



## **Uncommon Ground: Everyday Aesthetics and the Intensionality of the Public Realm**

**Daniel H. Ortega**

**Guest Editor**

*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

*"Everyday Practices depend on a vast ensemble which is difficult to delimit but which we may provisionally designate as an ensemble of **procedures.**"*

- Michel deCerteau 43.

[2] We inhabit a society where the information that we receive on a daily basis is focused on telling us how to live. Media campaigns constantly blitzkrieg the public with the responsibility to "act more environmentally friendly," to "lose weight," and to seek ultimate satisfaction/security in their brand of "fill in the blank." The sensory regimes employed to deliver these messages use the following common denominators: "buy this product," "live this way," "support this vision/cause/belief system." Comply and "everything will be fine": you will be thinner, safer, happier, and more productive. On a more tactile and surficial level, urban designers - via municipalities - allow

developers to enforce a codified definition of how public space should be formed, interpreted, and used. Counter to the narratives imposed or implied by existing power structures, Lefebvre aptly proposes the following: "As with every genuine art, this [the art of living] will not be reduced to a few cheap formulas, a few gadgets, to help us organize our time, our comfort, or our pleasure more efficiently...The genuine art of living implies a human reality, both individual and social, incomparably broader than this" (199)

[3] In proposing *Everyday Aesthetics and the Intensionality of the Public Realm* as the theme for this issue, it was my objective to invite discussion on the relative, discursive, embodied, and performative dynamics that complicate hegemonic dictates on how to live life in various specific contexts. Essentially, this issue is dedicated to what Henri Lefebvre has termed the "art of living." The compilation of articles and works of art featured in this issue act as an "ensemble of procedures" investigating and commenting upon the structural, political, corporeal, and ideological regimes that form nuanced power structures.

[4] While it was not the intent of this issue to focus on the interwoven dialogue(s) that occur between culture, ethnicity, and the discourse of architectural form to serve as the tableau for elemental practices of everyday life, the articles and works of art featured herein offer that milieu

as a place where the negotiation between the constructs of social power systems and the ingredient practices of those who occupy the public realm result in responses that often counter narratives imposed by existing power systems. The responses cataloged in this issue work to show a public realm whose constituents actively contradict the narratives sanctioned by the state and “cheap formulas.”

[5] Ortega’s article initiates the issue with a dialectical search for the contradiction between social structures and the subjective practices of those who occupy the public realm. In his critique of the ideology of sustainability, Ortega offers a relational ‘violent’ change of urban design programming that offers a constituent based “ecology of practice.” This “ecology of practice,” which takes place in the margins of public space serves as a tableau aimed at informing a more discursive view of sustainable development. Similarly, *Sketches of Urbaness*, offered by the graphic artist Michael Corrente questions the definitive boundaries of public/private interface. In doing so, Corrente offers, via his own “embodied engagement” with specific urban landscapes, an imaginary urbanness, that, as Corrente explains in his artist statement, “recasts the possibilities for public social opportunities in spaces developed with private interests foremost in mind”.

[6] In the work featured by ATSA, the artists' installation of animated "bubblegum cannon balls" and an empty "gumball machine" located on the grounds of La Habana's famous (or infamous depending on who you ask) iconic fortress, El Morro, plays on the semiological complexity of that which symbolizes at once colonialism and anti-imperialist struggle, patterns of facile consumption and its unpredictable outcomes. While not as initially striking, one can argue that the two distinct views of "Indianness" which are the focus of Arijit Sen's article on Indian ethnic identity in Berkeley, California, offer a related approach to the interplay between memory, site-specificity, and the daily lived reality of choosing whether or not to accept or reject that dualistic hegemony between a mediated view of culture and an intentionally more obtuse and intimidating presentation of cultural identities. Whether it is ATSA's physical and auditory "shock and awe...bubblicious dream" or the spatial strategies used by store owners in Berkeley, one gets the feeling "The whole thing may just blow up in your face" (ATSA).

[7] In the pieces offered by Boone, Dorgan, Hou and Reynolds, the problematic and contested sphere of spatial negotiation serves as a lens by which we can begin to discern between the many challenges posed by conventional treatises of practice, (educational, architectural, political and artistic) that, as the individual artist/authors have proposed, have a propensity to offer singular, and thus dominating, intentions. Whether in

Reynolds' whimsical attempt to construct multiple narratives by "confus[ing] the delineation between the real, the remembered, and the virtual," or in Boone's powerful example of a southern U.S.' African-American community's ability to shift perceived liabilities into perceived strengths, both contributors illustrate legitimate everyday paradigms by which ordinary individuals assume the role of creating narratives counter to those imposed by existing power systems. Both Dorgan and Hou continue this discussion of counter-narrative within the fields of architectural education. The articles submitted by both educators delineate not only the potential that exists in educating future designers to enter the world as fluent conversants in spatial and cultural dialogics, but also the responsibility of those future designers "not just to produce possible solutions for societal problems, but works to define these problems and the contexts in which they operate" (Dorgan).

[8] The final two authors offer critical readings of the creation of perception as a channel for cultural/ideological domination. In Stoneman's critique of "scientific" and "analytical" mapping of the North American "obesity epidemic," and Wilson's analysis of Chinese Industrialism's branding of a pre-packaged future as an attempt to quell the recent rise of violent protestation in that country's "industrializing" cities, both authors clearly articulate a need to recognize discourses resistant to associations between

the built environment, a state fearful of unrest (perceived or real), and a truly significant concern for the public's welfare.

[9] By encouraging a thorough dissection of space, place, and the event(s) that occur in the public realm all of the aforementioned authors/artists formulate an embodied challenge to the power structures that dominate our daily lives. By taking a focused and critical look at the counter-narratives that exist in the form of daily lived ingredient practices in the public realm, this second issue of *InTensions* invites scholars and artists from a discursive tableau to participate in furthering this discussion of *Everyday Aesthetics and the Intensionality of the Public Realm*.

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