

ARCH 684-002 - Fall 2012 Graduate Seminar  
**Paradoxical Public Spaces**

Course Instructor:

**Adrian Blackwell**

Class hours: Wednesdays 10am-1pm

Class location: 2026

Office location: 2024

Office hours: Wednesdays 3:00-4:00pm



Tahrir Square Showing the Architecture of the Encampment - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-12434787>

*I propose we think of [Walter Benjamin's concept of] distraction and [Hannah Arendt's concept of] action not simply as opposites, but rather as the respective limits of a spectrum of consciousness of persons in society – or to put it another way of bodies in proximate space.*

George Baird, Public Space: Cultural/ Political Theory; Street Photography

*It is... crucial to realize that, with modern democracy we are dealing with a new political form of society whose specificity comes from the articulation between two different traditions. On the one side we have the liberal tradition constituted by the rule of law, the defence of human rights and the respect of individual liberty; on the other the democratic tradition whose main ideas are those of equality, identity between governing and governed and popular sovereignty.*

Chantal Mouffe, The Democratic Paradox

*When Plato asserts in The Republic that the philosophers should rule the state, and takes the philosophers to be those who by definition are not wise but merely strive for wisdom, a paradox is invoked that is clearly intended by Socrates to be the greatest possible paradox, one capable of grasping the paradoxical composition of any discourse whatsoever.*

Boris Groys, The Communist Postscript

**Course Introduction:**

2011 was a year of political demonstrations across the Middle East, in North Africa, China, Greece, Spain, the United Kingdom and North America. These occupations have reanimated the concept of public space. In each case, citizens gathered together in squares and streets, in direct opposition to today's political economy of austerity and inequality. Since the mid 1970s countries around the world have reversed the redistributive agenda of Keynesian economics, in order to govern according to the rule of the market. In the face of this contemporary ideology of Neoliberalism that privatizes public assets and encloses common resources, it is no surprise that recent political resistance emphasizes the value of common resources and "The Right to the City."

For too many years we have been lamenting the Neoliberal assault on public spaces, rightly claiming that on the one hand they have become too privatized, and on the other they are too heavily surveilled to function as free locations for political, cultural, and economic contestation. But what would happen if we began with the idea that public space is constitutively paradoxical? From this vantage point, we might see that our discomfort stems from our inability to come to terms with its inherent contradictions. Public spaces are constructed through struggle. In each case they teeter in an uncomfortable and dynamic position between inclusiveness and exclusion, between openness and focus. These paradoxical geometries structure the limits of the public, defining who is, and who is not, welcome within a given space. In this course we will experiment with the affirmation of both sides of these contradictions, in order to acknowledge the necessarily partial nature of all publics, while at the same time challenging their exclusions. By thinking of public space in terms of its essential polarities, a field of contestation is opened between extremes, making room for discourse and disagreement. Public space is intrinsically paradoxical. It is in this conceptual form that it can accommodate political engagement. It is nothing but the terrain of its own constant negotiation.

The course is divided into six sections which each present the paradox of public space in a different form: 1) representation and participation, 2) Publicity and privacy, 3) affinity and disagreement, 4) people and things, 5) materiality and immateriality, 6) city and urbanization.



The Occupy Wall Street Library Book Bloc. <http://occupiedmedia.us/2012/07/occupied-reports-from-the-front-lines-21/>

**Course objectives:**

This course is designed to introduce students to contemporary debates about publics, the public sphere, and public space, as well as the key thinkers who have engaged in these textual dialogues. It will function as a theoretical investigation into a hypothesis about the paradoxical nature of public space. Over the term students will be developing, questioning and criticizing this hypothesis, so that the course will strengthen critical thinking. It is expected that as architecture students, you will have special insights to apply to public space theories that have been developed primarily by political scientists and philosophers. It is the specific relation between theories of publics and concrete spaces themselves that students are expected to develop in their independent research projects.

**Course requirements:**

The seminar will involve close readings of texts each week. Students will be required to have finished the readings and to participate in all class discussions with an informed perspective on each text. Over the term you will investigate these paradoxes through six 500-750 word written reading responses. You will also make two verbal presentations on a reading, which will summarize the thesis and key points of the reading and raise key questions for class discussion. The term project will be a graphical and textual analysis of the paradoxical nature of one contemporary public space in relation to a recent event that has occurred within it. This will include at least 4 drawings of the space and an up to 5000 word critical essay. This final project has three deadlines: A project proposal of 1000 words, an illustrated in class presentation of the key arguments and evidence, and the final written document.

**Relative weight and due date for assignments:**

1a - Seminar Participation	10% in each class during the term
1b - 6 Reading Responses	6 x 4% = 24% due by 9am the Tuesday before class
1c - In class presentations of two readings	2 x 8% = 16% due in class
2a - project proposal	5% - due September 26
2b - In class presentation of research	15% - due on an agreed upon class
2c - Final Hand-in	30% - due December 19

**Description of the Course Assignments:****Assignment 1 - Seminar participation and reading**

Each class will begin with a short introduction to the day's themes by the course instructor. Then individual students will introduce the two readings, one at a time, and ask the class to answer specific questions about them. The instructor will moderate and focus the ensuing conversation amongst the class comparing the two readings. The class will finish with the instructor introducing the next week's readings.

**1a - Seminar participation****10% in each class during the term**

*Each Student is expected to have read the week's assigned texts and to participate during the discussion during each class.* Carefully read the reading each week, underline important passages, and take notes on its key concepts. Come to class with questions you have about both readings. The primary purpose of the discussions is to engage the content of the readings themselves, in order to explore and better understand the ideas of key theorists of publics and public spaces. It is important that you engage the content of the readings and not simply your general knowledge of the subjects discussed.

**1b - Six reading responses****6 x 4% = 24% due by 9am the Tuesday before class**

*Each student will submit 6 reading responses of 500-750 words.* The reading responses should compare key concepts from the two readings that week. Each response should be framed as a concise essay. The first half should consist of a clear description of the key ideas of each thinker and end with your thesis about the relationship between their ideas. The rest of the response should argue for the points of agreement and divergence between them. All references to the texts should include page references. The reading response can make reference to other thinkers with footnotes, but should not contain unsubstantiated conjecture. The days that you will submit reading assignments will be decided on the first day of class.

**1c - In class presentations of two readings****2 x 8% = 16% due digitally by 9am Tuesday before class**

*Each student will lead the discussion during two classes of the term.* In advance of the class prepare a short hand out of 500-1000 words, illustrating the key theses and arguments of one of the two readings and a series of 2-4 detailed questions about the reading for the class. Questions should make specific reference to ideas in the text and focus discussion on the text itself. A digital copy of your hand out is due by 9:00am on the Tuesday before class. You are responsible for making double-sided copies for the class members. The days that you will do in class presentations will be decided on the first day of class. The presentations are distinct from the reading responses and will occur on weeks when you are not required to write a reading response.

## Assignment 2 – Topologies of Neoliberal Public Space

The term project involves the analysis of the everyday life of one public space that has been important in the history of Neoliberalism and an event that occurred within it. Choose one of the following sites, or suggest one of your own: Lenin Shipyard, Gdansk; Tiananmen Square, Beijing; Wenceslas Square, Prague; Tompkins Square, New York City; People's Park, Berkeley; Pike Street, Seattle; Park Fiction, Hamburg; Azadi Street, Tehran; Tahrir Square, Cairo; Syntagma Square, Athens; Puerta del Sol Square, Madrid; Plaza de la Encarnación, Seville; Wall Street, New York City; Bolotnaya Square, Moscow. Sites will be assigned in the second class, please submit your first choice for site selection by e-mail by 9am Tuesday September 18.

### 2a - project proposal

5% - due September 26

*Each student will prepare an illustrated proposal for their term project.* The proposal should be 500-1000 words and contain one or more illustrations. The outline should introduce the chosen public space and its formal, material and programmatic characteristics and describe an event that occurred in the space. Propose a thesis that investigates the ways in which this space functions paradoxically.

### 2b - In class presentation of research

20% - due on an agreed upon class

*Each student will present their findings as a 15 minute paper presented to the class.* All papers should be accompanied by images of the site and original drawings. The purpose of the presentation is to workshop your ideas and to rehearse the form of the academic paper. It should have a clear thesis and substantial evidence. Two students will present during the last six classes of the term, the presentation will be followed by 15 minutes of discussion about each presentation.

### 2c – Final Project

25% - due December 19

The final document should be 4000-5000 words in length and include at least 4 original diagrams: an annotated plan and a section of the everyday condition of the space, and an annotated plan and section of an event occurring in the space showing informal occupation, make these drawings in black and white lines on an 20x25cm frame horizontal format, at a metric scale of 1:250, 1:500, 1:1000, or 1:2000. The purpose of the project is to explore a paradox specific to the space and to be able to compare these spaces one to another. All projects will be posted online by the deadline.

## Course Schedule and Readings:

### Week 1 (September 12) - Course Introduction: How is public space paradoxical?

Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2010)

Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2009)

George Baird, *Public Space: Cultural/Political Theory; Street Photography* (Amsterdam: Sun Architecture, 2011)

### Paradox 1) Is a public space made by government or by citizens? representation / presentation

### Week 2 (September 19) - Democratic Space

Hanna Arendt, "Action" in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958), 175-247

Richard Sennett, *The Spaces of Democracy* (Ann Arbor Michigan: Taubman College, 1998)

### Week 3 (September 26) - Occupation – Term Project Proposal Due

David Graeber, "Occupy Wall Street's anarchist roots" in *Al Jazeera* 2011 / 11 / 20  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/2011112872835904508.html>

Christoph Brunner, "Debt, Affect and Self-Reproducing Movements: Interview with Christian Marazzi, George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici on the latest events in Québec." *eipcp*, <http://eipcp.net/n/1339011680>

### Paradox 2) Is private thought the necessary corollary of public space? publicity / privacy

### Week 4 (October 3) – The Public Sphere

Jürgen Habermas, "The Social-Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Berger (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996), 141-180.

Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" in *Social Text* No. 25/26 (1990), 56-80.

### **Week 5 (October 10) - Counterpublics**

Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics" in *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 65-124.

Sven Lutticken, "Secret Publicity: The avante Garde Repeated" and "The Conspiracy of Publicness" in *Secret Publicity* (Rotterdam: Nai Publishers: 2006), 21-41, 191-204.

## **Paradox 3) What forces people together in public space? affinity / disagreement**

### **Week 6 (October 17) - Affinity**

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Of Love Possessed" and "A force to Combat Evil" in *Commonwealth* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 179-199

Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2010), 9-63

### **Week 7 (October 24) - Dissagreement**

Jacques Ranciere, *Disagreement*, Trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2004) 1-42

Alain Badiou, "The Ethic of Truths" in *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2001), 40-57.

## **Paradox 4) Are public spaces only for people? people / things**

### **Week 8 (October 31) - Making things Public**

Bruno Latour, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik" in *Making things public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 2005), 14-41.

Isabelle Stengers, "The Cosmopolitical Proposal." in *Making things public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 2005). 994-1003.

### **Week 9 (November 7) - Socio-Natural Networks**

Matthew Gandy, "Landscapes of disaster: water, modernity, and urban fragmentation in Mumbai" in *Environment and Planning A* 2008, volume 40, 108- 130.

Erik Swyngedouw / Maria Kaika / Nikolas Heynen "Urban Political Ecology: Politicizing the Production of Urban Natures" in *The Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism*. Eds. Erik Swyngedouw, Maria Kaika, Nikolas Heynen (Oxford and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007), 1-20.

## **Paradox 5) Are public spaces physical or digital? materiality / immateriality**

### **Week 10 (November 14) - Immaterial Publics**

Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133-147.

Stephen Graham, "Constructing Premium Network Spaces: Reflections on Infrastructure Networks and Contemporary Urban Development." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. Volume 24.1 (March 2000)

### **Week 11 (November 21) - The Materiality of Spaces**

Kanishka Goonewardena, "The Urban Sensorium: Space, Ideology and the Aestheticization of Politics." *Antipode Volume 37, Issue 1*, (January 2005), 46–71.

Slavoj Žizek, "Some politically incorrect reflections on urban violence in Paris and New Orleans and related matters" in *Urban Politics Now*. Eds. BAVO (Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2007), 12-29.

### **Paradox 6) How do public spaces combine to make cities? city / urbanization**

#### **Week 12 (November 28) - Polis and Urbs**

Henri Lefebvre, "From the City to Urban Society" and "The Urban Phenomenon" in *The Urban Revolution*. Trans: Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).1-22, 45-76.

Pier Vittorio Aureli, "Toward the Archipelago" in *The Possibility of An Absolute Architecture* (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 2011), 1-47.

#### **Week 13 (December 5) - Cities Without Cities**

Thomas Sieverts, "The Living space of the Majority of Mankind: an anonymous space with no visual quality" in *Cities Without Cities: Between Place and World, Space and Time, Town and Country* (Oxford and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 1-47.

Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, "Cities and the Geographies of Actually Existing Neoliberalism" in *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 2-32.

Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore, and Neil Brenner, "Neoliberalism Resurgent? Market Rule after the Great Recession" in *Perspectives on the Global Crisis, South Atlantic Quarterly* Volume 111, Number 2 (Spring 2012)

#### **Final Project Hand in – December 19**

### **General Notes:**

**Academic Integrity:** To create and promote a culture of academic integrity, the behaviour of all members of the University of Waterloo is based on honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm>

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm>

**Appeals:** A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm>

**Note for students with disabilities:** The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term. Once registered with OPD, please meet with the professor, in confidence, during my office hours to discuss your needs.