

## Art and Public Life

ARTH 47911 / ARTV 37911 / ENGL 32821 / CMST 37802 / MUSI 35014  
Neubauer Collegium

**Class:** Mondays, 1:30 PM – 4:20 PM in Logan 801\*  
\*Alternate/additional course meetings may be required as needed

**Instructors:** **W.J.T. Mitchell**, Wieboldt 203, ([wjtm@uchicago.edu](mailto:wjtm@uchicago.edu))  
**Theaster Gates**, Logan 240, ([theaster@uchicago.edu](mailto:theaster@uchicago.edu))

**Office Hours:** **WJTM: Tuesdays, 2:00 – 3:30 PM, Wieboldt 203**  
**GATES: Mondays, 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM, Logan 240**

**Course Assistants:** Nova Smith ([nova@uchicago.edu](mailto:nova@uchicago.edu))  
Cameron McKee ([cmkee@u.northwestern.edu](mailto:cmkee@u.northwestern.edu))

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### Course Description:

The aim of this seminar-colloquium will be to work through some of the most advanced thinking on ideas about publics and their relation to questions of community, politics, society, culture, and the arts. From John Dewey through Hannah Arendt and Jurgen Habermas, the notion of the public has remained central to a wide variety of debates in the humanities and social sciences. What is a public? How are publics constituted? What is the role of real and virtual space, architectural design, urban planning, and technical media, in the formation of publics? And, most centrally for our purposes, what role can and do the arts play in the emergence of various kinds of publics? The colloquium aspect of the course will involve visiting speakers from a variety of disciplines, both from the University of Chicago faculty, and from elsewhere.

### Readings:

- **Recommended Texts** (Available at the Seminary Coop)—
  - *Participation* by Claire Bishop, et al.
  - *What We Made: Conversation on Art and Social Cooperation* by Tom Finkelpearl
  - *Site Specificity and the Problematics of Public Art: Recent Transformations of the Intersections of Art and Architecture* by Miwon Kwon
  - *Gentrification* by Loretta Lees, et al.
  - *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* by Erika Suderberg, et al.
  - *Art and the Public Sphere*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago, 1994). This is out of print, but several copies will be available on reserve, and key portions will be available on chalk. It may be possible to find your own copy via internet sources.
  - *Occupy: Three Inquiries in Disobedience* by W. J. T. Mitchell, Bernard Harcourt, and Michael Taussig (Chicago, 2013).
- **All other Required and Recommended Readings** will be made available on Chalk (Noted as **CH** on the syllabus)

Grading and Requirements: Attendance and participation at all class sessions; occasional short writing assignments to be posted on Chalk Discussion Board; oral report during final weeks of course on your project; 15 page essay OR a substantial proposal (and partial realization of) a public art project.

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### WEEK 1—Introduction

**MON 9/29 (MANDATORY):** This class will be conducted by Cameron and Nova Smith, and will mainly be devoted to working out enrollment questions. You should read the following texts in *Art and the Public Sphere* prior to the first week of class. They will not be discussed in any detail at the first class meeting, but will provide background that will be assumed throughout the rest of the term.

- Mitchell, “Utopia and Critique,” introduction to *Art and the Public Sphere*. **CH**
- Mitchell, “The Violence of Public Art: Do The Right Thing”,  
*Art and The Public Sphere*, **CH**
- Michael North, “The Public as Sculpture”, *Art and the Public Sphere*, **CH**
- James Young, “The Counter-Monument”, *Art and The Public Sphere*, **CH**
- Vito Acconci, “Public Space in A Private Time”, *Art and The Public Sphere* **CH**
- Read all Art and Public Life essays on *Critical Inquiry’s* website before the October 4<sup>th</sup> Symposium. **CH**

**MON 9/29 (Optional):**

- Dialogue with Claire Bishop and Claire Doherty on the exhibition *A Proximity of Consciousness: Art and Social Action* (6:00 PM at the Art Institute, Rubloff Auditorium, 230 S. Columbus Dr.)

**\*\*\*SATURDAY 10/4 (Mandatory):\*\*\***

**Art and Public Life Symposium (Logan 9<sup>th</sup> Floor Performance Penthouse, 1:30 PM – 4:30 PM)** This will be a public symposium, so please plan on arriving early to be sure that you have a seat. The texts will be the Art and Public Life essays on the *Critical Inquiry* website, [http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/art\\_and\\_public\\_life\\_symposium\\_dossier/](http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/art_and_public_life_symposium_dossier/). The authors of these texts (Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn, Leela Gandhi, William Mazarella, Mary Jane Jacob, Hannah Higgins, Matthew Jesse Jackson, Susannah Bielak, and Amy Mooney) will be assembled as a panel to discuss their position papers.

### WEEK 2—What is a Public?

**MON 10/6:**

- Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) 1-52. **CH**
- John Dewey, chapter 4, “The Eclipse of the Public,” *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), 110-142. **CH**
- Mitchell, Introduction and essay, “The Violence of Public Art,” and Michael North’s chapter, “The Public as Sculpture,” in *Art and the Public Sphere*. **CH** Recommended: Michael Warner, introduction to *Publics and Counter-Publics*.

Writing Assignment:

-Write a Chalk blog of up to 500 words (which may include photographic and/or videographic content) about the October 4<sup>th</sup> symposium, assessing the discussion and assembling takeaway points. Topics might include relations of public and private spheres, art and activism, public space and place,

**OR**

-Write a response paper (up to 500 words) on one of the previously assigned readings. See the Chalk Discussion Board for the place to post your text.

**WEEK 3—Publicity’s Secret:  
Visit from Jodi Dean**

MON 10/13:

- Dean, *Publicity’s Secret* CH
- Dean, “Making (It) Public,” *Constellations* CH
- Dean, “Communicative Capitalism”, *Democracy and other Neoliberal Fantasies* CH

**\*\*\*Public Lecture 10/13 : Crowds and Party \*\*\***

- Social Sciences Bldg. Room 122  
6:00PM -8PM

Assignment:

[TBA: possible shortresponse paper to Dean]

**WEEK 4—Virtual Publics and New Media:  
Visit from Patrick Jagoda**

MON 10/20:

- Readings:** - *Tactical Media* (Rita Raley, "Introduction," pages 1-30)
- *Avant-Garde Videogames* (Brian Schrank, "Videogames as Avant-garde Art," pages 1-26)
- Play *Between* (requires pairing students in the class): <http://www.esquire.com/features/best-and-brightest-2008/rohrer-game>
- Play *We, the Giants* (single-player, 5-minute experience): <http://wethegiants.thegiftedintrovert.com/>
- “Speculation: Financial Games and Derivative Worlding in a Transmedia Era” (Hayles, Jagoda, and LeMieux, pages 220-236, attached)
- Optional: Explore *Speculation*  
Archive: [http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/nexus\\_x\\_an\\_alternate\\_archive/](http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/nexus_x_an_alternate_archive/)

**\*\*\*Public Lecture 10/20: "What Are Artworks for in a Networked Time: Collective Collaboration and Practices of Failure in the Alternate Reality Game " \*\*\***

Social Sciences Bldg. Room 122  
6-8PM

Assignment:

[TBA: Possible brief response papers to Jagoda]

### **WEEK 5—Art as Social Practice**

MON 10/27:

- Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents” **CH**
- Finkelpearl, Interview with Vito Acconci on Art, Architecture, Arvada and Storefront **CH**
- Gablick, Connective Aesthetics **CH**
- Kwon, One Place After Another: Notes on Site- Specificity **CH**
- Hoffman, The Law of Art **CH**

THURS 10/30 – SAT 11/1(Optional):

- The Yams Art Group is in town (**details TBD**)

Assignment: TBA

### **WEEK 6: Activism and Public Space**

MON 11/3:

-Readings: Mitchell, Harcourt, and Taussig, *Three Inquiries in Disobedience*. Read intro and all three essays.

### **WEEK 7: Race and Space—Art That Purifies and Gentrifies**

MON 11/10: Field Trip!

- Lees, Chapter 2: Producing Gentrification, Gentrification **CH**
- Lees, Contemporary Gentrification, Gentrification **CH**
- Malcolm X Birthsite and memorial **CH**
- Stafford, Illiterate Monuments **CH**
- An Endangered Landmark, The Muddy Waters House **CH**
- Sze Tsung Leong, “Chinese Erasure” **CH**
- Hewitt and Young, Untitled (Structures) **CH**

**Meet at Incubator/Café at 1:30PM.**

- 2:30PM shuttle bus will pick up students and take them to Dorchester Projects
- 3:30PM walk to The Bank bldg.
- 4:00PM walk back to The Listening house for discussion and conclusion of trip
- End at 4:30 PM Shuttle bus will drop-off at Logan Center

Assignment:

- Show perversions of race and space as they are illustrated in newspapers, magazines and advertisements. Scan and upload at least 2 examples. Write 200 words (?) about the examples you chose. Upload Assignment to Chalk

### **WEEK 8: Theory and History of the Commons**

MON 11/17: Readings: selections from Casarino and Negri, *In Praise of the Common*; Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art*; Amy J. Elias, “The Commons...and Digital Planetary,” **CH**

Assignment:

- Assignment: Provide a video (2min Max) ,photographs (5 images Max) or sound recording (2min Max) of a space that you feel we (everyone) have "in common". Upload Assignment to Chalk.

### **WEEK 9: Student Symposium—Part I**

MON 11/24:

-Final Class Oral Reports, Performances and Presentations

### **WEEK 10: Student Symposium—Part II**

MON 12/1:

-Final Class Oral Reports, Performances and Presentations

### **Week 11: Final Papers and Projects**

MON 12/8: FINAL PAPERS/PROJECT DUE