Course: Public Art and Public Space  
Course Instructor: Dr. Andrew Findley

Introduction:

Public space is not always defined by physical characteristics, nor is the government the only authority that can designate space as public. In contrast, over the past three centuries (since the American revolutionary period), public space and its manifestations have changed dramatically as a consequence of the emergence of new forms of government, increased levels of individual and group participation in the public realm, and a pronounced public movement toward emphasizing the secular.

Prior to the 19th century AD, many public spaces were the product of intertwined religious and civic efforts. From the Classical period (c. 5th century BC) to the Renaissance and mid-Modern periods (c. 15th-18th centuries AD), the Western world (Europe and the Americas) was largely unified in religious composition, first adhering to polytheism, and later Christianity. Broadly speaking, these religious frameworks were rarely a matter of choice. For example, the ancient Greeks had no word for religion - it was simply an accepted aspect of life. Moreover, in many premodern societies, leaders were thought to have an exclusive proximity to the divine. This was evident in electoral and royal systems of government ranging from the Roman Senate, to the divine Roman Emperor, the Kings of Medieval Europe, and the Catholic Pope. Either as the dually serving head of religion and state, or as a mediator between religion and state, premodern leaders frequently bound religion with public rule. Consequently, many examples of public space in the premodern and early modern world were inherently tied to religion or were inflected with a religious atmosphere.

This model continued until the American revolution of the 18th century AD, which endowed America with the capacity to choose its own form of government and leaders. Individuals and groups now had the option and motivation to establish a public identity for themselves. Over the next two centuries, subsequent developments in immigration and multicultural recognition have established the era as one which allowed for and encouraged the expression of more than one social perspective. Secularism, and the so-called “separation of Church and State,” were also introduced in this period. In the contemporary period, physical articulations of public space have moved away from a combined focus on religion and state toward a focus on the public interest, whether requested by the public or anticipated by authorities. Publicly administered institutions have become devoid of religious character and the qualities of public art now project less of a religious devotional quality, and instead express themes of emotion, amusement, civic identity, advertisement, and beautification. Yet this period also sees the rise of private institutions whose membership is open to members of the public that elect to conform to basic requirements, which includes religious organizations, sports teams, commercial activities, and educational institutions. These changes have caused the once clear lines separating the public from the private to become blurred.
Modern public space develops concurrently with society and can emerge as something shaped by its intent, use, and decoration. Over time, those aspects may transform radically, making public space and its functional and artistic uses a constant negotiation of changing social threads. Therefore, public space can be broadly conceived to include the space utilized, constructed, and embellished by any group whose membership remains open for public participation. Rather than one type of public space based on a narrow view of a singular public, there are many publics and several related categories of public space. Coming to terms with how we define public space, art, and architecture by means of purpose, cultural significance, religious elements (or deliberate lack thereof), style, and typology, allows us to formulate a more complete understanding of how the public sphere fits within our world view and within the history of art. By closely examining the socialization of space and its many incarnations as a separate field that combines art history with anthropology, we can better comprehend the fluidity of art’s role in social consciousness and the public realm, and challenge basic assumptions that would deductively seek to confine public art only by appearance.

Course Goals:

To identify and examine the critical issues that define public space and its physical features according to secular and religious perspectives. By the end of the semester, students will be familiar with the major works of art and architecture, history, historiography, and categories of approach that exist within the field of public space, specifically through public art and architecture. Finally, students will develop their own framework of analysis to critically interpret the material and modern theory applicable to this distinct field.

Course Objectives:

Students will be assigned readings that demonstrate the trajectory of the history of public space as shaped and renovated by scholars. They will also learn a basic canon of the major works of art and architecture related to the field. This brief canon of built public space will demonstrate the variety of categories developed by modern artists, audiences, and patrons, with special attention given to how historical and social context influences intent and reception. Issues of geographical location and function will also challenge students to reevaluate scholarly and personal notions of what the makers and users of public art and architecture might have expected of their built and decorated environments. Students will also be introduced to the various perspectives that have been imposed on material topics related to the public sphere, and the contexts in which those perspectives were conceived. Finally, students will engage in a continuing evaluation of the academic approaches to public space that will demonstrate how contemporary views can affect the understanding and promotion of public space and how those positions can determine the diverse interpretations of the field, and how they may in turn inform currently developing views.
Requirements:

- Attend every course session.
- Actively participate in class discussions.
- Fulfill all assigned reading requirements (under 60 pages per week) as specified by the instructor.
- Take the exam.
- Prepare and deliver a short (approximately 10 minute) on a work of public art or material aspect of public space appropriate for the topic for that session. Topic must be approved by instructor by week 3.
- With the guidance of the instructor, develop a term paper on your presentation topic. Length requirements are flexible, but undergraduates should write at least 10 pages.

Grading:

- Attendance and participation - 25%
- Midterm exam - 30%
- Presentation - 15%
- Paper - 30%

Presentation:

- Every student in the course is required to give one 10-minute (including questions) presentation on a single work of Public Art. The presentation subject will be chosen by students and approved by Dr. Findley by week 3.

Required Texts:

- Occasionally, I will supplement the textbook with additional readings from scholarly articles. These will be available on Moodle.
Readings:

Textbook readings are not difficult, but they can be lengthy. At first, you may have a bit of trouble with the unfamiliar vocabulary and names. Please note that I do not expect you to remember every name, event, or term mentioned in the textbook. Instead, I want you to know the names of the major players, major works of art, and the basic trajectory of Roman material culture. When I want you to remember a name, event, or term, I will say so in the weekly guides (more on these below) or during class.

Writing Assignments:

You are required to complete a paper focusing on your presentation topic. Minimum length is 10 pages.

Exam:

There is one exam in this course - the midterm. The goal of this exam is to evaluate your ability to identify and critically analyze major works of Public Art.

Content and Format:

Classes will either take the format of a hybrid lecture and discussion. I will give a prepared presentation on a specific topic. Discussion can happen at any time and the entire class should feel free to address any topic based on assigned readings.

My job is to present lectures and lead discussions based on the reading assignments. Your job is to keep up with reading and participate in discussions.

Because this course meets for so long, we will take several breaks and have various discussion/Group activities throughout the weekly meeting.

Weekly Guides:

Every Thursday or Friday I will post a “weekly guide” on Moodle for use in the following week. It contains the supplemental reading assignments and a list of the concepts, terms, people, and events that I expect you to know from the reading assignments - in short, all you need to know to succeed in the course!

Course Outline and Readings:

A tentative schedule for weekly topics and readings, as well as preliminary questions for discussion is below. None of the readings or assignments are considered permanent until the week before each session - in the Weekly Guides. Until then, the following
should be viewed as a guideline, rather than a permanent schedule. Adjustments may be made according to class interests and demonstrated capacity for critically examining the material.

**Week 1: Introduction to the Western History of Public Space and Public Art - Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, and the Renaissance.**

*Lecture:*

This lecture will serve as a background to the course and will cover the basic aspects of space in the premodern world. Topics to be covered include the contributions of Hippodamus of Miletus, ancient city planning, and the belief of the divisions between sacred, civic, and private space. Given the general focus of our seminar, the lecture will only address examples of the the sacred and civic in detail. Among these, we will specifically discuss the Parthenon at Athens, the Forum at Rome, the Hippodrome at Constantinople, the Holy Sepulcher and Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem, and Notre Dame at Paris. Along the way, we will also cover certain types of public space including bathhouses, markets and Christian church complexes. In sum, the class will be introduced to the theme of premodern public space as a point of connection between the civic and the sacred. Overtime, the balance between the civic and sacred link shifts, revealing the tension between the two. This lecture will conclude with the proposal that public space has always been a pressure point between competing social forces. As that space becomes artificially developed by man, we can observe the ever changing authority of those forces. In the conclusion, students will be challenged to pay close attention to the driving force behind the development of modern public space and try to determine for themselves whether we can view the modern developments as continued progression or variations on a historically consistent theme.

*Read:*

  -Read, “From Rome to Las Vegas,” 18.


Hurwit, “Space and Theme: The Setting of the Parthenon.”

*Study Questions:*

What are the basic categories of public space prior to the modern period?
How can we separate premodern and modern public spaces in ways other than chronology?

What are the roles played by art in public spaces?

**Week 2: Public Space and the Modern World - Secularism, Spirituality, and Reasonable Accommodations**

*Lecture:* “Pluralism and the Publics”
- Pluralism, politics, and religion all affect the composition of public space, especially in terms of how it is perceived to exist. This lecture will outline the basic notion of the diversity represented by the word “public” and the variety of ways in which it can be interpreted physically and conceptually.

*Read:*


*Study Questions:*

Can strong beliefs in secularism or religion be reconciled through reasonable discussion? Does not the notion of faith, no matter the object (God or any secular belief system), determine that no discourse with an opposing viewpoint can be considered reasonable? How then should we refigure our definition for “the public”?

In what ways is Dissanayake’s article a convincing case for public art? What does she ignore in order to construct a more cogent argument?

Deutsche wrote a full 15 years before Cartiere (et al) developed the timeline for public art. What historical and artistic developments occurred during that time that may prompt Deutsche to amend her list of uses for public art?

Consider the publication dates of all the week’s readings. How are our four authors bound by historical circumstances? Why should this matter to a reader?
Week 3: Temples unto Ourselves - Universities, Museums, and Shopping Malls

Lecture: “Elite Spaces and Aspirations”
-The modern state sponsors, establishes, and maintains several types of public institutions. This lecture will address how the architecture and adornment of Universities, Libraries and Museums can provide insight to the public need to excel and the desire for superlative public institutions, as well as issues that may be raised about the realities of public accessibility. Comparing these to privately owned public spaces, the issue of accessibility can introduce uncomfortable topics.

Read:


-Select 2 or more articles from this section and be prepared to discuss them.

Walking tour of Campus

Study Questions:

Are the types of institutions we discussed today really utilized by all the public? Is there a certain level of social class assigned to those that frequent these institutions?

By aspiring to be elite, does government support for Museums, Universities, and Libraries actually support elitism? Are malls and shopping centers a more democratic expression of public space?

Compare the government supported institutions to the self selected publics we have discussed previously. Is there an element of exclusivity to Universities, Museums, and Libraries not present in sport stadia and religious buildings? Generally speaking, does one need to be born into the former, while anyone can more easily commit to the latter?

Week 4: Mourning and Public Memorials
Lecture: “Memorials Through History”
-Ancient practices of memorialization tended to favor military success or individual triumph. This lecture will introduce the categories of modern memorialization - individual loss and group sacrifice. Because the discussion will focus on Holocaust memorials and the AIDS Quilt, this lecture will feature discussion on modern memorials for the victims and supporters of war including the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial and the Abraham Lincoln Memorial.

Read:

-Skim “Memorials and Monuments Reconsidered,” 18-60.

-Read “Art as Monument, Art as Memorial,” 23-28.


Study Questions:

What makes group memorialization difficult to accomplish and who is responsible for determining how to honor the dead? Compare the general circumstances and characteristics of those honored by Holocaust monuments, by the AIDS Quilt, and by the VVM. What major differences separate the three groups?

Should a government entity be held accountable by associates and relatives of those memorialized? What if the government is in some way responsible for the loss of life? Does this amplify or negate the need for government participation?

Do memorials last? Is the art significant to establishing a lasting memory or is personal and national connection a vital element?

Week 5: City and “Country” Spaces (with field trip to beautiful downtown Terre Haute!)

Lecture: “Separate From the City”
- The city beautiful movement and environmental art and earthworks are in many ways related to each other. The former seeks to artificially inject the urban environment with man made nature, while the latter seeks to take art away from the urban environment and deliberately inject unspoiled nature with the intervention of humans. This lecture will outline the complexities of juxtaposing the two methods of emphasizing nature as a feature of public space.

Read:

*Art Spaces*

Questions:

Should we use Terre Haute as a model for the modern American city? In what ways is it unique from other cities? In what ways is it representative of a general type?

Consider in advance the major sites we will visit. Do any common threads exist to connect them?

- Read, “Art in the Park, Art as the Park,” “Art as the Agora,” and “Art as Pilgrimage,” 33-41.


- Read Chapter 6, “Public Art and Flying Pigs: The Cincinnati Gateway Story.”

Study Questions:

Is it possible to reconcile social space and natural space? Kosnoski believes that the design of Olmsted’s parks acted as a means to negotiate diversity through a welcoming neutral atmosphere. Yet in a dense urban area, is natural space neutral or an anomaly?
Based on their artificiality, should parks even be considered natural environments? Or should we consider man made landscapes a different type of natural environment? Do they actually serve a purpose outside of aesthetics?

Light’s article highlights the many motivations for conservation in the early 20th century. Is it possible that the growing desire for ecological conservation had a direct impact on public parks and/or the development of earthwork art?

Many examples of land and environmental art claim to attempt to escape society. Yet the very profession of art owes a great deal to the organized surplus of society. Can such examples of land art thus be considered disingenuous and/or vanity projects?

What are the problems of using public art to engage the public financially? Is it better to respond to public needs or anticipate them?

Doss portrays the Cincinnati Gateway as a representation of civic identity, but an unchangeable one. The “Fourth Plinth,” cleverly sidesteps this issue by regularly changing the character of Trafalger Square with the changing plinth. Does the constant refiguring of art in a public place debase the permanent character of that space?

**Week 6: “Plop” Art and Site Specificity**

**Lecture:** “Jean-Claude and Christo’s “Gates, Central Park, New York 1979-2005””

-Plop art and site specificity are important issues that affect the reception and permanence of art. By first exploring the development and execution of “Gates,” this lecture will propose that some examples of art in the public sphere can best be appreciated as transient events, whether or not the art remains installed permanently.

**Read:**


-Skim Introduction and Chapter 1, “Geneology of Site Specificity.”


-Read Chapter 3, “Public Art in the Corporate Sphere.”


**Study Questions:**
Site specificity is a complex topic. But is it as critical as it is frequently described to be? In your view, is the physical relationship between an object and its surroundings as significant as the relationship of an object to its social and historical context?

Can the public be expected to appreciate the difference between site specific art and plop art? Is it more reasonable to expect the public to notice a change in the shared environment?

**Week 7: Contested Space: Controversy, Memory, and the Forgotten**

*Lecture:* “Who’s in Charge Here?”
-Our final lecture will address the inherent controversies of public space. So far in this course, we have observed that government financially and lawfully supports the development of public space, but is easily swayed by private interests and limited public protests. This last lecture will cover the causes, controversies, and decisions related to the World Trade Center Memorial in New York City. This will lead to our final discussion which compares the controversial intents and receptions of two of the most famous physical embellishments of public space: “Tilted Arc” by Richard Serra and the “Vietnam Veterans Memorial” by Maya Lin.

*Read:*


*Study Questions:*

Tilted Arc adorns a public space, while the VVM is the central element of a public space. Yet viewers tend to focus more on the material aspects of the former, while embracing the immaterial of the latter. Is that a cause for the difference of reception of the two? Was is simply easier to grasp onto those particular features of each monument?

Given its very specific intent, can it be argued that “Tilted Arc” is the most successful work of public art? Had the work been understood as temporary from the outset (like Jean-Claude and Christo’s “Gates”), would anyone remember “Tilted Arc” as a controversy? Could the work have been more popular?
How does the VVM shy away from triumphal display? Consider all aspects of the work - size, color, material, etc… Can we see this as the full fruition of honoring without excessive decoration?

How do the VVM and “Tilted Arc” inspire the diverse responses of the public to public space? What general conclusions can we reach from the commission and reception of these two examples that can be brought to bear on other issues that have been discussed in this course?

**Week 8: Self-Selected Publics - Religious and Sport Arenas**

*Lecture:* “Sport Stadia as Embodiments of Community Traditions”
Ancient examples of public space like the Colosseum and the Hippodrome, show that humanity has long had an interest in watching sports entertainment in a group environment. But these sporting venues were also designed and decorated to promote community, rivalry, and commerce. This lecture will look at the stadia designed by HOK Sport and Populous over the past 20 years as evidence of the developing sophistication of public sporting venues for self-selected publics. This will be followed by a discussion on the ways in which religious space also engages the participation of self-selected publics.

*Read:*

-Read “The Cathedral as Duck and Shed,” 104.

-Read Chapter 7, “Historicism, Modernism, and Space.”


*Study Questions:*

In what ways can we assign sport and religious venues to the category of public space. What is required to be part of the included public?

According to Venturi’s approach, can sport venues also be considered “Ducks” or “Sheds?” How do designers seek to endow sport and religious structures with added significance through decoration?
How have churches changed since the premodern period in terms of design and identity? Are the two accidentally related or does a connection exist?

**Week 9: Race and Ethnicity**

*Lecture:* “Does Space Create Ethnicity or Does Ethnicity Create Space?”
-Rogers Brubaker argues in favor of reevaluating the definition of groups because he believes that ethnic groups, nations, and race are abstract entities that only exist within our perceptions. Instead of ethnic groups, Brubaker proposes that we consider more practical categories, such as cultural idioms, commonsense knowledge, and organizational routine as the potential basis for group-formation. Use and creation of public space could easily be added to these criteria. This lecture will look at the ways in which race and ethnicity can be viewed as markers of difference in social spaces.

*Lecture:* “Crime and Punishments”
-Although the behavioral aspects of crime and its consequences are often discussed, relatively little attention focuses on how they affect public space. This lecture will discuss the experiences related to incarceration, a limited lifestyle that is nevertheless married to the public sphere. By first examining the prison environments dedicated to those who have proven that they are unwilling to accept the laws established by the public, we will then proceed to a discussion on the relationship between public housing and crime, and street art and crime. Arguably, one is supported by government, while the other is punished.

*Watch:*


*Read:*


   -Read Chapters 61, 63 and 65

Study Questions:

Jones mentions David Hammons, “How Ya Like Me Now,” as a work of art that incited a community because the art manipulated racial representation. Likewise, Mitchell suggests that violent response is a factor of public art. Can we consider performance and response to public displays vital components of public art?

Do you agree with Graves’ assessment of the Joe Louis monument? Is she deliberately reaching for controversy? If another black Detroit hero, such as Motown founder Berry Gordy Jr., was honored with a statue, would that statue not reflect the source of his fame?

Can we read Venturi as an example proving Brubaker’s thesis? Can we classify people by behavior and shared values? If that behavior directly mirrors race, does that make such representations racist?

Public housing was originally meant to provide safe, affordable housing for a disadvantaged segment of the public. Yet, public housing became the nexus of crime for many communities. Did faulty design cause this, or are people entirely to blame?

Compare what you have read about prisons to what you have read about public housing. In what ways are they similar/different?

Street artists like Banksy act as social commentators, but does his anonymity exclude him from the public? Can we consider his art to be a reaction by the public to public space?

Although both are ostensibly meant to improve the public sphere, what are the different effects of public housing and graffiti/street art? Who is responsible for these consequences?
Week 10: Public Space? Private Subjects, Sponsors, and Donors

*Lecture:* “Millennium Park”
From the earliest days of Chicago’s development as an urban space, the land now occupied by Grant Park and Millennium Park was designated for public use. This lecture will address the development of Millennium Park as a public space driven by special interests.

*Read:*

- Read “Art as Amenity,” 28-33, and “Lessons from the Private Sector,” 79-84.

- Reread Chapter 3, “Public Art in the Corporate Sphere.”


*Study Questions:*

Donors and sponsorship are not new elements in the construction and decoration of public space. Do you believe that modern society sees corporate sponsorship of secular public art as disingenuous? If so, why should the funding behind a work of art matter?

Does sponsorship of public space take on a different tone if the subject is in a religious or commercial setting?

What is the danger of allowing civic aesthetic decisions to be made by private interests? How can Millennium park confirm or disprove that notion?
Consider your own relationship with the internet and the role it plays in your life. Has this virtual space become necessary in the modern world? Is it truly public?

In what way have the artificial means of communication like social networks, YouTube, and blogs altered the way in which people communicate? Is anonymity a key component?

The internet is not one unified community gathering point. Search for communities within the virtual world that are separate from those with which you are familiar. You may consider looking for religious, ethnic, or fan communities or look at separate constructions within virtual worlds, such as World of Warcraft. Do these virtual communities allow for a level of voyeurism that the real world does not? How can they be compared to other self-selected public spaces?