



## **THEORIZING THE PUBLIC REALM**

### **MPAS 585**

Fall 2009  
Tuesdays, 6:00pm-8:50pm  
IFT Lecture Room

Instructor:

**Joshua Decter**

Director and Assistant Professor  
MPAS Program: Art in the Public Sphere  
decter@usc.edu

With Rhea Anastas (8/25/09 & 9/22/09), Visiting Assistant Professor, MPAS Program

**Theorizing the Public Realm** is a theory-driven, discussion-oriented seminar that offers a selective, critical overview of key concepts of public space and the public sphere, from a variety of disciplinary and ideological perspectives.

The course examines cities as both real and conceptual entities, exploring the complexities of global urban public spheres. We will consider the historical evolution of the city as both a theoretical and actual entity, in relation to changing notions of public space, and the private realm. Utilizing a history of writings on cities, public space, art & architectural practice, the internet/cyberspace, and other related subjects, we will consider urban social environments in terms of economics, demographics, politics, cultural production, and psychology. In cities characterized by density, dispersal (or both), there are frictions between open and closed spaces, between private and public interests, between access and inaccessibility, and between individuals, suggesting that “public space” (and, more broadly, “the public sphere”), is a contradictory matrix of conflicting and unifying social and political interests— a zone of control, and resistances to control.

We will inquire about the task of art – and the artist, critic, theorist, organizer or scholar – in relation to the public and/or private realm, and consider what is at stake in utilizing public space as a platform for art and other forms of cultural production. Why are we preoccupied with such issues? Because it is central to democracy that the public sphere remains an actively contested territory, a zone in which “publics” and “citizens” develop the capacities to critically influence the social space of their cities.

But, we might ask, in our capacity as curators, organizers, writers, artists, or scholars: what actually happens when space is claimed in the public realm for a mode of cultural production that seeks to produce some kind of transformative ideological, political, perceptual, or psychological effect (temporary or enduring), for – or in collaboration with – “publics” or “citizens”?

If artistic, architectural and other types of cultural interventions into public city-spaces constitute a kind of urban acupuncture (an expression used to describe urban re-development in Barcelona), is there an underlying social condition that requires treatment?

Or, is “public space” an imaginary ideological construction?

An introductory sequence of notions:

- “The figure of the flaneur. He resembles the hash eater, takes space up into himself like the latter. In hashish intoxication, the space starts winking at us: ‘What do you think may have gone on here?’ And with the very same question, space accosts the flaneur.”
  - Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 841.
- “The production of psychogeographic maps, or even the introduction of alterations such as more or less arbitrarily transposing maps of two different regions, can contribute to clarifying certain wanderings that express not subordination to randomness but complete insubordination to habitual influences (influences generally categorized as tourism, that popular drug as repugnant as sports or buying on credit). A friend recently told me that he had just wandered through the Harz region of Germany while blindly following the directions of a map of London.”
  - Guy-Ernest Debord, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*
- “At this point, cognitive mapping in the broader sense comes to require the coordination of existential data (the empirical position of the subject) with un-lived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality.”
  - Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

- “What is this place?”
  - Edward Soja, Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory
- “The right to the city, says Henri Lefebvre, ‘cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities.’ On the contrary, ‘it can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life.’ The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of access to what already exists: it is a right to change it.”
  - David Harvey, *The Right to the City*
- “... the essence of public domain: different groups become attached to a particular place and somehow or other they must reach a compromise. Which codes should dominate there? What behavior should be tolerated? Who is allowed to ask whom to adapt? These are questions that are part and parcel of meaningful public space. From our viewpoint, a cultural-geographic analysis must tackle both the analysis of the production of all kinds of places and the analysis of the specific way in which those places are used or consumed, sometimes contrary to the intentions of the producer. In the network society everyone puts together their own city. Naturally this touches on the essence of the concept of public domain. The modern city is most easily understood as an archipelago of enclaves, and if the citizen is continuously occupied with maintaining his or her own small network with as little possible friction with other groups, then that does indeed ostensibly spell the demise of any form of public domain. However, that is not how the private space of the archipelago resident looks. The paradoxical fact is that many people are still searching for that experience of intensely felt public places. Public domain, in our firm opinion, not so much a place as an experience. Public domain experiences occur at the boundary between friction and freedom. On the one hand there is always the tension of a confrontation with the unfamiliar; on the other, the liberation of the experience of a different approach. In the main, our public domain experiences are in fact related to entering the parochial domain of ‘others.’”
  - Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp, In Search of New Public Domain
- “You don't get to go just anywhere in a city, and the same is true of cyberspace. In both domains, barriers and thresholds play crucial roles. Once public and private spaces are distinguished from each other they can begin to play complementary roles in urban life; a well-organized city needs both. And so it is in cyberspace. At the very least, this means that some part of our emerging electronic habitat should be set aside for public uses -- just as city planners have traditionally designated land for public squares, parks, and civic institutions. A

space is genuinely public, as Kevin Lynch once pointed out, only to the extent that it really is openly accessible and welcoming to members of the community that it serves. It must also allow users considerable freedom of assembly and action. And there must be some kind of public control of its use and its transformation over time. The same goes for public cyberspace, so creators and maintainers of public, semipublic, and pseudopublic parts of the online world -- like the makers of city squares, public parks, office building lobbies, shopping mall atriums, and Disneyland Main Streets -- must consider who gets in and who gets excluded, what can and cannot be done there, whose norms are enforced, and who exerts control.”

- William J. Mitchell, [City of Bits](#)
  
- “... locality-producing activities are not only context-driven but are also context-generative.”
  - Arjun Appadurai, [Modernity at Large](#)
  
- “‘WHERE DO I BELONG?’ seems to be the question that plagues so many of the discussions that I participate in. As a constant lament it refers to dislocations felt by displaced subjects towards disrupted histories and to shifting and transient national identities.”
  - Irit Rogoff, [Terra Infirma: Geography’s Visual Culture](#)
  
- “... the notion of urban acupuncture as developed by my colleague, the distinguished Barcelona urbanist Manuel de Sola Morales. By this term he intends a similar strategy of making catalytic, small-scale interventions, with the condition that they should be realizable within a relatively short period of time, and capable of achieving a maximum impact with regard to the immediate surroundings.”
  - Kenneth Frampton, [SEVEN POINTS FOR THE MILLENNIUM](#) an untimely manifesto
  
- “We are concerned with the understanding of how cities and societies change on the basis of collective projects and societal conflicts generated through history. Our questions address the issue of how and why the creators challenge the dominants....”
  - Manuel Castells, [A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Change](#)
  
- “The city in transition, in immanent and perpetual flows; not the city undergoing transition, in transcendent structural change.”
  - Deborah Hauptmann, [Cities in Transition](#)

- “The question then is: how can artists continue creating signs in the city? From my point of view there are three possibilities to confront: work from the idea of temporality; work from the relation with the context; or make an interdisciplinary collaboration.”
  - Antoni Muntadas, “Revealing Public Space: A Conversation between Juan Herreros & Antoni Muntadas”

## **COURSE STIPULATIONS**

You will be graded according to the following percentages:

- Class Participation: 30%
- 5-page Midterm paper: 20%
- 10-page Final paper: 40%
- In-class Presentation: 10%

Please note: no more than 3 class absences are permitted; an excess of 3 absences may result in a failing grade.

## **SYLLABUS**

### **8/25/09**

To view in class:

Dan Graham, Westkunst (Modern Period): Dan Graham Segment, 1980, 7:10 mins., color and sound, VHS to DVD

Dan Graham, Excerpts, Rock My Religion, 1982-84, 55:27 mins., b& w and color, sound, VHS to DVD

Nick Relph and Oliver Payne, Driftwood, 1999, 25 mins., film (Super 8 and 16mm) to VHS

### **9/1/09**

Decter introduction.

The Fall of Public Man, Richard Sennett, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1974/1992.

- “The Public Domain,” pp. 3-27.
- “Turmoil of Life in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century/The Impact of Industrial Capitalism on Public Life,” pp. 125-149.

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, Jurgen Habermas, MIT Press, 1991.

- “Introduction: Preliminary Demarcation of a Type of Bourgeois Public Sphere,” pp. 1-26

**9/8/09**

The Arcades Project, Walter Benjamin (translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin), The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge and London, 2002.

- Translators’ Forward, pp. ix-xiv
- Exposes: “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (1935), and “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (1939), pp. 1-26.

The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project, Susan Buck-Morss, MIT Press, 1991.

- “Introduction,” pp. 3-7.
- “Spatial Origins,” pp. 22-46.

Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture, Anthony Vidler, The MIT Press: Cambridge and London, 2000/2001.

- Introduction, pp. 1-14.
- “Agoraphobia- Psychopathologies of Urban Space,” pp. 25-50.
- “Spaces of Passage- The Architecture of Estrangement: Simmel, Kracauer, Benjamin,” pp. 65-79.
- “Dead End Street- Walter Benjamin and the Space of Distraction,” pp. 81-97.

**9/15/09**

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, Jurgen Habermas, MIT Press, 1991.

- “Social Structures of the Public Sphere,” pp. 27-56.

“Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention,”  
Douglas Kellner (electronic/web document)

In Search of New Public Domain: Analysis and Strategy, Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp, NAI Publishers, 2002.

- “The Public Domain as Perspective,” pp. 7-17.

Supplemental:

The Economy of Cities, Jane Jacobs, Vintage Books, 1969/70.

- “The Valuable Inefficiencies and Impracticalities of Cities,” pp. 85-121.
- “How Cities Start Growing,” pp. 122-144.

Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century, Peter Hall, Blackwell Publishers, 2002.

- “Cities of Imagination,” pp. 1-12.
- “The City of Monuments,” pp. 188-217.

Mutations, Rem Koolhaas (et al), Actar Editorial, 2001.

- “How to Build a City”

**9/22/09**

Sexuality and Space (editor: Beatriz Colomina). Princeton Papers in Architecture, Princeton Architectural Press, 1992.

- “Bodies-Cities,” Elizabeth Grosz, pp. 241-253.

Out of Order, Out of Sight: Vol. I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art, 1968-1992, Adrian Piper, MIT Press, 1996. Pages 29-53.

- “Talking to Myself: The Ongoing Autobiography of an Art Object” (1970-73), pp. 29-53.

To view in class:

A selection of videos by Joan Jonas, Valie Export, Dara Birnbaum and others from UbuWeb, <http://www.ubu.com/>

**9/29/09**

Situationist International Anthology, ed. Ken Knabb, Berkeley, Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981.

- “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” Guy Debord, pp. 8-12
- “Theory of the Derive,” Guy Debord, pp. 62-66.
- “Situationist Thesis on Traffic,” Guy Debord, pp. 69-70.
- “Another City for Another Life,” Constant, pp. 71-73.

Writing on Cities, Henri Lefebvre, Blackwell Publishers, 1995.

- “Lost in Transposition- Time, Space and the City,” pp. 3-62.
- “Philosophy and the City,” pp. 86-93.
- “The Specificity of the City,” pp. 100-103.

The Foucault Reader, Michel Foucault (ed. Paul Rabinow), Pantheon Books, 1984.

- “Panopticism,” pp. 207-213.

“Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias,” Michel Foucault (electronic/web document).

Supplemental:

Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century, Peter Hall, Blackwell Publishers, 2002.

- “The City of Towers,” pp. 218-261.

**10/6/09**

The Image of the City, Kevin Lynch, MIT Press, 1960.

- “The Image of the Environment,” pp. 1-13.
- “Three Cities,” pp. 14-45.
- “The City Image and Its Elements,” pp. 46-90.

Recombinant Urbanism: Conceptual Modeling in Architecture, Urban Design, and City Theory, David Grahame Shane, Wiley-Academy, 2005.

- Preface, pp. 6-11.
- Introduction, pp. 13-17.

Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies, Reyner Banham, The University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2001.

- “In the Rear-view Mirror,” pp. 3-18.
- “The Transportation Palimpsest,” pp. 57-76.

City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles, Mike Davis, Vintage Books, 1992.

- Prologue: “The View from Futures Past,” pp. 1-14.

Supplemental:

Learning from Las Vegas, Robert Venturi, et. al., The MIT Press: Cambridge, 1977

- Prefaces
- “Part I: A Significance for A&P Parking Lots, or Learning from Las Vegas,” pp. 3-73.
- “The Las Vegas Strip,” p. 116.
- “Urban Sprawl and the Megastructure,” pp. 117-127.

**10/13/09**

**Midterm Paper Due.**

“Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” Fredric Jameson, *New Left Review*, number 146, July-August 1984, pp. 53-92.

The Practice of Everyday Life, Michel de Certeau, (trans. Steven Rendall), University of California Press, 1984.

- “Walking in the City,” pp. 91-110.

Supplemental:

The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, ed. Hal Foster, Bay Press, 1983

- “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,” Kenneth Frampton, pp. 16-30.

Incorporations, Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (editors), Zone Books, 1992.

- “Unfolding Events,” Peter Eisenman, pp. 422-427.

**10/20/09**

The Politics of Public Space, ed., Neil Smith and Setha Low, Routledge, 2006.

- “Introduction: The Imperative of Public Space,” Neil Smith and Setha Low, pp. 1-16.

Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics, Rosalyn Deutsche, MIT Press, 1998.

- “Introduction”
- “(Public Space and Democracy)- Tilted Arc and the Uses of Democracy”
- “(The Social Production of Space)- Krzysztof Wodiczko’s Homeless Projection and the Site of Urban ‘Revitalization’”

Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space, ed. Michael Sorkin, Hill and Wang, 1992.

- “Introduction: Variations on a Theme Park,” Michael Sorkin, pp. xi-xv.
- “The World in a Shopping Mall,” Margaret Crawford, pp. 3-30.

Supplemental:

Mutations, Rem Koolhaas (et al), Actar Editorial, 2001.

- “Shopping (Harvard Project on the City),” pp. 124-183.
- “The American City,” Sanford Kwinter & Daniela Fabricius, pp. 484-493.

**10/27/09**

Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, Marc Auge, Verso Press, 1995.

- “Prologue,” pp. 1-6.
- “From Places to Non-Places,” pp. 75-115.

City of Bits: Space, Place and the Infobahn, William J. Mitchell, The MIT Press: Cambridge and London, 1995/1996.

- “Pulling Glass,” pp. 2-5.
- “Recombinant Architecture,” pp. 46-105.
- “Soft Cities,” pp. 106-131.

Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory, Edward W. Soja, Verso Books, 1997.

- “Preface and Postscript,” pp. 1-9.
- “Spatializations: Marxist Geography and Critical Social Theory,” pp. 43-75.

Supplemental:

- “The Generic City” in Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 1248-1264.

## **11/3/09**

Mutations, Rem Koolhaas (et al), Actar Editorial, 2001.

- “The Global City: Introducing a Concept and its History,” Saskia Sassen, pp. 104-123.

The Castells Reader on Cities and Social Theory, ed. Ida Susser, Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2002.

- “The Space of Flows,” Manuel Castells, pp. 314-366.

The Politics of Public Space, ed., Neil Smith and Setha Low, Routledge, 2006.

- “The Political Economy of Public Space,” David Harvey, pp. 17-34.
- “Building the American Way: Public Subsidy, Private Space,” Dolores Hayden, pp. 35-48.

## **11/10/09**

A Landscape of Events, Paul Virilio (translated by Julie Rose), The MIT Press: Cambridge and London, 2000.

- “Forward by Bernard Tschumi,” pp. viii – ix
- “The Fire Tomorrow,” pp. 68-73.

Recombinant Urbanism: Conceptual Modeling in Architecture, Urban Design, and City Theory, David Grahame Shane, Wiley-Academy, 2005.

- “Conclusion: Heterotopias, the Net City, and Recombinant Urbanism,” pp. 304-315.

Terra Infirma: Geography’s Visual Culture, Irit Rogoff, Routledge 2000.

- “Introduction: This is not.... unhomed geographies,” pp. 1-13.
- “Subjects/places/spaces,” pp. 14-35.

In Search of New Public Domain, Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp, NAI Publishers, 2002.

- “The New Cultural Geography,” pp. 21-69.

Supplemental:

Terra Infirma: Geography’s Visual Culture, Irit Rogoff, Routledge 2000.

- “Mapping,” pp. 73-111
- “Borders,” pp. 112-143.

**11/17/09**

Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory, Edward W. Soja, Verso Books, 1997.

- “It All Comes Together in Los Angeles,” pp. 190-221.
- “Taking Los Angeles Apart: Towards a Postmodern Geography,” pp. 222-248.

The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory, Norman M. Klein, Verso: London and New York, 1997.

- “Booster Myths, Urban Erasure,” pp. 27-72.

Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space, ed. Michael Sorkin, Hill and Wang, 1992.

- “See you in Disneyland,” Michael Sorkin, pp. 205-232.

In Search of New Public Domain, Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp, NAI Publishers, 2002.

- “Public Domain as a Brief for Design and Policy,” pp. 109-135.

Supplemental:

Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space, ed. Michael Sorkin, Hill and Wang, 1992.

- “Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space,” Mike Davis, pp. 154-180.

**11/24/09**

Critical Re-Considerations:

- Selection from Relational Aesthetics, Nicolas Bourriaud, Les Presses du Reel, 1998.
- Selection from Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art, ed. Grant Kester, University of California Press, 2004.
- Selection from Participation, ed. Claire Bishop, The MIT Press, 2006.
- Selection from Did Someone Say Participate?: An Atlas of Spatial Practice, eds. Shumon Basar and Markus Miessen, The MIT Press, 2006.
- Selection from Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945, eds. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

**12/1/09**

OPEN DISCUSSION

**12/8/09**

**(Final class)**

**Presentations.**

**Final Paper Due.**

\*\*\*

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student

Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.