

Sticky Tape, Wooden Pallets and Potted Plants in Urinals - Managing Space during the U.K. Covid-19 Lockdown

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Sticky Tape, Packing Crates and Potted Plants in Urinals Managing Space during the U.K. Covid Lockdown.

A paper presented at

‘Contemporary Legends and Pandemic Lore’ – The second ISCLR webinar in association with Sree Sankara Vidyapeetom College and Center for Urban Studies (Mahatma Gandhi University)

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Abstract

This paper showcases visual research collected from across Britain to explore pandemic narratives and rituals relating to management of public space during the lockdown and the first stage of the lifting of restrictions in the U.K. between late March and Summer 2020.

During the U.K. lockdown people were allowed to leave their homes only to shop, care for a vulnerable relative and for a daily walk. Supermarkets, grocery stores and other essential shops were allowed to remain open and had to quickly adapt to the needs of social distancing; limiting numbers within stores; keeping people apart; arranging and managing queues and enforcing mask wearing in order to meet Government requirements. This resulted in a wide range of creative interventions both within and outside stores as individual store managers and shop workers attempted to manage the flow and spacing of shoppers. As restrictions began to slowly ease in May 2020 these physical and visual interventions spread to a wider range of shops, venues and public spaces.

This paper utilises the authors extensive collection of lockdown photographs from a wide range of different venues and locations across the U.K. to explore the manner in which these functional, creative and at times humorous interventions attempted to manage people, define safe space and comply with Government restrictions and in doing so created a new form of vernacular visual culture.

Whilst members of the public have always been managed when utilising public space, the lockdown restrictions have however made increasingly visible the manipulation of our personal freedom and liberties through the visible signage and spatial management devices employed, and the queues that resulted.

Benjamin Davy (2021) suggests that whilst Social distancing is a ‘prudent intervention’ for sound health reasons the implications and impacts are problematic as it expands personal space at the same time as reducing social space.

On a more positive note, Lowe and Maguire (2020) have suggested that ‘public space is crucial to a flourishing society’ and that ‘the networks of the square are our best defence against the shadows of isolation and the looming tower of authoritarianism’ and it is perhaps this fine balance between protecting the public whilst overcoming isolation and avoiding the imposition of authoritarian limitations on personal freedom that these vernacular interventions express.

Low, Setha & Maguire, Mark. (2020). Public Space during Covid-19. *Social Anthropology*. 28. 10.1111/1469-8676.12885.

Vikas Mehta (2020) The new proxemics: COVID-19, social distancing, and sociable space, *Journal of Urban Design*, 25:6, 669-674, DOI: 10.1080/13574809.2020.1785283