



Week 2

Writing with public spaces

SUMMARY

The second week of the MOOC focuses on the specific aspects of dramaturgy for public space projects. Dramaturgy can be defined as the phase and process of creating artistic content and the procedures for adapting it for the stage.

Public space offers a different kind of stage, so the dramaturgy needs to work with the aspects of everyday life that resonate with the work. This lesson is organised into three parts:

- public space as a medium: the role of the location in the narrative and dramaturgical development
- adjusting perspective: ways of taking the space into account
- carrying a message: the aesthetic categories linked to the artist's dramaturgical intentions.

Lesson 1: Public space as a medium

Dramaturgy focuses on the meaning of a work, and involves studying or developing its narrative out of actions and **dramatic tensions**: an initial situation, twists, rising action, climax, dénouement, conclusion, etc.

It also involves using staging techniques to provoke reactions or **pull on the emotions** of the audience. In public space, any part of real-life that finds its way into the work, even by chance, contributes to and communicates with the artistic message.

The place where the work is presented therefore always plays a role and affects the work and the audience's perception of it. This is why the location is defined as a **medium**.

This role as a **medium** can correspond to a number of different registers, and different ways of playing with the elements of a place. We draw a distinction

between two major categories: the space as a **support medium (backdrop)** and as a **material medium**.

In the **support medium** category, the space plays a secondary role, but never becomes neutral. It is the backdrop for the work, but the message does not depend on the specific place where it is presented.

In the **material medium** category, however, the space plays a decisive role in that it serves as the raw material for the message. The work is built around the place, histories, life stories and accounts from residents, or specific features of the landscape. It is **site-specific**.

Lesson 2: Adjusting perspective

Working with and adapting to public space involves adjusting your perspective and deciding what angle you are going to adopt.

At this point, it is worth remembering the main categories of artistic intervention in order to determine the register of your piece. In **theatrical performance**, which comes from a long tradition of theatre, the space serves as the backdrop for an



action that is supposed to take place somewhere else: actors play characters in another place and time.

In **performance art**, the artist does not play a character, but performs as an artist, and the space is taken as it is, here and now. The **happening** is similar to performance art, and invites audiences to take part in a collective experience, which is the artistic act itself.

Art intervention is the aesthetic category in which the artistic purpose is to highlight some aspect of the context in order to play on the audience's conscience, with the goal of impacting reality.

The last form of art that we talk about is an **art event**, an artistic act which bypasses or transgresses the normal rules of the art market.

Beyond that, we need to work out what filter to apply to the perception of space, and what perspective or viewpoint to adopt.

Lesson 3: Carrying a message

The artist's message flows out of the perspective that they present on the space. Here again, there are a number of approaches.

One involves **portraying the world as it is**, shining light on hidden or faint realities, as a kind of reflection of reality.

Another approach is when artists **give a critical perspective** of the world, highlighting injustice or denouncing tragic situations, in more or less radical forms of artistic **activism**.

When artists get directly involved in social, political or environmental struggles, **activism** is the portmanteau used to refer to what they do.

Another register is **experiential art**, in which artists invite audiences to engage in an uncommon sensory

Artists can choose to consider a space for what it is **in itself**, from an overall perspective, or focus on more subtle aspects. Art thereby **makes the existent visible**.

A place can be considered for its **metonymic function**, i.e. as the symbol of a much bigger reality. A symbol can be a **symptom** when it expresses something dysfunctional that the artist chooses to highlight.

Artists can also make us change our perspective and consider places from a **new angle**, not for what they are, but for what they evoke. In this case, **metaphor** is used to evoke somewhere else, opening up a new perspective on reality. **Allegory** is another method used to communicate an abstract concept using a concrete image.

or relational experience. This type of project allows participants to take part in an experience that changes their perception and physical use of the spaces and modifies their social interactions.

These various approaches are all based on reality, but artists can equally have no purpose related to the actual space. They may have a purely aesthetic intention, where their aim is to **cultivate beauty** or **arouse an emotion** amongst the audience. The artist invites them to let go and simply contemplate the work in an attempt to awaken a state of poetical or philosophical meditation in the pursuit of sensory or intellectual satisfaction, or the pursuit of pleasure.