

Assignment: POPS Investigation and Presentation

As we move through this class, our understanding of space and place will become more and more complicated and nuanced. We will encounter various definitions and perceptions of what spaces “do,” with some ideas that parallel one another and some that challenge one another.

You and your group mates will explore one of the POPS locations listed in our syllabus. The goal of this assignment is fairly straightforward: Visit the location and document some of its characteristics. Based on the evidence that you gather, work together to make a claim (or perhaps claims) about the rhetoric of the POPS. In other words, how does the space influence or affect the thoughts, views, or actions of those who interact with it? Then, on the day of your presentation, your group will lead the class discussion for the first 20-30 minutes of class. Your presentation should not simply be a reporting out of what you saw; rather, it should have a claim that is supported by primary research as well as theories regarding space via the readings we have done so far in class.

What should we document?

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- The physical “ingredients” that are used to construct the POPS
- The objects (e.g., furniture, greenery, art) within the POPS
- The people interacting with the POPS
- The environment **around** the POPS
 - Does your POPS differ from the environment around it? Does it fit in? Remember, the surrounding environment can help you learn more about the POPS itself.
- Your experience traveling to the POPS
 - Could you get there by public transportation or is it accessible only by personal vehicles?
 - Did you have a hard time finding it? How come?

How should we document the POPS?

Any or all of the following methods are encouraged:

- Photographs
- Moving images (video)
- Drawing or a diagram
- Audio recording of sounds
- Textual description

Basically, anything that will help you effectively bring your POPS into the classroom. You are not required to create a PowerPoint, but that may be the best medium for you to present some of the details you document.

What exactly should we be analyzing?

The following set of guiding questions is repurposed from a textbook by Karla Saari Kitalong and Marcia Muth called *Getting the Picture: A Brief Guide to Understanding and Creating Visual Texts*. Like a critical reading of a written text, a close reading of a physical space involves careful, in-depth examination of the details that make up the space. Your reading should focus on the following three levels of questions:

● Level 1: What is the big picture?

- What is the situation or motivation for the construction of the POPS?
- What is its purpose?
- What audience(s) does the POPS seem to be meant for? Conversely, are there any audience(s) that are excluded?

● Level 2: What characteristics of the space can you observe?

- What objects are included in/around the POPS? How are they arranged? Cluttered? Sparse?
- What are the characteristics of the figures (i.e., people) in/around the POPS?
- What action(s) does the POPS seem to promote? What does it seem to shut down?
- What is the environment surrounding the POPS like? What features does it share with the POPS? What features are different?
- What elements contribute to the design of the POPS? What colors, shapes, or signs does it include? How are they arranged? Does the design of the POPS explicitly evoke any specific feeling, memory, or association?
- What can you hear as you are exploring the POPS? Is it loud? Quiet? What does this tell you about the POPS?

● Level 3: How can you interpret what the POPS *suggests*?

- What feeling or mood does it create? How does it create this mood?
- What sociological, political, economic, or cultural attitudes are reflected in the POPS?
- Are there any symbolic meanings behind the color, shapes, and signs of the text? Think about this: are there any differences between what the design explicitly states and what is symbolized?
- What theme(s) can you identify within the POPS?

One question to constantly keep in mind as you and your group members are investigating the space is **what is excluded**? Rhetorical analysis is not always about seeing what is there and what

it means, but also what is **not** there, and thus what message is being conveyed by the fact that someone or something is not represented.

What else should we consider when we are doing this assignment?

- Respect others around you. Remember that you are sharing this space with others. Be careful about your noise level and shoving cameras in strangers' faces.
- Be honest. You have nothing to hide and the spaces you are visiting are deemed "public" spaces. If anyone is curious about what you guys are doing, tell them about this class. You may even want to bring this prompt along so they have a better sense of the assignment.
- With that said, POPS does stand for "**privately owned** public open spaces." You may encounter security or staff members that argue that these spaces still belong to private groups and thus may question you about your motives. Again, be polite, honest, and explain the situation. Feel free to give them my contact information and tell them to contact me with any questions or concerns they may have.
- **Important: if something does come up during your exploration, your group may want to reflect upon it afterwards and think about what that situation contributes to the overall rhetoric of the POPS.**