

Public Sculpture Today as Object and Event: Experiencing Time and Activating Space*

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This study aims to analyze how public art questions the function of art on a philosophical and political level. At once accessible and critical, public sculpture gives a social dimension to the body's phenomenological experience of space and enables the public sphere to materialize into a real space of social interaction.

My 55 case studies cover contemporary sculpture created in the Western world, primarily after 1980, and include works as diverse as Jaume Plensa's *Crown Fountain*, Andy Goldsworthy's *Midsummer Snowballs*, and Joanna Rajkowska's *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue*. These artworks appeared at the same time as the critical discourse on public art began promoting intangible forms of social practice. The sculptures and installations examined address the relationship between the public and its physical and social environment. The works link public space, the human body, and time structured by human history. These links are discussed in three sections that explore how each artwork challenges individual identities, reveals social relationships to be processes that evolve over time, and encourages the viewer to become publicly engaged in social change.

Public art leads us to consider space as a resource that enables human creativity. Works materialize conflict and encourage viewers to find themselves within the body politic. This social structure in turn gives identity and political relevance to public space. Publics that appreciate the body as process can perform their own identities. Art — the experience of co-creation that takes place between the public and the object — results from a confrontation between the viewer's sense of time and the work's own *time specificity*. While the traditional monument imposed a particular reading of history on the public, contemporary anti-monuments force it to directly confront conflicting narratives of past events. By offering other perspectives on the past, present, and future, critical public art undermines existing frameworks by which we integrate history, question the distribution of common resources, and modify general rules governing our behavior.

Public art can be a catalyst for the formation of a sense of awareness of *publicness* through its commitment to both conflict and fleeting consensus within democracy. Whenever it claims, occupies, or dominates a particular place over a specific time, public art becomes a political statement implicating viewers in the experience of coexistence, strengthening public spaces and participation in the discursive sphere. Contemporary public art welcomes discord and undermines both the rational consensus endorsed by models of the discursive public sphere and the dominant hegemony, supporting an approach intent on creating sites for exchange and dialogue. While we can distinguish between critical public artists who defend agonistic spaces and those who aim to create consensus, we maintain that public sculpture that exists in the public interest and supports political renewal is a form of temporary reconciliation that must oscillate between these two positions. In the past, public art was created for an existing audience. Today it must enable its audience to form a public.

* French Title: La Sculpture publique aujourd'hui entre objet et événement : Expérimenter le temps | Activer l'espace

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June 2013
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