



THE ULTIMATE IN OPEN CONCEPT  
**LIFE-LIKE LIVING**  
P.1 NOW UNDER CONSTRUCTION

PRESENTATION CENTRE: 107 Shaw  
November 19-26, 2010

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## LIFE-LIKE LIVING: TESTIMONIALS

### “It’s Who You Are.”

—DNA3 Sales Centre street advertisement, King & Shaw, Toronto, November 2010

Or not – or so Sean Martindale insists is possible, and takes that insistence as the ground on which to insert a quietly provocative series of interrogations into the corporate fabric of the city. And of course there is much to interrogate.

Let’s look at one instance, as Martindale does with his recent work, a series based on the marketing of upscale condominiums in Toronto. If, after nourishment, shelter is our second-most vital requirement, Sean takes aim at the urban-industrial complex – the city bureaucracies and development corporations – that has largely eliminated the possibility for individuals to supply that need themselves. The specific target of his intervention is the signage, and behind them the advertising skills, that the developers employ to elicit the emotional responses that transmute need into desire. While this in itself registers as an understandable critique of our complicity in consumer culture, Martindale lifts another veil that offers up a more troubling question: the slippery, but flagrantly illegal intrusion into our public space of those who would force our attention. Signage is – perhaps regrettably – everywhere, but there is legal permit driven signage, on streetcars for instance, and illegal signage for which there are neither limitations nor public gain. The problem is more widespread than one might imagine, and left unchecked (the city’s policing is always inadequate to the task) we are helpless conscripts in a high-stakes game of Monopoly.

If this is background, the foreground is Martindale’s ‘liberation’ of illegal signage and its conversion into a mock ‘tent city’, itself ‘extra-legally’ salted around the city – a reference to the plight of many who are excluded from the implicit right to shelter that constitutes the rhetoric of both private capital and public policy. In a comedic replay of the gambits used by the developers, Martindale divides his appropriations into both tents constructed out of vinyl condo advertisements, and sandwich-board advertisements for his tent city ‘accommodations’. In a further mockery of the housing industry, Martindale turns the exhibition space that establishes the project’s definition into a presentation centre for his ‘development’. But in redefining an exhibition space as a presentation centre, Martindale constructs an evocative loop that ties the idea of art not

only into the idea of commerce, but also into the concept of representation itself – as in re-presentation. And here we enter a funhouse of possibilities, as we search for some ‘original thing’ that we are here to find re-presented. Can an ersatz domain be represented? Is it not merely itself a representation? Where does the infinite regress of representations end?

If Martindale’s critique of both representation and real estate projects seems simply amusing, it is perhaps because we haven’t sufficiently noted the casual appropriation of both authenticity and voice that lies within the slogan quoted at the top of this introduction to his work. While we no doubt consciously dismiss this and many other examples of the tactic of infiltration, it is also a staple of psychological analysis that we nevertheless absorb information and make it our own. We buy into a monthly price of \$999.99 over one of \$1,000.00 because we want to believe there is a difference – another tactic of course at work in the promotion of condominium sales. The principle, a version of what the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser called ‘hailing’, has been cited for the inability of the Soviet Union to eliminate the traditional forms of social cohesion that stood in contrast to the state’s attempt to revolutionize behaviour. In the end, we act in profoundly different registers than we think we do, and those who know the rules win the game.

Of course Martindale is working out of a long line of antecedents. Guy Debord’s classic *The Society of the Spectacle*, for example, examined the degree to which our lives are increasingly rendered ‘inauthentic’ through the imposition of artificial needs and skewed desires such that all we experience is what has been manufactured by corporate power and state acquiescence. Theodor Adorno’s critiques of the administered society, for which in his view the aspirational motivations of utopian modernity are partly responsible, sound the same note of alarm.

But, one might ask, is it art? Tired though that question may be, one interrogation deserves another. The thing about art is that it wears a thousand faces, and one of them, evident here, is parody. There are a couple of things to be said about parody. It is immensely accessible; we know, or at least sense a parody when we encounter one. Consequently, we instinctively look for that which it questions, or interrogates, and our perception of that will be instantly and irrevocably altered – even if we seek to refute the parodic contamination. Secondly, it only works if it is focused and acutely aware of the dimensions of its subject in preparing an alternative modeling of its form, of which – given the conundra of origin inherent in form itself – there are perhaps an infinite number. It only works, in

other words, if it has the qualities of art. Is Martindale’s work art? Of course it is. Is it timely? It sure is. Can it succeed? Perhaps, if we pay attention.

— Ian Carr-Harris, November 2010



Sean Martindale, co-conspirator, friend, and one of four organizers of the TOSAT project has been busy lately. It seems he has been stealing condo advertising over the last year with the intention of using the material to fashion makeshift shelters. Sean’s work is always thought provoking and this project is no different. Not only has he been able to rid his city of a blighting form of outdoor media, but at the same time draws attention to the growing divide between the haves and the have-nots, those that can afford high priced luxury living and those that might sincerely benefit from some simple construction materials, or promotional materials in this case.

All too often the commercial media that dominates our public spaces presents a standard of consumption available to only a select few. Economic discrepancies are overlooked in favor of a presentation aimed at those who can afford to engage a luxury lifestyle. Such is the nature of commerce and the media industry that espouses its values at every turn. Familiarity has gotten the best of us and most fail to see this discordance operating on a daily basis. By using luxury condominium advertising to illuminate the basic need for shelter, Sean isolates the housing issue while presenting us with a broader understanding of advertisements failures. Through this broad view we see outdoor advertising’s disconnect with the pressing needs of our cities and its residents, giving us pause, and asking us once again to consider our willing acceptance of commercial media in public space.

— Jordan Seiler, November 2010