 17, 2011 and it occurred as a consequence of the congregation of multiple local activist groups that stood up against the unjust economic and social order identified by the Wall Street on the one hand, and the call of the anti-capitalist *Adbusters* magazine to occupy the Wall Street district with tents on the other. While these two occurrences are intrinsically related, it is equally crucial to bear in mind that the OWS was inspired by the post-2010 social movements such as the Arab Spring, notably the occupation of Tahrir square in Egypt, the Greek anti-austerity movement and the occupation of Madrid's Puerta del Sol square. Certainly, in different geographical, social, economic, and political contexts, the issues to protest and to occupy public spaces differed, yet, they all shared common elements of protestation such as the act of occupation of squares through encampments and the implementation of leaderless social movement, not to mention the widespread use of social networks.

The slogan of the OWS was "we are the 99%" against the wealthy 1%. The latter represented by the Wall Street appeared as the main body of the unequal distribution of resources, wealth and power in the contemporary United States of America. This concerns in particular the burst of real estate bubble and the government's decision to bail out banks, bound to the economic crisis in 2008, the rise of the unemployment rates, and the foreclosures. The 99%, on the other hand, were the people under the weight of debt and crisis against those who own 40% of the wealth. Moreover, the so-called Wall Street greed was entwined with the economic and political partnership of the major corporations and the government of the United States. All the preoccupations related to the economic crisis and the corporate greed was in fact exposed and condemned through the handmade signs created during the occupation of the park. Accordingly, the sporadic meetings of various groups of activists, students, artists, writers in Wall Street's Zuccotti Park at the beginning of the occupation grew into "New York City General Assembly" (NYCGA) while the movement spread its messages most particularly in the aftermath of the violent interventions of the police towards the non-violent protesters marching in New York's Union Square and Brooklyn Bridge.

Within the OWS, performative actions and artistic practices were considerably contributive factors in the spatial experience in and around the park and to grasp the issues debated in the movement. In the first place, the handmade and printed signs, and the drumming constituted the primary aesthetic in the park. As one of the activist/artists expressed, in the northwest quadrat of the park people created a "sort of tapestry of signs" on the ground. Moreover, Zuccotti Park incorporated an actual residential open-air space for those who were living in day and night inasmuch as various common structures such as the infirmary, the library, the kitchen, media relations corner, meditation and screen-printing areas. Those were developed spontaneously and the park was gradually filled in with the people joining the movement while the organization of the GA was built up in the course of events. In this context, the OWS enlivened "a world of possibility beyond 'the market' and 'the state' [where new] forms of livelihood and governance" emerged within the park yearning for the ideals of "justice, democracy and solidarity" (Miller 2020).

As previously mentioned, the central demand of the people in OWS – the 99%, concerned in particular the adjustment of the unjust economical system in parallel with the corrupt political culture in the US. Accordingly, the handmade signs and the slogans reflected those preoccupations: from individual messages that addressed a whole range of matters within the American society to issues particular to specific communities. Certainly, the house foreclosure, the power of the 99%, the greedy wealth of the 1% and the Wall Street, the climate change, the violence inflicted by the New York Police Department (NYPD), the poverty, anti-war messages, hope for a democratic society, and Medicare for all constituted the content of the signs for the most part. The salient point here is that the relationship of the people to the signs was highly performative in the sense that they did not simply created the signs and their content, but they curated

the space of claim as they lined up the handmade signs in several forms on the ground of Zuccotti Park. Therefore, it did not remain as one man's or woman's claim or creation, the overall performativity included the spontaneous and ephemeral interference of a collective body. Yet again, the ephemeral and temporary character of objects and actions was indeed a key aspect not only in sign-making or curating, but also in other performances and performative actions during the movement. As regards the graphically rendered "list of grievances" that Rachel composed, the ephemerality was challenged by the transformation of the handmade mind map into a printed poster.

## The creative process

The virtual artist Rachel Schragis was thus the mastermind of one of the artistic practices in the OWS which the present paper addresses as the "mind map." While being the creator of this original artwork, she was one of the activists who participated to the GA meeting where the "Declaration of the Occupation of NYC" was composed and announced on September 29. That day when the declaration was issued marked the starting point of the creative process of this artwork as well as her participation to the movement, which she defined as "a classical story of being activated into political work through Occupy." First of all, she became a member and organizer of the Arts and Culture Working Group, one of the working groups and committees that were formed with the emergence of the movement. Then, as a visual artist obsessed with making mind maps for many years, the declaration of the OWS was an inspiration to her coming up with the idea of a map that revealed the substance of the OWS and the written text that she thought of as a sort of "list of grievances." Her sitting down in the middle of Zuccotti Park to make this map in pencil on canvas took another shape with the participation of other activists in the park to help out with the outer rings and consequently with the inking of the artwork. After being shared on social networks, the mind map caught public's attention including the members of the OWS's GA, subsequently it was reproduced as a printed poster.

As a matter of fact, Rachel's "mind map" as a graphical rendering of a written official declaration acted as a visual response to the uncomprehended OWS at the beginning of the occupation. At that particular moment, the media was questioning the lack of clear demands and a leader in the movement, a fact that was common in the post-2010 movements. Furthermore, the artwork visually displayed the connections of grievances of unacquainted people resisting in the same movement. Her conceptualizing and drawing the "list of grievances" map was primarily based on a subjective artistic experience: she was doing her "thing" as expected and presenting her interpretation of engagement within the movement. This is the reason why she stated "no one makes you part of Occupy but you. You make your own official. What the group can provide was accountability or feedback or strategy or messaging." She contributed to the movement within her own ability and talent while being a member of the Arts and Culture Working Group as well as the Puppets Guild, her actions were reinforced within specific networks of knowledge and handicraft. However, her artistic contribution became one of the well-known posters of the OWS through the GA's financial support after its propagation on social media.

In that respect, as one of the editors of *Adbusters* magazine Micah White argued, "Occupy thrived when it benefited from the specialist knowledge of its participants. The strength of true horizontalism comes from recognizing that our fundamental equality, our shared humanity, is derived from our diversity" (White 2016: 130-131). The horizontal organization of the movement acted upon the "horizontal leaderlessness," (*ibid.*) which came into view through the most original practical invention, the "human microphone," where the audience repeated in waves the words and phrases of the speaker through the rest of the audience. Since the use of microphones and megaphones in Zuccotti Park was

prohibited by law, the human microphone of the GAs operated efficiently in the transmission of the ideas and discussions “in the horizontal acoustics of the crowd instead of the electrified intimacy of ‘amplified sound’” (Kim 2011.)

Rachel’s map reflected thus her being a constitutive part of the OWS community, not only through sharing her creativity and handicraft, but also the graphical projection of the non-hierarchical structure of the movement. “Let these facts be known” hand-written at the center of the map was encircled by the bubbles of written ideas directly taken from the list of grievances in the original declaration. Around this first ring, the outer rings grew out of the participatory “crowd-sourced editing process” (Schragis 2011) in Zuccotti Park where hundreds of people contributed to the mapping of ideas. The participatory and horizontal process of creation appeared specifically at this stage of map-making. Therefore, the map also enabled a circular visual reading of the written declaration just like the decision-making processes in the GA. The ideas in the form of words enunciated in the occupied space of Zuccotti Park and then transcribed in a conventional manner, finally transformed into a graphical cartography that represented the interconnected undulating words comparable to the horizontal acoustics of the human microphone. This is how Rachel’s graphical “list of grievances” revealed the continuing interrelation between the ideas, words, the three-dimensional lived space, and the two-dimensional flat surface of graphical cartography which occurred through collective performative action.

### **From lived-space to creative cartography**

As regards the cartography and the map on two-dimensional surface, it is worth mentioning the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre whose concept of absolute space refers to the “reduction of three-dimensional realities to two dimensions” (1974: 285) such as maps and graphic representations of space, maintaining a certain political and social utility. According to him, map-making and map-reading as well as the contents of the map are susceptible to change and interpretation. In Lefebvre’s tripartite division of space, he addresses the material perceived space as the space of the experience and human interaction in everyday life, while the official representation of space by the urban planners and cartographers refers to a space that is conceived in specific contexts. To David Harvey (2006), the geometrical space incorporates the space of calculations and standardizations as in the city plans and urban structuring, on the one hand, and the relative space reflects the observers’ perspective, on the other. In this respect, Richard Schechner states that the maps “perform a particular interpretation of the world [and] every map is a ‘projection’” (2006:41) as the representation on the flat surface. This idea in fact appears in the enactment of the world with the eyes of colonial powers, as in the Mercator’s cylindrical map projection. Accordingly, Schechner accentuates the phenomenon of maps enacting power relationships whereas to Lefebvre, maps may also result in a “remove from reality” (1974: 84).

Rachel’s map, on the other hand, enacts the horizontal non-hierarchical relationships within the OWS where the ideas continuously grew, expanded and took multiple forms going beyond the material space of Zuccotti Park. The artistic production, the imagination, the sensible and the dreams, thus the non-verbal realm introduced an affective aspect in the shape of images and symbols. All this, in fact, characterizes Lefebvre’s concept of lived space-time, that is the space of users, inhabitants and artists, where “the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (1974: 39). Therefore, instead of the official representation of space, the perceived, conceived, and lived spaces simultaneously exist and inhabit the creativity within the OWS.

Rachel Schragis’ hand-made map born out of the “consensus run meeting,” in such a framework reflected thus the experience of occupation and the relational arrangement of living beings and objects through performative action. While incorporating a collective-performative map-making and echoing the spirit and mindset of the occupation,

the two-dimensional map imprinted the participatory process and connected the lived three-dimensional space and cartographic understanding of space in its own terms. The spatial representation of embraces thus both egocentric and allocentric perspectives, that is to say, both body-centered and flattened frameworks (Tversky 2019) referring to gestural communication and abstract thought. From this perspective, while the egocentric framework represents the lived experience in the occupied space where the body is at the center of action, the allocentric perspective remains outside the body and uses a sort of bird's eye view similar to cartographic practices.

Moreover, when this collaborative work of art was turned into a printed poster with the financial support of the GA, it served as a point of reference for the inquiries about the movement. Indeed, the map, to Rachel, “answered the question what [was] Occupy about,” when it was not very clear or conventional in the eyes of the journalists or the general public. It accordingly revealed the processes that the protesters expressed themselves and the mindset they adopted within the movement, not to mention the issues they fought against. Hence, Rachel's mind map pictured the connections of grievances of unacquainted people and its reproduction as a poster played a considerable part in dissemination and graphic visualization of the movement.

### **Mapping of ideas through words and gestures**

Barbara Tversky argues that “creating a map means integrating many different experiences and flattening them to a plane” (2019: 119). In Rachel's map, the action of drawing transformed the written declaration into something else, an artwork in the shape of a map, still holding the characteristics of the written language. Yet, as previously described, creating this mind map involved an experience beyond a simple transcription of a written statement. The action itself was an act of incorporation of multiple experiences of multiple people into a two-dimensional surface. On that surface, the declaration formed the core of the artwork through which the bubbles of ideas expanded into connected rings of common grievances. Indeed, the highlighted statement “our increasingly interconnected world obscures the underlying truth that all of our grievances are connected” on one top of the mind map verbalized the multiple interconnections. Each clustering of words connected to people's lives on a personal level that intertwined with the collective experience, which enabled them to perform the bonds both intellectually and corporally.

Furthermore, the act of drawing, doing the artwork in real space-time suggests a gestural and corporal dimension similar to the other performative actions in the OWS. As Tversky develops, the gestural dimension incorporates another way of thinking and communicating as well. For instance, the use of specific gestures during the assemblies in the park such as the hand signals instead of words to communicate exposes the communicative capacity of gestures under such circumstances. In this sense, those hand signals have direct meanings and they resemble the way the maps and graphs communicate. She argues, therefore, that instead of the common perception that words precede gestures, they conjointly evolve and develop. Curiously, Rachel's mind map embodies both words and gestures in such a way as to voice in flat surface the story of the OWS.

“Created by actions in space” (ibid: 197), gestures and maps are dynamic and static at the same time, reflecting the interconnectedness of the perceived, the conceived and the lived space-times. Their difference lies on the temporality as Tversky specifies: that is, gestures are performed in here and now while the maps and graphs do not depend necessarily to the present time, but they interconnect the past and the future, like the language. On another note, the divergence can be identified in the temporariness of the gestures in the present time interaction: their representation of thought differs from the map and the graph which lasts. In this respect, Rachel's map of “The declaration of the occupation of New York City,” as the very object and as the representation of map-making process, I believe, gathers the gestural, corporal



dimension with the transcription of ideas and context on the same cartographical flat surface. In addition to that, it certainly embodies the gestural dimension while transcribing the whole experience of space-time.

In conclusion, from the occupation of Zuccotti Park, the assemblies where the words, gestures, and thought intermingled to the handmade signs and performative creative actions, Rachel's mind map could incorporate the overall movement through its indirect tools. It demonstrated how the three-dimensional experience was connected to and transformed into the two-dimensional space of the map. The rings, tents, connections, lines, waves, people, trees, words, gestures; all constituted a sort of connective tissue throughout the occupation whether on cartographical surface or in lived space of the OWS.

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