



Graduate School - Creative Approaches to Public
Space (CAPS)
SUMMER SCHOOL - *ÉCOLE D'ÉTÉ*
RENNES, BRITTANY, FRANCE

ATTENTION, PLEASE!
High Stakes and Emergencies:
Interdisciplinary Methodologies
for Creative Research on Public Space

CALL FOR PAPERS
(academics)

20th June 2023

Whenever we hear 'Attention please!' or see a sign with this request in a public space, it is commonly understood that an authority demands our urgent attention. Depending on context – and if spoken, intonation – it can be a polite request or a downright command to immediately direct our attention in a certain way. Who has the authority to direct human attention in public spaces and how does this affect the ways in which we engage with our environment(s)? How do such interactions affect the creation and reception of art in public spaces? What are the implications for different approaches to social, cultural, political, and ethical issues?

John Locke (1632-1704) described God as the ultimate authority to direct human attention towards a 'concern with morality and control of nature' (Harris, p. 152). The reified expression 'paying attention' to something or someone implies a certain cost and suggests a sense of obligation whereas 'giving attention' to someone or something suggests an act of voluntary generosity. But paying attention also pays: It is pleasurable. According to Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), God encourages and rewards human attention with the sensation of pleasure arising from understanding (Locke, p. 161). According to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in *Critique of Judgment* (1790),

paying attention to the beautiful and judging its representation in art is rewarded with pleasure as he maintains '[...] that is beautiful which pleases in the mere act of judging it [...]' (Kant, p. 187).

In what other ways does attention generate pleasure? In *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith (1723-1790) highlights the pleasure we derive from the attention(s) of others. He clarifies that we are predisposed to pay special attention to ourselves and that the more the attention of others paid to us mirrors our own regard for ourselves, the more pleasure we gain (Smith, p. 138).

Smith's concept of the relationship between a theatre director, performers, and their audience and that of real-life interactions is similar. He proposes that, if we wish to receive the favourable attention of an audience, be this an actual theatre audience or 'spectators' for any issues we stage for/present to them in real life, we must direct our own attention towards the spectators too. The spectators must feel seen in their own right in order for them to appreciate the performance. Smith calls this type of attention '**sympathy**' and argues that in order to provoke sympathy from others, we have to demonstrate sympathy for our 'spectators' too. This means that our 'presentation' must be shaped in a manner that our audience can sympathise with because it is also sympathetic to them (p. 16-17). It is the mutual feeling of sympathy, once aroused, that according to Smith leads to careful attention being given to the other and to their respective situation. This amounts to an exchange of attention and perspectives: 'As their sympathy makes them look at it in some measure with his eyes, so his sympathy makes him look at it, in some measure, with their eyes, especially when in their presence, and acting under their observation [...]' (p. 16-17). From these considerations, several questions may arise :

- What is the relationship between attention and sympathy in how art and arts interventions in public spaces engage with the public?
- How do objects of art and architecture draw our attention?
- How does art in public places make us engage with one another?

Karen Barad claims there is a natural relationship between all matter (*Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, 2007, p. 393). This '**entanglement**' could also be described as mutual attraction, attention or sympathy that exists between all matter. Could the complex interactions that occur when we pay attention simultaneously to art and to others in public places be described metaphorically in terms of 'diffraction patterns'?

- How can such entanglements of 'diffracted' attention be said to influence a sense of community and solidarity?
- How does this impact collective creation and public interactions?
- Can such communal activities address inequalities of attention (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak; Richard Sennett...)?
- Can the creative practice of 'commoning' (Annette Baldauf et al) overcome the atomization of 'attention seekers' 'competing for attention' (Charles Derber) in public space/on social media?

According to Annette Baldauf et al. 'the concept of the commons has resurfaced as a key feature in the discussion on alternative societies, social movements, and urban transformation.' (p. 21) How do we pay attention to the common and to commoning when it comes to the collective creation of art and collective appreciation of art in public spaces?

CALENDAR FOR SUBMISSIONS

Participants are invited to submit proposals (150-200 words) for 20-minute papers/presentations on the broad topic of attention in public space, or on any of the suggested themes listed below, before **15th April 2023**.

Contributors will be notified by 30th April 2023.

Papers are to be delivered on June 20th, 2023 during the CAPS Summer School in Rennes.

SUGGESTED THEMES

Attention required : high stakes and emergencies

- Social theatre and collective creation
- Visible and invisible bodies in public space
- Social inequalities and political responsibilities, conflict
- Care

The unexpectedness of public space

- Involuntary scenographies and sensory urbanism; atmosphere (Goffman)
- Surprise, serendipity, joy, recognition, attunement, kinships and companions species in public space

Drawing attention: attentive approaches to public space

- **What to see / What not to see / What is not seen / How to see / How to be seen in public space**
 - Modalities of attention: sitting still, walking, racing, experimenting, wandering, strolling
 - Attentional devices: what is put in place to promote - but also capture - attention in public space
 - Attention to detail / what draws the eye in
 - The seen / the unseen
- **From drawing attention to paying attention**
 - How do we perform attention?
 - Making space(s) for public attention (in favour of public attention?)
 - 'Literary attention' (Yves Citton)
 - Directed, manipulated, forced, voluntary/involuntary attention (Wayne Wu)
 - Reified language around attention - why 'paying attention'? What is the cost of attention and at what expense do we

'pay attention' to one aspect over another in the public sphere?

- What are the politics of public attention?

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Location: The event will take place in-person, at various sites around the city of Rennes, France.

Organising team: Dr. Hélène Bailleul, Dr. Gaëlle Debeaux, Prof. Anne Goarzin, Dr. Marion Hohlfeldt, Marlène Meslay, Taylor Still, Dr. Eva Urban-Devereux.

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