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THE SPACE OF ART ¹

Michael R. Hill, Ph.D. (Geography), Ph.D. (Sociology)²

Introduction

Three years ago, Tami Miller challenged me to think formally about “the concept of space as creative grounds for enlivenment and immersion,” and today’s talk revisits part of the lecture I gave here in 2013.³ The ideas presented then — as now — are grounded in my university training, research and teaching in the interrelated disciplines of geography, design studies, landscape architecture, community and regional planning, and sociology.⁴

While mostly skipping over the concept of “time” (that’s quite another discussion), I will review five spatial constructs and related ideas useful in our work as docents. The handout overs the main points, so there’s no real need for note taking.

The topic of “space” is often addressed as a large, cosmic issue. The TV show Star Trek identified space as “the final frontier, . . . Where no man has gone before.

In contrast, let’s focus on space at the human scale, as we experience it everyday as embodied, usually earth-bound, living beings. From this perspective, space is not the final frontier, it is the first frontier, it is a threshold we must cross to become fully human, to explore strange new worlds in our own back yards and “around the corner” in places like the Krasl. The essence of this human-centered approach to “space” and environmental knowing is manifest in the following video clip.

¹ Docent Training, Krasl Art Center, St. Joseph, Michigan, 11 May 2016.
² Email is the most direct method of contact: michaelhilltemporary1@yahoo.com
³ An extended version of this talk was presented in Spring 2013 for the Krasl’s First Thursday Lecture Series.
⁴ As a sociology graduate student, I was delighted to discover the world of “visual sociology.” For an introductory survey of this field, see: Image-Based Research: A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers, edited by Jon Prosser (London: Falmer Press, 1998).
To reiterate, for every one of us here on earth, space is our *first* frontier.

The Krasl is a space into which many have gone before ...

... and into which virtually everyone *can* go to explore new worlds of art.

In talking about “space,” I focus on embodied, human-scale dimensionality.

I offer five interconnected topics that are provocative in terms of “art” generally and “sculpture” specifically. These are: relative spatial magnitude, spatial dimensionality, human embodiment, places as spatial systems, and the permeability of system boundaries.

Of these, **Human embodiment** is fundamentally most important, but for now let’s take it as given. We’ll come back to it later in more detail.

Let’s start with **relative magnitude** as a way to think about the upper and lower spatial bounds for making and displaying art.

First, some words of caution about photographs. (1) As we know, photos aren’t always what they purport to be, and (2), for my purposes, they are notoriously problematic when illustrating size and magnitude. There are important differences between first-hand experiences, on the one hand, and graphic *images* of reality, on the other.

I cannot, for example, bring Chicago’s Wrigly Building into this room to demonstrate just how much larger it “really” is, relative to our embodied selves. Instead, I can only show you a photo. But, the first-hand, embodied *experience* of monumentality and radical shifts in relative magnitudes can only be *hinted at* in photographs, or in drawings, or by the maquettes that we show to visitors during docent-led tours.
Viewing a drawing, a maquette, or a PowerPoint image of a larger sculpture ...

— while often instructive — differs greatly from the visceral, embodied, first-hand experience of the “real thing.” And here, rather than display a photo of Chicago’s untitled Picasso, I ask you to think back to your own first-hand encounters with this large, iconic sculpture.

When we look at art, we necessarily do so from inside a human body. In everyday life, we typically determine whether something is “large” or “small” relative to the dimensions of our own bodies. But today, I can only show you photos.

Further, at very great extremes, large and small, our human scale is overwhelmed, making it impossible to explore the far reaches of our world without the aid of telescopes, microscopes, etc.

In this view from the Hubble telescope, the spatial magnitude represented by the image is well beyond direct, embodied experiential comprehension.

To be presented to embodied humans, the extremely large spaces explored by the Hubble must be somehow rendered at human scale. Here, they are captured photographically on gallery walls, as was done at the Krasl a few years ago. But, what we experience is the photo, not galactic space itself.

We can be awed and inspired by stars, but, as artists, the creation and arrangement of actual stars and galaxies lies far outside our human capabilities.

If not galaxies, humans can construct buildings and this model, on display at the Chicago Architecture Foundation, brings the city as a spatial whole into a relatively small, comprehensible space. Here, where the directly accessible world of human-made architecture is rendered in miniature, “art” per se definitely enters the picture.
At the other extreme, relative to our human scale, a series of men’s neckties marketed as the Cocktail Collection was said to be “inspired by the intricate molecular structures of some of your favorite beverages highly magnified under the microscope.” The right-hand tie is titled “CHAMPAGNE,” the one to the left is labeled: “WINE.” Obviously, these neckties show that art can be inspired by scientific explorations at extreme magnitudes. But, direct, unaided apprehension of the molecular-level world is simply unavailable to us as an embodied experience.

In sum, images of great spatial extremes relative to our human bodies must be somehow brought within our human scale to be visually apprehended. Today, I am doing this in a reasonably-sized lecture room using standard projection protocols. Spatially speaking, the exceptionally large are made relatively small, and the minute are rendered relatively large. Pragmatically, the world of making and appreciating the visual arts is limited to spatial magnitudes (1) that can be directly apprehended by embodied humans or (2) that have been radically transformed and mediated by miniaturization or magnification such that we can see them.

Given this reminder about photographs and technological mediation, I turn now to two sub-topics: monumentality and playful shifts in magnitude.

[slide: subtopic – monumentality]

Vertically monumental structures often become iconic symbols. We are awed by them. Examples include:

[slide: pyramids at Giza]

. . . the pyramids at Giza, . . .

[slide: Washington Monument]

. . . the Washington Monument . . .

[slide: Eiffel Tower]

. . . and the Eiffel Tower.

[slide: Brancusi’s Bird in Space]

By comparison, Brancusi’s Bird in Space, a six-foot sculpture, is not monumental and would fit comfortably within traditional indoor exhibit spaces such as the Krasl. But, within the range of directly accessible images, there are practical spatial limits to what can be displayed in traditional exhibition spaces.
Consider this wind turbine blade, 148 feet tall, recently installed as a “sculptural element” at an Interstate rest stop near Adair, Iowa.

The rest stop is located in an agricultural region newly — and densely — populated with wind turbines.

The vertical, skyward thrust of the blade at the rest stop is not only monumental, in human terms, it is — to me — every bit as intriguing as Brancusi’s *Bird in Space*. Large architectural structures can, obviously, be artistic, . . .

. . . including this massive bridge with its soaring pylons.5

The proposed Kingdom Tower, in Saudi Arabia, at nearly one mile in height, approaches the limits of vertical monumentality, given current technologies.

Compared to towers and skyscrapers, however, lateral or horizontal monumentality generally poses fewer engineering challenges, and prehistoric peoples using relatively modest technological resources left impressive marks on the landscape, ...

including this White Horse in England.

The relatively small humans (seen within the yellow circles) emphasize the horizontal monumentality of this earthwork.

5 The Millau Bridge over the River Tarn in the Massif Central opened in 2004 and is the highest bridge in the world.
The prehistoric Serpent Mound site in Ohio pushes lateral monumentality to its visual limits — ...

[slide: Serpent Mound from the air]

... in that to be seen as a whole, one must take to the air ...

[slide: Serpent Mound, Ohio, with observation tower circled]

... or climb a modern observation tower (circled in yellow) that was unavailable to the people who constructed this earthwork.

[slide: subtopic – Playful magnitudes]

Spatial exaggeration, making images and objects much larger or smaller, often has a playful, sometimes amusing dimension.

[slide: thank you note]

For example, take this ordinary “Thank You” note as a starting point.

[slide: cornfield message]

This monumental message, “Thank You! For Freedom!,” carved by tractors in a cornfield near Offutt Air Force Base in eastern Nebraska, was comprehensible only from the air; to earthbound observers it is essentially invisible. The photo in the local newspaper, however, resulted in many smiles.

[slide: baseball player swinging bat]

Let’s rotate this baseball bat . . .

[slide: baseball player – bat to vertical]

Inversions of spatial magnitude provide a playful element in several artworks . . .

[slide: Oldenburg’s Bat Column]

... as in Oldenburg’s monumental Bat Column or . . .

[slide: bat earrings]

... at the other extreme, as in these tiny but wearable bat and baseball earrings.
An ear of corn . . .

. . . inspired this whimsical . . .

. . . monumental rendition on a grain elevator near I-80 at Omaha, Nebraska.

This building exterior provides a massive expanse for a mural, do you spot it?

Here it is.

Meow!

**Dimensionality**

We move now to dimensionality. First, let’s note that one-dimensional space is for us a conceptual abstraction, not something that we can experience.

This pointillism example underscores the fact that any point visible to our eyes necessarily has extension in two dimensions.

Further, the two-dimensional images in the art books we hold in our laps, or regard on a postcard or framed on walls, or see on a smart phone screen, or view in a PowerPoint slide, exist necessarily in three dimensional space simply because they are always at some distance, a third dimension, from our embodied eyes and brains.
Every canvas has some degree of depth, minimal as it may be, and sculpture is even more obviously three dimensional.

Lynda Henderson argued in 1983 that two concepts of space beyond immediate perception—i.e., (1) the curved spaces of non-Euclidean geometry and (2) a higher fourth dimension of space—were central to the development of modern art.⁶ As suggestive as Henderson was (and continues to be in her latest revision), it is nonetheless the case that our embodied, experienced world of canvases, oils, acrylics, plaster, wood, bronze, iPhones, marble and museums remains a world of three dimensions, not four, not two, not one.

Like the world of one-dimensional space, the world of four and ever higher dimensional spaces lies in the realm of mathematics, advanced physics, and science fiction.⁷

The TV character Dr. Who traveled though higher order n-dimensional space and time in the Tardis, a space vehicle that looks from the outside like a British police call box.

The interior space of the Tardis is, of course, much, much larger than the exterior, thus defying all known laws of local space-time. This presents no problem for sci-fi writers, but artists, museum curators, and museum visitors are inescapably trapped in a three-dimensional world. We can, however, imagine what it might be like to enter something akin to the fictional space-time of the Tardis as long as we engage in the willing suspension of disbelief abetted by some clever and very careful miniaturizations.

This is precisely the visual trick of the miniature Thorne Rooms at the Art Institute of Chicago. Visitors are enthralled by visually entering into seemingly large three-dimensional spaces that are framed, like the entrance to Dr. Who’s Tardis, by relatively small openings.

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⁷ For embodied humans, a strictly two-dimensional world is also an abstraction, one imaginatively explored in Edwin A. Abbott’s *Flatland* (second revised edition, 1884) and the animated short film, *Flatland* (35 minutes, 2007).
We walk away, however, knowing that it was a special effect based on miniaturization, knowing that everything we experience as embodied humans remains inescapably trapped in three spatial dimensions.

[slide: a flock of airplanes]

This stunning flock of airplanes is a composite image of several planes that have actually taken off, safely, at widely spaced intervals of time. If we could experience the fourth dimension, then we could see images like this with great regularity, not as photographic composites, but as direct, unmediated experiences.

[slide: light writing spiral]

One final illustration, and we’ll abandon the fourth dimension. Here is an example of light writing. Starting at the top, the artist began spinning around while seated on a stool and slowly lowered a red light source. The extended movement, from top to bottom, was recorded using a long camera exposure. What the photo depicts, in a sense, is time stacked up on itself, as a fixed instant, but time doesn’t work that way, it doesn’t actually stand still, at least in our experience. It took a relatively long interval of time, not a single instant, to make this photo.

As embodied artists, as embodied docents, and as embodied gallery goers, we are stuck with the lived realities of three-dimensional time-space.

[slide: topic — embodiment]

I turn now to embodiment and its relationships to space and art. I will assume that we agree that we exist separately and spatially in physical/biological bodies.

[slide: Woman looking at art]

It follows that we necessarily experience the world (and thus art) from within our bodies.
In sum, given the reality of various constraints and vulnerabilities, it is through our human agency\(^8\) and the capabilities of our embodied selves that we make, display, and experience art in a socially-organized, taken-for-granted spatial world of three dimensions.

Surveillance is an important human capability. It refers to our ability to absorb information from our external and internal environments. This complex capacity is crucial both to the production and the appreciation of art.

Our surveillance modalities include vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste, and kinesthetic channels — and our sense of space is most fully constructed with inputs from all of these sensory modes.

Our visual surveillance of works in art galleries frequently occurs at eye level, that is — when standing — from an elevation of 61.7 inches, on average; it’s slightly higher for adult males, slightly lower for adult females. And, when seated, as in wheelchairs or at a table, average eye level is approximately 48.5 inches.\(^9\)

Note that average eye level measurements are significantly lower for seated adults and young children than for standing adults. A sculpture that is twice as high as our own docent bodies may be easily three or four times higher for a petite youngster.

A maquette or sculpture displayed on a pedestal can present radically different surfaces and shadows to docents, on the one hand, than to young students, on the other.

The fact that our physical stature can limit, modify or otherwise impinge upon our surveillance capabilities is just one example of the constraints inherent in human embodiment. I will return to constraints and vulnerabilities in just a few moments.

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\(^8\) By agency, I mean an act as distinguished from behavior per se. As Schutz put it: “The distinguishing characteristic of action is precisely that it is determined by a project which precedes it in time. Action then is behavior in accordance with a plan of projected behavior . . . . Thus the project is the primary and fundamental meaning of the action. But this is an over-simplification . . . . When an action is completed, its original meaning as given in the project will be modified in the light of what has been actually carried out, and it is then open to an indefinite number of reflections which can ascribe meaning to it in the past tense.” (Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964, p. 11).

\(^9\) Data based on US ergonomics studies. Data for other countries will likely differ, sometimes significantly.
In the meantime, I want to point out that as embodied selves, we can make “art” simply by placing our bodies in space.

This point is radically made by the performance installations designed by Marina Abramović.

In this installation, nude performers stood immobile, facing each other at a narrow gallery entrance ...

... through which visitors had to bravely pass if they chose to continue onward.

In a parallel performance, Abramović “simply” sat for several hours without moving. As an artist, Abramović is deeply engaged with the reality of embodiment.10

We can also make art by moving our bodies through space.

Karen O’Rourke argues that the act of walking . . .

. . . can itself be an art form.11 (although this is not something we usually think about when trudging through a snowstorm) . . .

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O’Rourke references this photo from Richard Long’s *Walking the Line*\(^{12}\) by way of illustration. But, what we see here is not walking, as such, but the image of a trace through the grass *made* by walking, and this is getting ahead of ourselves.

[slide: dancer leaping]

We have long acknowledged that dance falls under the umbrella of “art.” The dance troupe Pilobolus demonstrates that human movement *per se* is art. Even as they cross over into commercial promotion, the result is nonetheless artistic and sculptural.

**[film 05 – Pilobolus Ford Canada commercial]**

[slide: wheelchair dancing]

Recent work by the Dancing Wheels Company\(^{13}\) markedly expands the limits of movement as an inclusive art form.

So, to sum up to this point: (1) We can make art by placing our bodies *in* space, and (2) we can make art by moving our bodies *through* space.

Now, as embodied beings, we can also make art by manipulating objects and rearranging elements of our spatial environment.

The embodied movements through which we act on our environment to make art range from the nearly imperceptible, to the iconic, to the very broad.

[slide: fingers on touchpad]

Embodied movements by which we make art include: the slight tremor of a finger on a laptop touchpad . . .

[slide: finger on a keypad]

. . . tapping a key on a keyboard ...
or pressing a camera’s shutter release button.

Putting the final touch on a display of art can be the smallest, apparently simplest of motions, as this short clip illustrates.

[film 06 – making a Thorne Room adjustment at the AIC]

[slide: potter at wheel]

Many embodied movements are traditionally associated with the arts... shaping clay ...

[slide: violin playing]

... the subtle pressure on a violin string ...

[slide: stone cutter]

... cutting stone ...

[slide: painter at easel]

... and the stereotypical stroke of a paint brush.

[slide: trimming a topiary]

Other, larger-muscle movements can also be artful... trimming a topiary ...

[slide: painting with feet]

... playing in paint ...

[slide: construction crane]

... all the way to operating a construction crane to realize an architect’s design.

[slide: composite of three images]

In sum, and this is a point I want to emphasize, it is difficult to think of any embodied movement, including walking through grass, that stands aloof from the potential to make “art.”
Humans possess many embodied capabilities, including adaptability and growth. And, importantly, it is our embodied communicative abilities, including speech and language, that allow us to lead discussions as docents, to express ourselves, share ideas, and think creatively and critically about the various movements, manipulations, and resulting performances and displays that we call “art.”

Embodied humans do not, however, possess unlimited capabilities. We are constrained by the physics of the real world, by various biological realities, and the physiological characteristics of our brains. These limitations are relevant to those who make art, explain art, and who design and manage spaces for displaying art.

Unaided, we can apprehend, as visible light, only a small segment of the electromagnetic spectrum.

We cannot see through opaque surfaces without the aid of technologies such as radar, sonar, X-rays, thermal scans, infrared sensors, and the like.

In this example, X-rays reveal elements of another painting buried under the surface paint of Picasso’s Old Guitarist.

Our eyesight is not especially keen; if we stand too far away from many paintings we necessarily miss out on important details.

As noted before, inspection of extremely tiny or exceptionally distant objects and events requires microscopes, telescopes, sophisticated cameras and the like.

Our night vision, unless technologically augmented, is exceptionally poor.

Images are held in our brains for only fleeting instants of time.

We get tired, we get cold; we cannot carefully attend to the whole of what the Louvre has to offer in a single day. We require rest, food, water, air, etc. etc.
Our strength wanes as we age; and we cannot simply walk through solid brick walls no matter how young or strong we are. When a gallery’s doors are locked up tight, we cannot readily enter.

We also possess several vulnerabilities as embodied humans.

We are vulnerable to injury, physical impairment and premature death, to physical capture and incarceration, and — importantly — to betrayal. I pause momentarily on mayhem, torture, and the like only to point out that they are frequently the subject of artistic expression.

Betrayal deserves special notice as a human vulnerability.¹⁴ In the realm of art, we enter here the dubious nether world of art fakes and forgeries, authentication swindles, and art thefts (for what is theft but a betrayal of trust?).

These themes are explored in many places, but for an engaging introduction, please consider viewing Orson Welles’ last major film, “F for Fake” which is available here in the Krasl Art Center library.

In sum, we possess identifiable vulnerabilities, constraints, and capabilities, all relevant to the making and apprehending of art. In particular, Homo sapiens is capable of movement, and it is mobility that not only allows us to make art, it permits us to travel to and through spaces such as galleries, sculpture gardens, and other spatial locations where art is made and displayed.

Spaces & Places

¹⁴ Discussed by Erving Goffman as the ever-present possibility of our “containment” in a “fabrication” (Frame Analysis, pp. 83-122, 156-200) and less formally in Lying by Sissela Bok (New York: Pantheon, 1978).
I would enjoy thoroughly exploring the idea of spaces as “systems,” but we would need several hours. To whet your appetite, I’ve provided a short introduction to “systems” in the handout. For today, I simply point to the wide range of spaces and places in which art can be displayed.

Let’s begin with the body itself. It can be the site of face painting, as in this example, and for tattoos, of course.

The body can also be a place on which or from which to hang art, as in the case of jewelry . . .

or clothing, as in this fashion show example from Armani.

Even the cast on a broken limb can be a worn site for artistic expression.

And finally, framed art per se can also be hung from the body, as in the case of Andy Worhol wearing his own self-portrait.

When thinking of art displayed in galleries and our homes, we usually think of hanging pictures on walls.

Viewing great works of art placed on walls is a central part of popular ideas ...

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15 For discussion, see the Appendix — A Brief Introduction to Systems

16 On clothing per se, see especially Charlotte Perkins Gilman, The Dress of Women, edited by Michael R. Hill and Mary Jo Deegan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002; originally published in 1915).
about visits to art museums

We should note that conventions for displaying art on walls are themselves social constructions that change with the times and vary from place to place.

[slide: Diego Rivera mural in Mexico]

... as shown in this dramatic use of wall space in a magnificent stairwell in Mexico.

[slide: stairs at AIC]

The risers in a flight of stairs can also be places for art, as in this recent installation at the Art Institute of Chicago. For, what are the risers in a staircase but a series of very short walls.

[slide: the “Face on the Barroom Floor” – Central City, Colorado]

Beyond walls, floors and horizontal spaces are also places for art, as this paradigmatic photo of “The Face on the Barroom Floor” graphically illustrates. Other possibilities include:

[slide: making a design in the sand on a beach]

... making designs at a sandy beach.

[slide: formal Japanese garden]

... the geometric patterns in a Japanese formal garden.

[slide: Navajo sand painting]

... Navajo sand painting.

[slide: floor mosaics, Portugal]

... floor mosaics.

[slide: chalk painting]

... chalking the block.

17 Jitish Kallat, Public Notice 3 (Grand Staircase, Art Institute of Chicago, 2010-2011).
... and the installation of an interior plantscape in an art museum.

Ceilings are not much used in today’s newer museums, but they are the sites ... of some of our most iconic paintings.

Architecturally, domes are frequently adorned with stunning examples of ceiling art, as in this example from the Cultural Center in Chicago.

More recent gallery uses of ceiling space include Ai Weiwei’s *Snake Ceiling* ... and Giuseppe Licari’s *Humus*, a ceiling installation that, in revealing the undersides of tree roots, provides a ready-made segue to my next topic — underground art.

There is, of course, artwork about underground spaces, as in this poster for the London subway system ... and

... in this recent exhibit at the John Crerar Library at the University of Chicago.

But underground space can also be a place for art. This site, in the Vienna sewer system ...
. . . was the location – in the film, *The Third Man* – . . .

. . . for a chase scene, featuring Trevor Howard.

If one takes *The Third Man* locations tour while in Vienna, a special feature is watching a clip of the chase scene projected on the wall of the actual sewer tunnel.

If traveling to Vienna, or other destinations, from Chicago, there is a good chance you will encounter Michael Hayden’s artfully designed underground passageway at O’Hare Airport.\(^{19}\)

And, if using the subway system in Stockholm, Sweden, you will move through several imaginative underground spaces:

This slide, depicting the Terracotta Army in China,\(^ {20}\) illustrates one solution to the problem of showing literally underground art, i.e., art that cannot be seen because we cannot see through walls or layers of soil. In this case, the figures have been partially excavated *in situ* and sheltered with a protective roof.

Here, we have a cross-section model, a miniaturization, of Serpent Mound, Ohio, showing us the placement of burials within the mound as it was built-up over time.

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\(^{19}\) *Sky’s the Limit*, designed by Michael Hayden (1987)

\(^{20}\) Shaanxi Province.
The prehistoric art at Lascaux, France, located in underground caves, presents a difficulty of another kind. The caves are now closed to public tours, but can be visited in faux reconstructions, as was done recently at the Field Museum in Chicago.\(^{21}\)

If art can be displayed underground, why not underwater, as was done recently off the Florida Keys.\(^{22}\)

Note too that art can be displayed on the surface of rivers and ponds.

Outdoor spaces provide myriad opportunities for displaying art.

For landscape architects, the landscape is the art, as in Frederick Law Olmstead’s plan for New York’s Central Park.

Closer to home, the ecologically-sensitive vision of Jens Jensen’s prairie school landscape design for Benton Harbor’s Jean Klock Park has now, sadly, been lost to neglect, on the one hand, and to privately-owned golf greens and fairways, on the other.\(^{23}\)

Trees can be structures from which art is hung ...

. . . and to which nondestructive wrappings can be applied. Here in summer, and here

\(^{21}\) March 20 – September 8, 2013.

\(^{22}\) The exhibit was first installed in 2011 and is open only to qualified divers. It has recently been reinstalled.

\(^{23}\) The Architectural Drawings of Jens Jensen, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, online Image Bank. Website: http://bentley.umich.edu/legacy-support/architects/jensen/index.php The online Image Bank includes a detailed, eight-part Jensen design for Jean Klock Park. “Jens Jensen was one of America’s most visionary prairie school landscape architects” — from the Bentley Library website.
... in mid-winter.

Parks make attractive venues for art shown out of doors, as in the annual Krasl art fairs on the Bluff.

In Christo’s 2005 “Gates Project” in New York’s Central Park, the park as a whole became a monumental, horizontal installation of bright orange portals though which visitors walked, strolled, and jogged.

The advent of winter brought major changes in contrast between the “gates” and the snow-covered park, emphasizing the part that environment can play in displaying art.

The outdoor placement of the Krasl’s many sculptures, some at locations far distant from the Art Center itself, provides a contrast to many “sculpture gardens” wherein the sculptures in a collection are grouped more or less together.

Public sidewalks offer another venue for displaying artwork in urban areas.

As does this Chicago rooftop.

[slide: highway art in France]
Along this highway in France, art has been placed . . .

[slide: highway art in France, art works circled]

. . . with the express purpose of providing mildly interesting objects for potentially bored drivers.

[slide: *Umbrellas of Harbert*, Michigan]

Closer to home, the annual placement of large, decorated umbrellas along the highway at Harbert, Michigan, encourages drivers to slow down and visit.

[slide: billboard: “If I Say So”]

Can art be placed on highway billboards? “If I Say So,” this billboard replies.²⁴

[slide: *Floating Heads*]²⁵

Air and sky itself can be a place for art, as the following four slides illustrate:

[slide: colorful kites]
[slide: hot air balloons]
[slide: fireworks]
[slide: Twin Towers memorial light shafts]

In sum, our displays of art — in buildings, in parks, on screens, in books, on billboards, on stairways, in alleyways, on walls, in caves, hanging from trees, placed underwater, floating on rivers, or lofted in the air — all of these displays are inescapably *spatial*. In practical terms, and this is my main point, there are no spaces — no places — from which art made by embodied humans can be excluded *a priori*.

[slide: topic – permeability]

**Permeability**

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²⁴ For excellent examples, see the Artist Billboard Project in Lansing, Michigan. On the web: [http://www.lansingarts.org/ProgramsServices/ArtistBillboardProject.aspx](http://www.lansingarts.org/ProgramsServices/ArtistBillboardProject.aspx)

²⁵ *Floating Heads*, by Sophie Cave, Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow, Scotland.
As my final topic, I touch briefly on “Permeability.” I refer here to the ease or difficulty of crossing or penetrating the boundary of a spatial system. Gallery spaces, for example, are typically locked up at night, and thus become impermeable to visitors if not to cleaning crews and night watchpersons. Likewise, during opening hours, galleries are open to visitors . . .

[slide: admission fees]

. . . but admission fees can reduce permeability.

[slide: long ticket line]

Long lines and waiting times can deter attendance, and thus reduce permeability.

[slide: no fees at Joslyn plus list of permeability issues]

Omaha’s Joslyn Art Museum received a 2013 grant allowing the museum to suspend admission fees for three years, thus increasing permeability. However, this slide also lists several issues that can affect permeability in any given case and situation.

[slide: ceiling too low]

We have certain expectations – often taken for granted – about permeability when we visit museums, that we can stand upright, for example, without bumping our heads.

[slide: paintings roped off]

We expect to get close enough to artworks that we can examine them carefully. But, in the interest of preservation, curators may want us to keep our distance. Crossing internal boundaries within museum spaces may not be easily negotiable.

[slide: art class at a painting]

Competing space and time demands can limit access to artworks. For example, it would take a particularly nervy visitor to walk in front of this organized study group for a closer look at the painting.

[slide: crowd at an opening]

Enclosed gallery spaces are finite. Admitting too many people defeats the ostensible purpose of the exhibition. And, what rules of dress and decorum affect admission to a gallery? The next video clip documents a particularly unusual permeability request, and a challenging situation for docents.
The needs of children and adults do not always coincide. . . .

. . . with the result that a museum that is fully permeable to a single, able-bodied adult may be less so for a family group with small children and the family dog. And, vice versa, the energy and antics of some children may be off putting to more staid museum goers.

Permeability also varies according to the capabilities, constraints, and vulnerabilities of exhibit visitors. This tactile installation in Denmark is specifically designed for blind and vision-impaired patrons. Unlike many exhibits, the dictum here is “Please Touch!” The permeability of traditional, visually-oriented venues can be increased, but often requires ingenuity and commitment to inclusiveness, as illustrated by the youthful docents in this clip:

And finally, places for making and displaying art are necessarily embedded in society, with all its warts. Increased permeability may be as simple – and as complicated – as providing spaces that are free from bullying and/or spousal disapproval of artistic interests.

To conclude this discussion, I invite you to watch an abbreviated version of a documentary I co-produced some 35 plus years ago.

Here we return full circle to our starting point, a universe of distant stars that we can neither create nor fully imagine, but that can nonetheless inspire sculptural creativity.
In this 10-minute version, you will see the unfolding of what the artist, Otto Piene, called “an artistic sky event.” This occasion celebrated the opening of the then new College of Design at Iowa State University. As you watch, please consider the *Iowa Star* in terms of the topics we outlined today:

- Magnitude
- Dimensionality
- Embodiment and Movement
- Space and Place
- Permeability

[film 14 – *Iowa Star* excerpts]

[slide: Thought Question]

This is the point where students typically ask, “Will this be on the exam?” So, here is your take-home assignment: a Thought Question:

In terms of magnitude, dimensionality, embodiment and movement, space and place, and system permeability, what special challenges are presented to docents by works such as Otto Piene’s *Iowa Star*?

[slide: reprise — lecture title side]

The Space of Art

Michael R. Hill

SPACE . . . The final Frontier.
These are the Voyages of everyone.
Our lifetime mission:
To explore strange new worlds,
To seek new life & new civilizations,
To boldly go where everyone has gone before.

Magnitude
Dimensionality
Embodyment
Spaces & Places
Permeability
Hubble Telescope Images

Exhibit

Chicago Architecture Foundation

Silk ties inspired by molecular structures highly magnified under the microscope

(left) Wine  (right) Champagne
Magnitude
Vertical Monumentality

Constantin Brancusi
Bird in Space (1923)
Height: 6 ft.

Wind Turbine Blade (1 of 7)
Length: 108 ft.

Millau Bridge, France
**Magnitude**

Lateral Monumentality

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Playful Magnitudes

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Thank you!
Air Photo, Near Offutt AFB, Bellevue, Nebraska

Claes Oldenburg
Bat Column
Height: 101 feet

Anne Trumble, Stored Potential (2010). Repurposed grain elevators along Interstate 80, Omaha, Nebraska.
Magnitude
Dimensionality
Embodiment
Spaces & Places
Permeability
Capabilities:

Surveillance

Stature, surveillance, and perspective

Bodies in space as art
Marina Abramović

Embodiment
Moving through space

Walking and Mapping
Artists as Cartographers
By Karen O'Rourke
MIT Press
April 2013

Richard Long, Walking the Line
Get a docent talking to a crowd

Embodiment
Constraints

THE ELECTROMAGNETIC SPECTRUM

Visible Light

Pablo Picasso, The Old Guitarist (1903)
Betrayal is an ever-present vulnerability of embodiment

Magnitude
Dimensionality
Embodiment
Spaces & Places
Permeability
Armani Men’s Wear, Fall-Winter, 2012-13, Fashion Week, Milan

Andy Warhol poses wearing a self-portrait

8/5/2016
Ai Weiwei, 

Snake Ceiling (2009), Hirshhorn Museum, 2012

Giuseppe Licari, 

Humus (Rotterdam, 2012)
I'm hungry!
Thought Question:
In terms of magnitude, dimensionality, embodiment and movement, space and place, and system permeability, what special challenges are presented to docents by works such as Otto Piene's Iowa Star?

The Space of Art
Michael R. Hill