

Week 4 – Making Invisible Boundaries in Edinburgh's Public Space More Visible

Category: Uncategorized

written by s2814160 | 11 February 2026



Following this week's collective discussion, I continued to explore how invisible boundaries in Edinburgh are made in everyday life. They are generally not imposed explicitly. More often, they are produced through repeated habits, time patterns, and ordinary ways of using space, until they start to feel natural. Which is why they are difficult to recognize.

This was clear to me when I started to closely observe people's everyday use of space. In the Royal Mile and Princes Street, where the tourist presence is significant, local inhabitants tend to avoid the "busy" hours and instead move to other areas for recreation or relaxation. During festival periods, squares, streets, and pedestrian areas are reorganized by performances, tourist flows, and temporary structures. As a result, how these areas are accessed is transformed. After repeating the same use pattern a couple of times, unbalanced space use can be mistaken for being a matter of choice. These barriers, therefore, are not invisible because they don't exist, but because of their ubiquity.

I also started thinking of creating a light AR element. I did not want to use technology simply to make the project more up-to-date. I was interested in whether different surfaces at the

same location could be recovered. So, if I made an augmented street scene, I might be able to see today's retail tourist scene and a trace of previous life. This natural and fixed place could, then, be viewed as the outcome of commercial interests, choreographed movement, and controlled visibility. In this context, AR could be used to undo the idea of "this area has always been like this".



AI-generated mock-up for Lightweight AR Visualisations for Edinburgh. Produced as a speculative visualisation for project development.

We also had a private meeting with the collective about the title and manifesto, and that helped me to understand the public stance of the project better. I don't want high-profile commercial activity confused with the public. It might be crowded and commercial, but that does not necessarily follow that it will also be of equal public value. Nor do I want differences in rates of use, which vary by hour, day, or season, to be treated as an inherent part of public space. More importantly, I do not want the project to equate the problem with that of residents and tourists. Of more concern is the relationship between capital, management, and circulation that results in spatial hierarchy. Otherwise, there would be a risk of reproducing exclusions within the exhibition.

References

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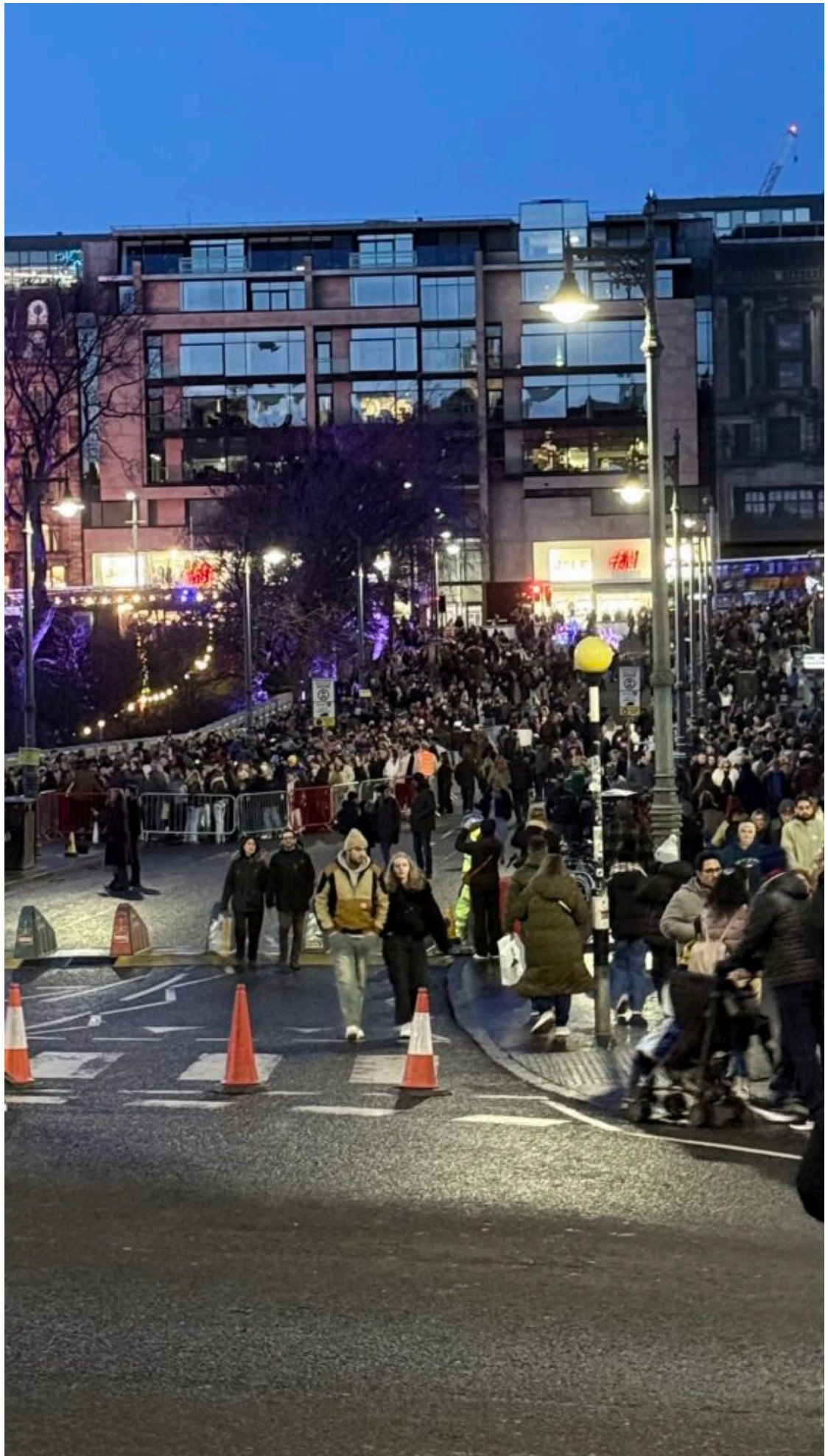
Week 3 – Edinburgh as a Mirror: Exhibiting Invisible Boundaries in Public Space

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This week's class on exhibition ethics, together with James's discussion of curatorial responsibility, helped me clarify the direction of my project. I chose Edinburgh as the site of the project because, from the outset, I understood its public space as a field of clear contestation, shaped by tourism, movement, accessibility, and institutional forms of use. Edinburgh is therefore not an accidental choice for a project about invisible boundaries. The deeper reason is that the pressures within the city have already been made visible in policy discussions. The forthcoming visitor levy is one direct and clear attempt by the city to balance two competing aims: maintaining attraction for visitors while protecting the city's liveability for local residents. The tension between liveability and the tourist economy offers a strong point of entry for discussing invisible boundaries.



Crowded Princes Street, Edinburgh, 2025. Photograph
by Hazel Ren.

This also helped me answer a basic question: why curate this project at all? What I want to make clear first is that I am not simply trying to criticise tourism or festival culture. What interests me is how public space is organised, who has greater capacity to remain within it, and who becomes marginalised. Edinburgh is not a self-contained case. It operates more like a mirror, reflecting wider questions of spatial inequality.

James's workshop also helped me understand more clearly why this exhibition format is worth exploring. I began to consider whether Edinburgh's public transport network could connect a series of exhibition sites, allowing urban transport itself to become an organic part of the exhibition. If audiences enter the exhibition by different routes and spend different amounts of time in different places, then the meaning of the exhibition will not be strictly controlled by a single path. In this sense, the idea continues the non-linear viewing model I had been considering last week, but this week it became more clearly and consciously linked to the politics of public space.

I also developed a more specific understanding of the audience. My primary audience is local residents, because they are most likely to feel the long-term effects of changing accessibility, crowding, and belonging in public space. At the same time, I do not want to reduce the issue to a simple opposition between residents and tourists. Tourists also matter, because they usually encounter Edinburgh through pre-set routes and standardised city images, and I want to interrupt that familiar way of looking. Students, researchers, and disabled people are also important publics, because accessibility is never only an economic issue; it is also shaped by bodily conditions, time pressure, and many other

factors. Different people experience public space differently, so the framework of the audience itself must recognise that difference.

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