

Venice Beach

The Space

There was a clear distinction from the northern part of the beach which was filled with tourist shops and attractions such as the 'Freak Show' and the southern part near the pier which was much quieter, where the beach alone is the tourist attraction. The beach is very large and open, with everything designed for show - the structures, the attractions, the bodies and the talents. Even spaces that would normally be inside such as the gym, blatantly on display for all to all to see and admire. The recreational regions are elevated, highlighting the importance of visibility and setting the space for performance.

How the Space is Used

The area as a whole is a geography of the body. Alongside muscle beach, there is a pedestrian path with various street vendors. The majority sell handcrafted goods such as 'your name' on a grain of rice, artwork of the beach and other high skilled items. This broadens the meaning of body culture to things such as human talent, skill, handwork, and creativity. The beach is spatially efficient to enable rollerblading, cycling, volleyball and multiple other activities to occur all at once. Not only this but it is very visible in that there is a cycle lane next to the beach with a volleyball court on it. All displays can occur simultaneously as a place in which the beach is a stage for display and body performances.

Venice beach has also been used as a setting in many films since the silent era of film from 1910. Charlie Chaplin's 'A Busy Day' in 1914, 25% of Baywatch Episodes from 1989-1995, and Baz Luhrman's 'Romeo and Juliet' in 1996. The involvement of this space in popular culture has given it an air of prestige and promoted it to a wide audience. This has therefore attracted many visitors to Muscle beach and exacerbated the visual aspect of Venice Beach.



The Body

Venice is a space occupied by images of the body. This is evident in many forms; shop displays, for example a lot of shops were dedicated to surfing and other sporty activities. Many shops were selling beach wear, surf gear, t-shirts and hats. The shops emphasised the image of the muscular body, some t-shirts had '6 pack coming soon' written on them and signs said 'how to get a beach bod: 1. go to the beach, 2. done'. Wherever you go you can see the image of the body, overcrowding you and giving you a sense of claustrophobia, either through the visual or the written. These shops were presenting Venice as a cool, trendy place where anyone can go and get a '6 pack'. However, there seems to be a contradiction as many were topless showing off their body, yet the number of t-shirt shops near the sport and gym area were countless.



The Equality of Body Culture

Banham emphasises how Venice beach is a place where 'all men are equal and on common ground. We found however that this raises the question about exclusions homeless 'men' or less mobile 'men'. Homeless groups could be excluded due to the cost of the outdoor gym (\$10 a day), therefore they do not have the equal chance or use of this space. Secondly, less mobile or disabled people cannot utilise the gym equipment. Therefore, we felt that Banham's statement was not entirely true. However, the skate park is free and accessible for anybody. It is also interesting that there are homeless people in the space where bodies and body visibility is so celebrated, yet their bodies are ignoring and invisible.





Beach?

So why here? Venice beach is clearly a popular place to train, to show off and to watch others. Beaches have always been a place to take off your clothes, relax and exercise, but here there has been a spiral towards exhibitionism and those who have the body or the skills to train here are attracted to the area for this reason. The area has celebrity names tied to it - with Arnold Schwarzenegger and David Hasselhoff being two big names famously training here. This has further publicised and glamorized the beach and attracts people who look up to celebrities like these. The beach is also a broad expanse of beautiful land with incredible views of the Santa Monica Mountains which makes it a great inspiring place to be. It is easily accessible, with a good road network nearby, and just a k to the number 1 bus route that goes all over the city. There are also cycle lanes throughout. The of people partaking in the fitness culture, the skate park, along with all the street performers and es it a great attraction for spectators.

Architecture

Surrounding muscle beach there were shops in shack like buildings, relatively run down and ugly, thus attracting you to the beach and the sports areas as you don't particularly want to look at the buildings so you head towards the beach. Not only this but the outdoor gym itself is very run down and minimalist. This demonstrates how the body, stripped bare is the most important visual aid in the space. Venice beach architecture is not very materialist compared to other places.

However, as you travel south down Venice the architecture becomes more elegant and attractive. Buildings are post-modern and are essentially capitalist real estate taken over by the wealthy gentrifiers and transformed into large overpowering structures looking down on you. One building to the next they are all different. This continues as you head slightly inland down the canal in Venice.

There are no uniform houses, one house will be square and extremely modern whilst the next house will be the classic, wooden, colonial type house. There may be a high contrast between these houses but they all share similarities through exclusion and inclusion. All the houses are extremely pretty, either modern architecture or old looking with beautiful flowers making you feel included in the area, yet at the same time many houses have security signs outside and fences surrounding the property, like Beverly Hills, giving you a sense of exclusion. It is clear to see through the new architecture that Venice has been regenerated by the wealthy and this is not necessarily what people want. There were signs of backlash throughout the area with graffiti and writing on walls saying 'free Venice'. Comparing this to Long Beach: one person said Long Beach had rejected developers from regenerating the homes which has meant there has been a lack of gentrification and a more 'retro' style shopping scene. This is a clear contrast to Venice which is constantly regenerating and gentrified.

Free Venice

In Venice, there has been an ongoing debate regarding attempts to 'free Venice' and make it an independent city. In the 1950s and 1960s Venice was dominated by counterculture, accommodating artistic rebels. However, the old Venice is being threatened by secretive tech companies and the well-off residents who have caused major changes and divisions over shared and public spaces. The Venice neighbourhood Council (VNC) put forward two resolutions to make Venice an independent city in 2015.

One side of the argument supports the arrival of these new companies and retail along with the rising property values and rents, however the other side sees themselves as colonised. Now there are apparently still racial tensions in the area. Whilst at Venice beach we did not see much evidence of media or shop displays aiding this 'protest' but having researched and spoken to people, we found that it is a current issue surrounding Venice beach. Not much has been done to make the issue aware to passers-by.



