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## Reflections on the meaning of public space: A critical psychoanalytic perspective

Public space is fundamental to political life: Consider the demonstrations of the Arab Spring and their confiscation of public spaces and reflect on the Occupy Wall Street movement that began in lower Manhattan. From a political psychological and psychoanalytical view, one is left with several questions: What is the meaning and experience of public space? How do we feel about public space? What does it mean to enter and participate in public space? Why do some people move toward it? Why do others move away from it? And, why do some move against public space? In reframing the concept of public space so that we might consider these questions, I draw upon the dialectical school of critical theory and upon the post-Kleinian object relations theories of Winnicott (1971), Ogden (1985; 1989; 1994), Modell (1984; 1993), and others. Critical theory offers a dialectical critique of society in the interest of social change; contemporary psychoanalytic theory contributes the concept of private space (and private self), which deepens our understanding and dialectical critique of public space. In sum, this article explores the psychological, experiential, and unconscious roots of public space.

From a critical psychoanalytic perspective, the notion of public space is understood alongside the idea of private space. Public space is defined in dialectical tension with the concept of private space. It is critical to keep in mind that the human potential for social and political dialogue and civic engagement are cultivated or suffocated in childhood and society. The viability of public space, as a physical and symbolic attribute of social democracy, depends upon emotionally whole and non-traumatized private selves hatched from nurturing and good enough holding environments (private spaces). Good enough holding environments foster the imagination and curiosity essential for political dialogue and empathic (subject-to-subject) human relations, which signify potential private and public space. In my view, reimagining public space as a dialectic between public and private calls attention to the importance of self-organization and conscious awareness of otherwise unconscious, regressive forces. The persecutory dimension of private and public space is never eliminated; rather it is neutralized and counter-balanced by the potential and transitional space.