

Public Art/Private Spaces

Instructor: John Jota Leños
Fall 2002 / Wednesdays 6:30-9:30 p.m.
Office: Fine Arts 417
Phone: 412 268 8151 (x 88151)
e-mail: leanos@andrew.cmu.edu

Course Description:

American urban centers have faced a significant degeneration of public space through the convergence of mega-advertising, car culture, cell phone usage, surveillance cameras, wireless computers and the globalization of the suburban model. The privatization of public space has made it increasingly difficult to define the parameters of the public sphere which itself is a multifaceted and highly contested idea. In this course, we will consider the concept of the public sphere and debate how visual/performance art, art activism and interventionist art are incorporated into what is considered 'public.' We will look into how urban planning, architecture and high technology are changing the experience of public life in American cities and will directly apply our findings onto public spaces in Pittsburgh. We will concentrate on how art in public spaces functions in relation to its local context, specifically its role in community building, political change and resistance. By combining research and readings with artist-ethnographic fieldwork, we will collaborate to create visual, interactive and/or performative public artworks in the city.

This course is NOT about state sanctioned or corporate funded public art projects. We will NOT deal with airport art, statues in the park, or abstract sculptures in the plaza. We will not be looking at how interpersonal, private life intervenes in the public realm nor will we be looking into matters of bourgeois privacy. Rather, we will consider issues of the public and private in terms of power and attempt to complicate and engage these issues through our dialogue and artwork.

Learning objectives for this course include:

Approach:

This is NOT an art history class. You will not be sitting in the dark, staring at slides, jotting down names and dates ad nauseum. You will be interacting and sharing your ideas in class—your preparation for class and participation in the classroom will determine most of your grade (see Evaluation below).

My approach to teaching is for the most part founded in the ideas of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian liberation educator who wrote The Pedagogy of the Oppressed. He believed that knowledge emerges through restless, optimistic inquiry, experimentation and dialogue between student and teacher.

To quote him:

The revolutionary educator's efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. Her efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them.

Throughout this semester we will be investigative partners and collaborators. Our model will be based on a roving hierarchy in which each one of you and groups of you will lead discussions and modes of inquiry.

Course Work/Expectations:

1. Reading Critiques: The course will be conducted by groups of students critiquing the readings assigned for each week. Each "lead group" will be assigned at least one set of readings which they must present in class. The "lead groups" will be responsible for the following:
 - Leading an insightful discussion about specific concepts that you think are important from the text
 - Proposing fundamental questions about the text
 - Putting forward inventive and/or alternative ideas and theory for discussion
 - Experimenting with the form of presentation
 - Generating excitement about the ideas in the text

It is imperative that all students come to class having done the readings and thought about them in a critical manner. The students that are not leading the discussions for the week will be responsible for the following:

- Keeping a journal of notes from each reading and turning it in each week
- Coming to class with three questions and/or perspectives that you would like to discuss
- Presenting these questions and perspectives in class

I will be available to guide lead groups in their proposed activity and assist you in highlighting and clarifying ideas. I have set aside **Tuesday evenings from 6 to 7 p.m.** (the day before class) to meet with lead groups who are presenting the week's reading. Please come and meet with me to discuss the readings and ideas to be put forth. This can be used as a cramming session before your presentation.

2. Artist-Ethnographic Study: Students will be conducting two ethnographic fieldwork studies of public spaces in Pittsburgh through the lens of a social critic/artist. These ethnographies will involve going to specific sites to observe the social systems, ask questions and make predictions. I will be giving you a handout of the guidelines for these assignments as the dates near. You will turn in written evaluations of these studies on the dates specified below as well as make a brief class presentation on your findings.

3. **Public Art Proposal:** All students will have to turn in a 2—3 page proposal for a public art project **no later than November 6**. This proposal should consist of the following:
 - Description of the project—what the project is, where it will take place, what it will look, sound, feel or taste like
 - Justification of the project—why you are doing it
 - Explanation of how the project relates to readings, discussions and ideas brought up in class
 - Timeline of the project—how long it will take you to complete and how long it will last

4. **Final Project:** The final public art project must be **completed by December 4**. All students will make 10-15 minute in-class oral summary of their projects and turn in a written report of the work. Both oral and written reports must include some form of documentation (photography, video, remnants, etc). I will provide you with a guide for the format of your written summary and oral presentation. Your final project will be evaluated on the following criteria:
 - Dedication to the project
 - Inventiveness, experimentation and willingness to take aesthetic, performative and/or political chances
 - Consideration and sensitivity for your audience
 - Aesthetic quality of finished product
 - Quality of documentation
 - Quality of final presentation

I will be working with you individually and in groups on the conceptualization, development and completion of your projects. I will also present several guides and examples of ways to go about this work.

In sum, all students will be responsible for proposing critical theory, conducting research and creating artwork. You will not be alone in this work. Your peers and collaborators are here to investigate, argue and refine your ideas. I will be working with groups in the development of your theory and public artworks.

Evaluation and Grading:

Since this course is based on dialogue, exchange and artistic experimentation, most of your grade (60%) will be based on the quality and quantity of your preparation outside of class and your participation in class. This portion of your grade will be evaluated through the effectiveness of your group's presentations, your ability to speak to ideas during class and to allow others to speak, and your journals/notes on the readings. The final portion of your

grade (40%) will be based on the thoroughness and inventiveness of your ethnographies (15%) and your final project (25%).

Attendance is required. You will be downgraded for missing class. Please let me know if you cannot make a class.

Calendar:

AUGUST 28 Introductions

SEPTEMBER 4 The Market Militarization of Public Space: Surveillance and the Politics of Self-Control

Readings:

- Michel Foucault—"The Eye of Power"
- Mike Davis—"Fortress L.A."
- Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett—"Performing the City: Reflections on the Urban Vernacular"
- Margaret Crawford—"Blurring the Boundaries of Public Space and Private Life"

SEPTEMBER 11 Advertising and the Privatization of Public Space

Readings:

- Sharon Zukin—"Whose Culture? Whose City?"
- Howard Gossage—"How to Look at Billboards"
- Kalle Lasn and Richard DeGrandpre—"Toxic Culture USA"
- Amos Kenigsberg—"Peace, Love and Marketing"

SEPTEMBER 18 The Problem of Public Art—Audience, Community and Action

Readings:

- Martha Rosler—"The Birth and Death of the Viewer: On the Function of Public Art"
- Suzanne Lacy—"Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys"
- Patricia Phillips—"Public Constructions"

SEPTEMBER 25 Role of artist: What is responsibility of artist?

Readings:

- Suzi Gablik—"Connective Aesthetics: Art After Individualism"

- Martha Rosler—“Place, Position, Power, Politics”
- Estella Conwill Majazo—“To Search for the Good and Make it Matter”

OCTOBER 2

Cultural Participation and Pedagogy

Readings:

- Roundtable—“Cultural Participation”
- Aida Mancillas—“The Citizen Artist”
- Tom Finkelpearl—“Paulo Freire: Discussing Dialogue”

OCTOBER 9

NO CLASS MEETING—BLACKBOARD SESSION

Ethnographies

Readings:

- Roland Barthes—“Center-City, Empty Center and ‘No Address’”
- Margaret Crawford—“The World in a Shopping Mall”
- *Setha Low—“On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture” (Field Notes)*

OCTOBER 16

NO CLASS MEETING—BLACKBOARD SESSION

DUE: Ethnographic Studies via Blackboard electronic drop-box

OCTOBER 23 -MID-TERM

Resistance from the Margin

Readings:

- bell hooks—“Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Oppenness”
- Steve Pile—“Opposition, Political Identities and Space of Resistance”
- Walter Benjamin—“The Author as Producer”
- Hakim Bey—“TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone”

OCTOBER 30

Performance Gesture as Radical Politics

Readings:

- Coco Fusco—“Latin American performance and the *reconquista* of civil space”
- Yolanda Broyles-González—“El Teatro Campesino and the Mexican Popular Performance Tradition”
- Ondine Chavoy—“Orphans of Modernisms: The Performance Art of Asco”
- Goodale Eastman, Elaine “The Ghost Dance War”

NOVEMBER 6

Hidden Consequences of Public Space/Art

Due: Public Art Proposals

Readings:

- Lucy Lippard—“The Best-laid Plans . . . and Public Places”
- Krzysztof Wodiczko—“Strategies of Address: Which Media, Which Publics?”
- Patricia Phillips—“Out of Order: The Public Art Machine”

NOVEMBER 13

The Blank Slate: the Margins, the Desire for Disturbance and Social Transformation

Readings:

- Robert Riley—“Leave Proof: Media and Public Information”
 - Ricardo Dominguez—“Electronic Disturbance: An Interview”
- Collin & Reiko “3 Rivers—2nd Nature: the River Dialogues” (Art and Plannig)*

NOVEMBER 20

Strategies of Resistance/Subversion: Political Voice of the Street

Readings:

- Timothy Drescher—“Street Subversion: The Political Geography of Murals and Graffiti”
- James Tracy—“The Art of Social Justice”
- Paul Von Blum—“Resistance Art in Los Angeles”
- Abbie Hoffmann—“Revolution for the Hell of It”
- Marguerite Waller—“Border Boda or Divorce Fronterizo”
- Julie Delgado—“Capoeira and Break-Dancing: At the Roots of Resistance”

NOVEMBER 27

NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY)

DECEMBER 4

FINAL PROJECTS DUE