

Public space, private space

WEEK 4

GGRC13

Questions for this week

1. How are urban political geographies shaped by the ways that 'public' and 'private' spaces are designated and legally constructed in the city?
2. How are spaces once considered public becoming private, and vice versa?















What is 'public' space?

- Usually refers to space that is owned and/or managed by the local government and which is accessible to **all**
 - Roads and streets, public squares, parks, sidewalks, public community centres and beaches are usually considered 'public space'.
 - Usually free to access
 - Open to all the public
 - Public space is also associated with particular democratic rights – to assembly, to free speech and expression etc...

*See Kohn p8 for the messiness of defining the term
'public'*

Public space and free expression

- “Overwhelmed by telemarketing, junk mail and the constant barrage of sales pitches, people have become deeply resistant to political solicitation.” (Kohn p3)
- Who is allowed to publicize their message in public space, and who is not?



- Kohn argues that public life is being undermined by the growing phenomenon of the ‘private’ governance of particular urban spaces.
- In her view, the question about whether or not we live in a vibrant, healthy democracy is ultimately a question about the spaces that we have (or don’t have) to participate in democratic life.

Toronto women’s march
drew 60,000 people last
Saturday to public spaces



- (Kohn, p1) The Crossgate Mall incident, in which Stephen Downs was arrested for wearing a peace t-shirt on mall grounds on the eve of the Iraq war, is “emblematic of restrictions on political expression proliferating across the USA. It illustrates the political impact of the privatization of public space.”

Together alone?

- These restrictions on privately owned public space, and what Kohn sees as our growing reluctance to engage with or be engaged by strangers in public spaces “threaten the variation and diversity of political life”, but more importantly, to our day-to-day encounters with everyday political discussion.



Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOHV1VlxL0A>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwtpSlaS7_4

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqTeTUi_T8

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPoSzpiK2TI&list=PL2553BC62DF7B52DF>





Eroding 'the commons'? The ad hoc privatization of public space

- To Kohn (p3), the privatization of public space is sometimes not direct, but indirect and so gradual as to be almost unnoticed.
- Commodification – 'café creep' – describes the way that privatization can take the form of the gradual taking over of 'public' spaces by private, profit making activities.
- See "the public commons" in Kohn p7-8



‘Ad creep’: the politics of outdoor advertising

IllegalSigns.ca



Volunteers fight illegal signs



Google map of 550 illegal outdoor signs in Toronto (source: illegalsigns.ca)



Sidewalks



- Sidewalks are so commonplace that we don't tend to think of them as 'political' spaces.
- Yet they are crucial micro-spaces in which we make, collectively, a million small decisions everyday involving our interactions with other people.
- "Historians have long drawn attention to the political importance of everyday acts and manners as mechanisms of resistance and subjugation."
(Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht 2009 p97)

Sidewalks as spaces of white supremacy and acts of resistance

The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow

[home](#) →

A Century of Segregation
Jim Crow Stories
A National Struggle
Interactive Maps
Tools & Activities
For Teachers

Jim Crow Stories

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▶ CHARLES GRATTON

Audio: [Listen to this personal narrative](#)


This and other voices, selected from the [Behind the Veil](#) project of the [Center for Documentary Studies](#) at Duke University, are part of the book/CD set [REMEMBERING JIM CROW: AFRICAN AMERICANS TELL ABOUT LIFE IN THE SEGREGATED SOUTH](#) (The New Press/Lyndhurst Books, Center for Documentary Studies). Begun in the late 1980s when several historians connected to the Center for Documentary Studies met to address their concerns about the relatively static historical interpretation of the age of segregation, [Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South](#) is a major research project investigating the complex realities and lived experiences of African Americans through first-person testimonies.

Behind the Veil supports the creation and preservation of archival materials, including oral history interviews and family photographs; research and publication on all aspects of blacklife during the Jim Crow

You pass any white people on your way, you get off the sidewalk. Give them the sidewalk. Don't challenge white people.

LISTEN TO THIS PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Gratton recalls his childhood days and growing up during Jim Crow.

 [hear audio](#)

SUBMIT YOUR STORY →

Share your memories of the Jim Crow era.



Sidewalks a space of gender politics...

- “In the nineteenth century [America]... men moved from private realms to public spaces and were expected to easily navigate both spheres, but women who wished to maintain middle-class propriety were relegated to private realms.”
 - Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht (2009:89)

flâneur

[French; noun] *one who strolls around aimlessly but enjoyably, observing life and his surroundings.*



...but also class politics

“Although it affected all women, the private sphere was a middle-class construct, and working-class women could not and did not want to always follow its dictates... For female peddlers on sidewalks and in public markets, being in public was necessarily and un-remarkable. “

Loukaitou-Sideris, A. and R. Ehrenfeucht (2009:89)

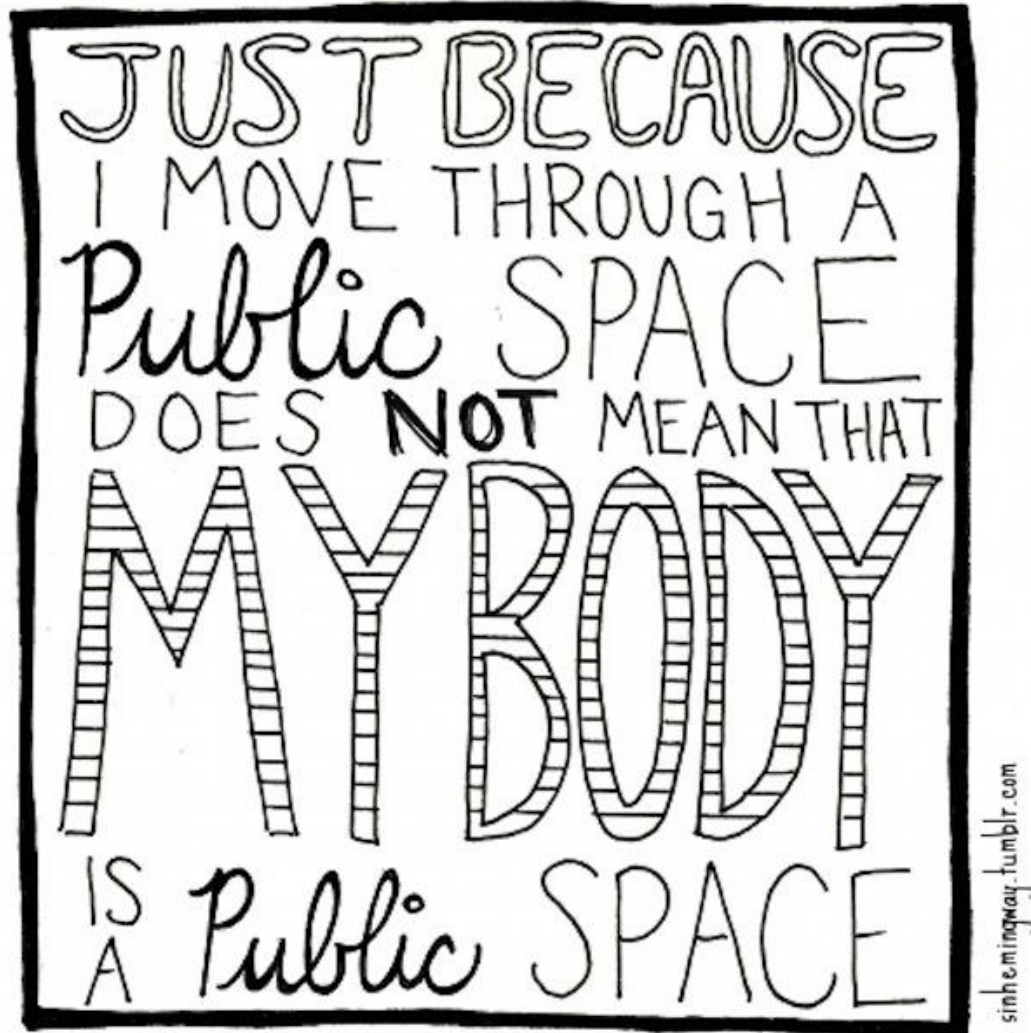


...And sexual politics



- “No respectable 19th century middle-or-upper class woman would be seen in public unescorted. In the daytime only working class women walked alone, and at night a woman alone was considered a prostitute or a ‘night walker’ ...”
- Loukaitou-Sideris, A. and R. Ehrenfeucht (2009: 90)

Week 7: Genders, Sexualities and (Public) Spaces



The growth of quasi-private urban associations

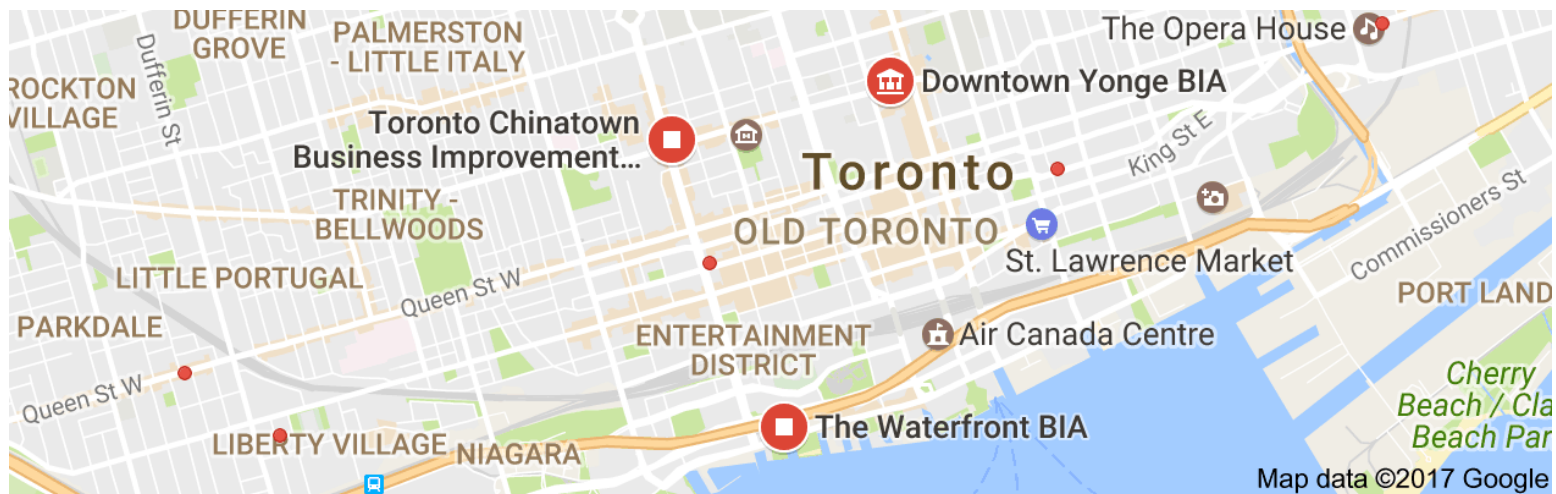
- We can also consider the growth of local neighbourhood organizations
- Homeowners' associations
- Residents' associations
- Business improvement associations (BIAs)

**Privatization or democratization of
neighbourhood space?**



Business Improvement Associations

- Business Improvement Associations (BIAs or BIDs) are quasi-legal organizations that can be formed to make decisions about revitalizing or animating the streetscape and business districts of a particular neighbourhood
- These associations can tax local businesses to provide services like street planters, garbage collection or private policing.
- In these cases, public goods (in this case, the street and the sidewalk) is put in the hands of private actors.



Business Improvement Associations (BIAs)



The BIA's control of St. Lawrence streets

- Busker fest



- Homeless or panhandling individuals



Image source: torontosun.com

Week 12: squatting, informal settlement and 'occupancy urbanism'



'Private' (and illegal) settlements on public land in the neighbourhood of Kibera, Nairobi

The political problem of carefully curated sidewalks

- This ***uncertainty***, however, is what cities and business owners have nevertheless sought to reduce by redeveloping particular commercial streets.... Diverse residents enjoy these abridged streets for shopping, observing and socializing but for many observers, these tightly controlled destination streets are predictable and exclusive.”
 - Loukaitou-Sideris, A. and R. Ehrenfeucht (2009: 90

Spaces of unpredictable encounter



“City life is composed of clusters of people with affinities — families, social group networks, voluntary associations, neighborhood networks, a vast array of small ‘communities.’ City dwellers frequently venture beyond such familiar enclaves, however, to the more open public of politics, commerce and festival, where strangers meet and interact. “

Iris Marion Young, in [*Justice and the Politics of Difference*](#), 1990

Assignment 1 – eval criteria

	A	B	C	D
<u>Article summary</u> : Well structured, good grammar; clear and well-written. Gives a clear description of what the article is about and what the author(s) set out to do.				
<u>Identification of key concepts/insights</u> : Student accurately focuses in on what the main insights, theoretical concepts, etc... of the article is and shows the reader that they have a good grasp of these, and/or can see the ‘forest for the trees’, i.e. they see beyond the list of ideas or points made in the article and are able to articulate the broader contribution that it makes as a whole.				
<u>Analysis and critical thinking</u> : Goes beyond summary and concept identification to really discuss the merits of the article, discuss what questions the author doesn't consider, point to shortcomings in the methods, or otherwise think analytically about the contributions of the article.				

Some takeaways

- The distinctions between ‘public’ and ‘private’ space in cities is not static – it has changed over time, and is different in different cities
- Spaces are rarely entirely private or public, but are often a complex mix of both
- Who is ‘in’ and ‘out’ of place in public space has involved gendered, classed and racialized politics throughout history.
- The ways in which ‘private’ interests are colonizing public spaces can have major implications for how cities are governed, how equitable they are, and how democratic they are.