A6815: Public Space: Rhetorics of the Pedestrian

"The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be..." Michel de Certeau, 1984.

"Public space" is among the most widely used tropes in the spatial disciplines and it shapes discussions about control, freedom, status, and identity in the spaces of the city – indoor and out, and in the suburb, territory, or region. The term suffuses our drawings, images, and propositions yet typically remains abstract. For the term to be helpful, we must ask harder questions: How is public space experienced and regulated? How is public space entangled with the processes and discourses of urbanization? Are there multiple publics and different kinds of public spaces?

To refine an examination of public space, this seminar focuses on the pedestrian, the walker in the city and the prime user of public space. Yet the pedestrian is not a generic category: pedestrians are shoppers, workers,
tourists, vendors, residents, demonstrators, or homeless, of different races, classes and origins, of different capacities and with different expectations. None have the same access to, or status in, public space. How do pedestrianized spaces evidence these differences? How are forms of power or authority articulated in particular spaces?

Once a thorn in the side of traffic planners and city engineers who widened streets and narrowed sidewalks, the pedestrian has become central to "best practices" in remaking urban spaces. Regulations are being re-written, sidewalks adjusted, streets torn up, and street management expanded. But these are not isolated policies or actions since pedestrianization is has become a central feature in the monetizing of urban space, where every inch of the city is represented as a site of profit. How do pedestrian spaces and policies demonstrate or respond to this shift?

And, per de Certeau, the walker in the city carries political and counter-cultural meanings, standing in for the capacity of citizens (and non-citizens) to evade or protest control by urban or state institutions. The pedestrian might be a redemptive figure. Pedestrians, and the process of pedestrianization, reveals how cities are places – sometimes contested – of stability and instability. Thus, in this seminar, we will document how pedestrian spaces have been regulated, designed, planned, maintained, surveilled, policed, represented, perceived, and used, perhaps offering a glimpse of how power operates in cities.

01/21 Week 1: Introduction: The Politics of Pedestrianization

01/28 Week 2: Livability & Walkability


02/04 Week 3: Complete & Incomplete Streets


02/11 Week 4: Publicness: Utility and Utilitarian (UD Beira trip)


02/18 Week 5: Regulation and Governance (UD Addis trip)


Nicholas Blomley, Rights of Passage: Sidewalks and the Regulation of Public Flow (2011)


02/25 Week 6: In-class discussion of Dossier

03/03 Week 7: Pedestrian Planning 1

Victor Gruen, The Heart of Our Cities (1964) 209-242


Carmen Hass-Kau, The Pedestrian and the City (Routledge, 2015)


03/10 Week 8: Pedestrian Planning 2


Harvey Rubenstein, *Central City Malls* (Wiley, 1978)


03/17  Week 9: Spring Break