

## CALL FOR PAPERS

# Urban Encounters: Art and the Public

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, October 10-12, 2013

Public art installations are increasingly being created and used to open up new lines of inquiry into the socialities of urban public space. As cities strive to be indexed as culturally dynamic and ‘creative’, the stakes of artistic production in public space are raised ever higher. Yet there has been little rigorous research into how the interactions between art and the public actually play out in the urban social context. This interdisciplinary colloquium brings together artists and researchers to explore how artworks in diverse media and genres can shape the urban public – the patterned and unpredictable encounters, events, and flows of city life – and, conversely, how the urban public can shape artistic production. We ask:

- What forms are artistic engagements with the city taking, and how do they influence the city’s people and places?
- How does the urban public encounter art in the city, and how do these encounters affect the structure and content of the work?
- What kinds of urban publics are generated through art?
- How can we investigate and interpret encounters between art and the public in urban spaces?

Site-specific artworks in public space have the potential to change the ways in which members of the public experience their cities. Artworks that fit into the interstices of the city – the car parks or alleyways, the gaps between buildings – open up these spaces for new exploration. Artworks that appropriate central urban places, like main squares or monuments, can reframe or subvert their dominant meanings. Art can alter the fabric of the city by projecting images or sounds onto its architectural surfaces. Art can use new media technologies to create circuits for the urban to flow from ‘real’ to ‘virtual’ and back again. In short, art can disrupt and rework the social and affective spaces of the city.

Moreover, while all art is interactive, in the sense that people react to and therefore interact with it, many artists are experimenting with work that exists only through explicit engagement with the public in some form. This can mean attending carefully to the structures and rhythms of public spaces, such that their surfaces or sounds, for instance, are built into the piece. Or it can mean creating art that is activated by participants’ gestures *in situ* or accessed via individuals’ mobile devices. Art can be crowdsourced, with conduits set up for incorporating textual or visual contributions from members of the public. More rarely, viewers’ experiences of art might be directly integrated into the work itself. Still other kinds of public art are conversation pieces (Kester), generated through more or less long-term collaborations with groups of people investigating specific urban social problems in creative ways. Artistic engagement with the urban public can generate original, sometimes surprising encounters.

This colloquium will engage these themes through academic papers, artists’ talks, exhibitions, and workshops on interdisciplinary collaboration. We invite submissions for scholarly papers that focus on the themes of the colloquium from academics, researchers and artists working in the social sciences, humanities, urban planning, architecture, fine arts and media arts. Space is limited, as the aim here is to give ample time for in-depth presentation and discussion of high-quality papers, circulated before the colloquium, with a view to producing a special journal issue. Send an abstract of up to 250 words, along with authors’ names, affiliations and email and postal addresses to [tracingthecity@gmail.com](mailto:tracingthecity@gmail.com) by June 30.

Conference organizers: Solomon Nagler (NSCAD University); Kim Morgan (NSCAD University); Martha Radice (Dalhousie University). Contact [tracingthecity@gmail.com](mailto:tracingthecity@gmail.com) for further information.