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EDITED BY MALCOLM MILES

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Introduction

Artists have always addressed nature-based themes. As artists working in an inter-disciplinary research setting we are interested in work that transcends singular authorship and integrates the arts with other areas of knowledge; and in knowledge that has the power to change perception and alter values. We seek to develop opportunities for discourse about place, its aesthetics and ideas about change. Returning to our primary discipline, we are particularly interested in art's relationship to radical (socially transformative) ecological theories and the more adventurous ideas in public planning. We have been thinking about how art moves beyond the visual exposition of the nature/culture relationship to the role artists are beginning to take in the public discourse of this relationship. In this paper, we contextualize this emergent practice by examining the public realm as a setting that defines and focuses ecological and social questions, then review Arthur Danto's and Suzi Gablik's arguments for art's social and ecological engagement. In Chapter 8, we continue the discussion in terms of contemporary practices.

The Public Realm

We are interested in the systems and ecologies which create experiences that can be understood and framed in the post-industrial public realm. Post-industrial refers to the shift from carbon based industrial power and production towards a computer based economy of information, goods and services that began in the late 1970s. The post-industrial condition includes a pervasive legacy of human produced pollution that affects air, soil, water and ultimately the climate of the planet.

The question of the public realm is pursued from a broad interdisciplinary perspective: artists, architects, historians, philosophers, political scientists, social scientists, urban planners all participate in explicating and theorizing this important area of social, environmental, spatial and political action. The public realm has

been variously charged through the years as a political entity with the responsibility (but not the power) to keep the state bureaucracy honest and the market economy in check. In other cases it is a performative zone outside the home where we practice civility. Only recently have ideas of intimacy, reproduction and domesticity entered the discourse. We argue for the inclusion of environmental concerns as well.

The Concept
Over the last two hundred years the public realm has taken on a variety of forms and constructs. The concept can be confusing because it is often formulated in opposition to or complicity with the state, private economic interests, or private/personal interests. Following Weintraub (1997) on the public/private distinction, we suggest four oppositional relationships which define the current concept of the public realm.

Public Realm Concept Models, (After Weintraub, 1997: 8-35)
I. The Market and The State model (a capitalist model), which sees the public/private distinction primarily in terms of the distinctions between the public sector of state administration and the private sector of the market economy. This idea places the state in a position to manipulate the rewards and punishments through political coercion and incentives that move the rational self-interests of the market economy toward greater social benefit.

II. The Active Citizenship model (a classical approach), which sees the public realm in terms of political community and citizenship distinct from both the market and the administrative state. Public life is a political process of active participation in collective decision making which provides a discursive-democratic set of checks and balances upon both the state administration as well as the market economy. This public realm is a field of discourse and action that emerges when humans act and deliberate in concert. (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1995, 1996)

III. The Spatial-Social model (an urban planning model) consists of interaction within a continuum of public, semi-public, municipal, market, corporate and private spaces all contributing to and framing an experience of sociability mediated by conventions that allow diversity and social distance to be maintained despite proximity. This is a realm of civility which has retreated from the idea of collective decision making. This idea of public realm is in opposition to the private realm of the family and the domestic sphere, but it is also in opposition to the state administration and the market economy which collaborate to provide the authority and administration of this public realm helping to maintain the opportunity for civility. (Aries, 1987-91; Jacobs, 1961: 29-112)

IV. The feminist model splits the social world into gendered domestic versus public lines. Where the public side includes the state, the economy and the realm of political discourse. This idea is based on a history of patriarchal bias in terms of

market-product based work, and the political viability of masculine forms of "public life". This is in direct contrast to a political history that denies women's voice, women's labor or the viability of issues that are placed behind the veil of privacy, intimacy or domesticity. (Fraser, 1994: 110) This is a transformative model, intended to critique the patriarchal traditions and the problems of dichotomous thinking about public/private realities.

The oppositional and conflicting aspects of these ideas can be clarified with a table (fig.1).

fig. 1: public realm concept models

Title	Public	Private	Authority
Market and State	**State** Administration	Market Economy	
Active Citizenship	Political Community and Citizenship	Market Economy and **State** Administration	
Spatial-social	Social Civility in a Spatial Contnuum	Family and the Domestic Sphere	**State** Administration Market Economy
Feminist	The **State**, Economy + Civic Discourse	Family and the Domestic Sphere	Social Critique

In this discussion, we are trying to understand what public means - not so much a site of comfort like the home, competition like the market, or poll-driven management by the state, but maybe a site of tolerance and unexpected experiences, and the potential for those that occupy urban spaces as well as those that claim expertise in urban spaces to find equitable means of creative engagement and the potential for transformative action.

> "…By definition a public space is a place accessible to anyone, where anyone can participate and witness, in entering the public one always risks encounter with those who are different, those who identify with different groups and have different opinions or different forms of life."
> (Young, 1990: 240)

Young is a political scientist who provides us with a sense of the complexities that face us once we move away from the theory and towards the reality of life in the public realm, observing the complex diversity which has replaced the reductive idea of a public by that of multiple publics. Through history, the public realm has never been singular or without contest. It is a dynamic reality with constant challenges to access, representation and authority. Stanley Aronowitz (1997) provides a concise overview of the authors through history who have addressed the question of the public realm. In *Is Democracy Possible?* John Dewey (1927) writes about the complexities of a democracy which has transcended the scale of personal relationship replacing it with a mediated continental nation state held together without political bonds. Walter Lippman (1955) has argued for an expert public

which services a phantom public of citizens. Each of these authors saw no easy path to an articulate public realm equipped to cope with complex issues. Jurgen Habermas (1996) faced with similar challenges in post-war Germany developed a theory of communicative action which provides a means to resolve structural barriers to understanding. His theory outlines an unconstrained dialogue amongst scientists, politicians and the public as the only one compatible with democratic self understanding. It is based upon human communication capacity and the potential of rational discourse. Authors like Seyla Benhabib (1992) and Nancy Fraser (1995) have gone into Habermas' theory of communicative action from a post-modern and feminist perspective of multiple and competing publics. Bent Flybvjerg (1998) integrates the ethical intention of Habermas' discourse theory with Foucault's analysis of power in a recent article that we think is quite useful as we consider current conditions of global power, unrestrained capitalism and environmental impacts of global proportions.

Given the recent history, Weintraub's framework is good as far as it goes. But he only begins to scratch the surface of the problems which are raised when feminist theory and new political philosophy begin to unpack the bias inherent to the public/private dichotomy. Mary Ryan (1994) tells a history of women constructing an alternative civil society with woman-only institutions, voluntary associations and philanthropic and moral-reform societies. Street protests and parades were the site of action for women excluded from participation in the legal, political and economic life of the public realm. Women, labor unions and civil rights activists are just some of the historic groups that have worked in opposition to singular and dualistic ideas of the public realm. Commenting upon the ongoing success of the feminist movement, she says, "The movement of women into the public is a quantum leap in our public life; it both expands membership in the public and articulates vital aspects of the general interest that have hitherto been buried in gender restrictions and disguised as (issues of) privacy". (Ryan, 1994: 286) Iris Young looks directly at political theories, and the tendency to reduce diverse political subjects to singularities and to value commonness or sameness over difference. She says, that "Social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending to those group differences in order to undermine oppression" (Young, 1990: 3). These emergent political philosophies uncover a public realm which is moving away from singular or dualistic conceptual constructs and towards ideas of complexity and diverse publics as a reality and a social ideal.

One could argue that the state, the market, civic discourse, multiple publics and diverse family constructs are all dependant upon a meta-public sphere called nature. Remove nature and human society will find nothing more than a vacuum, with no potential to support life, commerce, politics or intimate relationships. It could be argued that this statement is so obvious it's not worth saying. But then again, let's consider what the effect might be of not stating the obvious. First, nature, like women, and diverse publics have been and continue to be denigrated to a position of subservience, without equitable representation. (Merchant, 1980;

Plumwood, 1993). The issues are simply not on the table, or if they are, the power and voice of the representatives cannot compete with other interests. But let me take a moment to provide an overview of why nature should be included in the historically anthropocentric concept, spatial framework and discourse about the public realm.

Nature is the context and source for human experience and material production. Living systems, or "nature", cannot be replaced, nor can they be manufactured with the existing knowledge and tools of agricultural, industrial or post-industrial societies. Fertile soil, pure water, clean air and biological diversity are all disappearing. Environmental economics tell us these are capital goods, they are not income that can be spent with an expectation of replacement. (Prugh et al., 1995) It is a bit of a stretch, but one could say that nature has been repressed. It has been included in the public realm equation only in terms of its material relationship to capital. Yet, we would argue that nature is, and has been, a primary focus for the construction of ideas of shared spatial uses as well as shared resource. British common law is the basis for American common law and they both support hydrological systems as public rights. We have specific water rights: the right to access, to use, as well as rights to purity and consistent delivery. Clean air laws, and clean water laws have all been written in this century in response to the impacts of industrial economies. To date the rights of nature have been confined to the rights of specific species not to become extinct[1].

Following the eco-feminist argument we would state that historically nature and women have been pushed aside and constrained from the conceptualization of the public realm. Women have captured their place. Nature demands advocacy and voice. Like the architectonic context of the spatial social model, and following the critical and transformative intent of the feminist model, we think it is essential that we consider an ecological model of the public realm. Let me reconfigure the outline.

Public Realm Concept Models, (After Weintraub, 1997: 8-35)
I.   The Market and The State model (a capitalist model)
II. The Active Citizenship model (a classical approach)
III. The Spatial-Social model (an urban planning model)
IV. The feminist model splits the social world into gendered domestic v public lines.
plus:
V.   The ecological model is a co-evolutionary paradigm that recognizes that human culture coevolves in relationship to nature. The private sector, the public sector and the intimate sector of familial relationships have historically operated in a parasitical relationship to nature. The city is a node of pure consumption that must borrow carrying capacity and energy from elsewhere (ex-urban agricultural lands and forest lands) or from the past, in terms of fossil fuels. The development and sustainability of public, semi-public, municipal, market, corporate and private spaces are all in a parasitical relationship to nature.

Without ecological representation at the table of the public realm the enlightened self interest of capital, and complicity of the state influenced by global capital have the potential to decimate nature as we know it.

fig. 2: a fifth category

Title	Public	Private	Authority
Ecological	Social and Ecological Citizenship	State, Market, Family	Limiting Factor Natural Capital
	Nature: biosphere, bioregion, landscape, ecosystem, organism		

The Experience

Experiences of the public realm can be defined at two scales. In relationships between individuals in public space and as the more encompassing social-ecological-political concept of a shared commons. It is easy to think about being "in" a public space. Public space has both its spatial and discursive forms, it has a perceptible boundary. We choose to either participate or not participate in public space activities. In contrast we would define the commons as having no real boundary; it is part of the experience of place. The commons are a shared experience that is processed through a social-political lens. Public space is to the commons as skin is to breath in the body. The skin is a clear and perceptible public-place of our body, we are aware of its condition, its visibility and its cleanliness. Breath is the body-commons which we all share, it sustains life. The breath we breathe, however, gets less attention than our skin. We are seldom aware of its chemical condition, its cleanliness or even its ability to support life – until it's too late. The former is an obvious physical artifact that we are well aware of, the latter a ubiquitous necessity easily overlooked until compromised or removed.

The experience of public space is often framed by place, articulated by architecture, urban design or landscape and hydrology and defined by social-political action. Public space can be found in both terrestrial and aquatic conditions. It can be planned and constructed as in sidewalks, streets, roads and parks. It can be preserved, conserved as in forests, ponds, estuaries and natural ecosystems. It can be managed in terms of the ocean, the great lakes or the rivers, streams and creeks of the nation. Public space is an environmental continuum of material constructs and identifiable natural systems, which are assumed available to all. A range of social-political constructs, which are based upon long-term protection, but include opportunities for legal advocacy and public oversight, supports these public spaces. The idea of public space is constantly evolving and a number of authors suggest that it is actually in a period of significant decline or outright hostile take-over. They see a public realm caught between the self-interests of nations and capital, and the mediated spectacle of consumerist desire. They include Aronowitz (1993), Davis (1999), Schiller (1989) and Sennett (1994). Other authors like Brill (1989) and Carr et al. (1992,), as well as Marcus and

Francis (1998), suggest that the old forms of dense European cities are simply giving way to a diversity of new forms and that public space is simply evolving with new relationships to the state, capital, and diverse publics and politics.

Another public space is framed and defined by the voices of citizens engaged in discussion about shared aspects of life and the issues of the day. Two voices in dialogue create this space, which can be casual (personal) or targeted (civic). This discursive form of public space is considered by many to be the bedrock of an equitable democratic society, a site worthy of significant oversight and constant critical engagement. Arendt (1958), Dewey (1927), Habermas (1995), and Lippman (1955) have developed significant texts on the subject which point to decline or crisis. They seek to understand the reasons for decline as well as strategies for restoration. Arendt and Habermas have become key points of reference for a new generation of post-modernist writers interested in the move from singular notions of public, toward diverse publics with diverse relationships and access to power.

Throughout history, interested and powerful parties have captured both the spatial and discursive forms of public space for a range of invested interests. Spaces can be fenced , policed, monitored, or otherwise secured to stop, block or deny access. Access to discursive and spatial forms of public space has been controlled, managed or denied throughout history. Civic discussions can be captured and redefined to reflect powerful interests and minimize the voices of less powerful interests. (Benhabib 1992; Fraser 1994; Young 1990)

Public space is an intimate experience in comparison to the commons. We see the commons as diverse and ubiquitous resources, which are perceived as too dynamic, too diffuse or too well integrated into the fabric of human life to have the kind of value that needs to be defended. Where the experience of public space is intimate, the experience of the commons is expansively diffuse. Despite the collective ubiquitous and multiple benefits of the material commons (and the organisms and resources that inhabit the commons), they can and have become the target of desire for powerful interests.

There is no greater prize than wealth that is extracted from a ubiquitous once-public common good redefined as a desirable market resource. For this reason the meaning, form and function of the commons is constantly shifting. For example, a century ago, rivers were considered unalterable natural commons. In the last century industrial tools allowed us to re-define their function and manage them as resources for industrial production, minimizing their ecological values (Cioc 2002; Haglund 2002; White 1995). With the emergence of radio and television technology the airwaves were discovered and targeted as a public good, to be controlled by federal interests (Aronowitz, 1993; Schiller 1989). In the coming century, inner space is the commons of speculative desire with our worldwide genealogical heritage, the focus of new bio-industrial economies that seek to

market plants, organisms and natural systems that were previously considered part of our ubiquitous common heritage (Shiva 1997).

The post-industrial era provides significant challenges to our biological and ecological commons. First, the external world is affected by a legacy of industrial pollutants that remain in our atmosphere, soils and waters. We are just now beginning to realize that we have and are affecting nature and the global commons in ways never before thought possible. Secondly, the concept of resource extraction has now descended to the microbiological level, with market interests scrambling to capture value through mapping, manipulation and patenting of genes. The market interests in these processes are of course enormous, with desire and economic speculation outrunning moral and ethical constraints. In these examples we find a range of meaning, form and function, which radically redefines the concepts of humanity, nature, public space and the global commons in the coming century. This is an area of massive cultural flux, one where strategic energy in terms of interdisciplinary arts practices can result in opportunity for significant creative engagement, as well as economic and intellectual support with good potential for social-political impact.

> "The forms for actual change in our society are yet to be created, though created they must be, for affective forms for change will be tooled from the actual conditions and historical location of our cultural space and consciousness." (Kosuth, 1993: 171)

Art and Society - Art and Ecology

In the previous section, we have attempted to make an argument for nature and the public realm as sites that demand strategic, critical and creative attention. Yet isn't this simply another topic amongst a myriad of subjects that the artist might consider as the framework for a formal media study? After all, a proper education in the arts is about self expression through media, technology and technique, not subjects like society, ecology and the tension between the public and private realm. In the section below, we are simply recognizing a theoretical boundary between art that is concerned with itself and art and that engages the world. To draw a boundary and to name it creates the condition that allows us to breach that boundary.

Philosophical models

> "With modernism, the conditions of representation themselves become central, so that art in a way becomes its own subject." (Danto, 1997: 7)

Art has been its own subject for over a century. Our discipline has been deeply invested in the examination of its own media and method, the very concept of itself. We inhabit the world, but for the most part seldom seek to affect it in any direct way. Today the word art can be defined only in reference to artists' production framed by the authorizing reaction of institutional support, and an impact upon the viewer that demands intellectual and/or material consideration.

We should take a moment to discuss how we come to this condition. In the quote above by Danto he claims that modernism turned inward upon itself seeking to understand the material conditions of artistic representation much in the way that sciences sought to understand the material conditions of natural systems. In discussing this subject further, Danto comments upon the end of modernism and the beginning of what he calls the post-historical period, rather than the post-modern, which he feels is a label which misdirects the sense of contemporary possibilities and the lack of a definable style in the current period worth recognition at this point.

> "…nothing marks the difference, outwardly, between Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* and the Brillo boxes in the supermarket. And conceptual art demonstrated that there need not even be a palpable visual object for something to be a work of visual art. That meant that you could no longer teach the meaning of art by example. It meant that as far as appearances were concerned, anything could be a work of art, and it meant that if you were going to find out what art was, you had to turn from sense experience to thought. You had in brief, to turn to philosophy."
>
> (Danto, 1997: 13)

From the perspective of philosophical logic, the denotation of the word art produces a larger set of things that art may be, than the set of things that art is not. The logic based connotation or dictionary definition of the world is harder to pin down as a result. It is very hard to describe today what may evolve into something new tomorrow. Our working definition above is relatively clear that the product of the artists work can be understood in terms of the integration of conceptual and material content. The material and conceptual form of the artist's production can also be defined in terms of its affect and effect. We would agree with Carol Becker writing about the Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse, who says that the strength of art lies in its otherness (its affect)[2] and its potential effect on society. "Fundamental to Marcuse's understanding of the possibility of human liberation was his belief in the imagination – its regenerative abilities to remain un-colonized by the prevailing ideology, to continue to generate new ideas, and to reconfigure the familiar." (1996: 37) This idea of otherness, suggests that art is not a part of everyday reality, instead it is part and parcel of the philosophical texts, the stories and creative materials that help us make sense of the world. We see this "making sense" as theoretical direction and creative opportunity, a sense of the potential for transformative engagement in the world, we would claim that the arts have a very specific role in the world. This is different from the "making sense" of science that is tied to the notion of an analytical method of proof and truth or quantitative description. Art does not develop in the way that the natural sciences develop, presenting progressively more adequate views of an essentially unchanging reality. This we think is an important point, and is part of the value of art, in that its foundation knowledge or "core truths" are not so rigorously held that new ideas require a paradigmatic change in the area of knowl-

edge before they can be considered valid by the community of practitioners. This is the heart of what is unique in art and why its effect upon society can be significant, if we choose to focus and engage.

The downside to this is that, without a history of progressive improvement, it is also very hard to define efficacy, value and impact within or outside the discipline. This is a significant question that we will return to later in chapter 8. Let's return to Becker's thoughts on art and its effect on society. While she patently believes in the potential for art and society she is also clear that "there is a lot of confusion about where it fits, what functions it serves and where its emphasis should be placed." (1996: 39) Furthermore she claims that there is little debate about art that is considered political, but exists outside the political arena. She also claims there are few theoretical models to examine as we attempt to address such issues. Where Danto opens the door to a new intellectual inquiry about what art is, Becker asks what is art's direct relationship to society and politics. Becker's claim is provocative for those of us that are interested in this kind of question.

> "We do now realize that anything can be art. That is, any material or element in any sense can be made to function within an art context. And that in our time quality is associated with the artist's thinking, not as a ghost within the object." (Kosuth 1993: 44)

In *Has Modernism Failed* Suzi Gablik (1984) asks the question, is art for arts sake or for society's sake? She outlines the struggle between those that believe art serves no purpose and indeed that anything that served a purpose could not be art. This tradition is examined in terms of the social relations of early modernist artists who felt that art about art was a protest against the materialist society of the early 20th Century. "The original meaning of the term avant-garde implied a double process of aesthetic innovation and social revolt; it took the form of an estranged elite of artists and intellectuals who chose to live on the fringe of society." (1984: 22) Arthur Danto in *After the End of Art* (1997) describes the same period as the "age of manifestos" referencing the work of Phyllis Freeman who has unearthed "500 examples, some of which - the surrealist manifesto, the futurist manifesto - are nearly as well known as the works of art themselves." (1997: 28) Danto describes a process of definition, where artists recover, disclose or reveal the truth about art, which had been lost or poorly acknowledged. These manifestos provided a philosophy that defined a period in history and its end state, which was the one true art of the time. What art was, until the period of modernism, can be defined as 'mimesis': the imitation or simulation of the world through two and three-dimensional media. He sees the period of modernism as a time when artists and intellectuals worked to clarify the philosophical truth of art, in the same way that a natural scientist clarifies the fundamental truth of natural organisms. In one instance he compares the astronomer considering a point of light as a star or not a star as similar to Duchamp viewing his urinal or Warhol viewing his boxes as art or not art. Danto describes the next transition, where art moves away from questions of truth.

"…a new level of philosophical consciousness has been reached. And it means two things. It means first that having brought itself to this level of consciousness, art no longer bears the responsibility for its own philosophical definition." (Danto, 1997: 36)

Where Danto sees the collapse of modernism[3] in Wahol's Brillo boxes, the loss of art as an identifiable typology, initiating a new period of variable forms of conceptualization and production, Gablik sees the dissipation of the revolutionary intent of the avant garde in a self referential formalism that is only aesthetic. Claiming this as a tragic end game she quotes Peter Fuller: "…the contemporary artist's freedom is, in any case illusory, since it is restricted solely to aesthetic questions. It is like the freedom of madmen and the insane; they can do what they like because whatever they do has no affect at all… they have every freedom except the one that matters: the freedom to act socially." (1984: 31) To act upon society, is at the heart of Gablik's thesis.

Gablik has a range of ideas, from questions about the ability to study art for moral results, to the restoration of spiritual content and tradition in the arts. At first glance the idea of tradition could seem somewhat reactionary and conservative for this vocal critic of the art world, but she is quite clear and typically to the point.

"What the early modernists failed to foresee, in their dedication to the new, was that such a conception of history could only be built on sand, since no belief ever had anything solid to support it. Maximizing the variable of change – stimulating it artificially and making it the most important thing on the stage – destroyed stability. Pressed to its ultimate conclusion, the steady violation of expected continuities – which has been the crucial element in modernist 'progress' – is radically at odds with systemic wisdom and equilibrium." (Gablik, 1984: 116)

In this statement she stakes out a ground, which is in curious tension with the statement in the previous section by Becker commenting upon Marcuse, stating that the strength of art is in its otherness. Gablik's conclusion identifies the conceptual point at which modernism was so deeply invested in otherness, and its pursuit of the form of that otherness, that it went beyond its capacity to sustain itself, developing a cultural position which could only result in its own demise, the end of modernism, or, in Danto's terms, the end of art. In these arguments of Gablik and Danto we have a clear sense that art is at a point of significant transition. It is open to the ideas that transcend its own meaning and methods of production. Becker, via Marcuse challenges us (the artists) to find that new way, through social-political fit, function and possibly impact. In Chapter 8 we suggest some cases of how artists have engaged with this context.

Notes

1   In western cultures the courts are the primary sites of action when the question of rights are considered. In eastern and mid-eastern countries, religion can provide the authority for rights of nature.

2   Becker, 1996: 44 discusses Marcuse's idea of "otherness" in terms of its "inability to become part of the reality principal or in any way to anticipate the needs of the performance principle". We will go a bit deeper into this statement later in the text.

3   We should say that Danto is interested in the social function of art, it is a consistent subtext in his writing, it is simply not his primary agenda as it is with authors like Becker, Gablik, Lippard etc. As the art critic for *The Nation* a decidedly left-liberal publication he has been able to take unpopular stands and reveal the complexities of high culture and their impact on questions of art and public space. (See his article on Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*.)

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