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An ethnographic approach to the taking place of the event

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter delineates an ethnographic methodology for researching events focusing on their contingent and conflictual taking place, without reducing the latter to a negligible syncope between events' *planning* and *legacy*. Consistent with a critical event studies perspective, our approach marks a difference vis-à-vis well-established ways to explore urban events.

We thus propose a methodological approach that is conceptually and empirically attuned to the conflictual, excessive and material quality of the event. In fact, we contend that the management of, participation in, and outcome of events are the result of their turbulent encounter with the everyday life of the city. An encounter full of frictions, conflict and contradictions that offer promising opportunities for research, and that ethnography permits to unpack and explore. By methodologically shifting the focus on the contingent taking place of the event and its telluric effect on the space in which it occurs, moreover, we are able to show how this approach, regardless of its scale, context and purpose, is able to provide valuable insights on its social, strategic and political significance.

First, we briefly sketch the theoretical understanding of the concept of event that orients our approach. Second, we develop a brief literature review to

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highlight the specific limits our proposal aims to overcome and some of the inspirations from which it draws. Finally, we illustrate our methodology through two relevant case studies, a neighbourhood festival set in Milan, and the 2010 South Africa FIFA World Cup, as it takes place in Johannesburg.

EVENT AS CONFLICTUAL TAKING PLACE

The event comes (*venire*) from outside (*ex*), disrupting the ordinary course of things. An event, therefore, is first of all a *taking place*, a formula that encapsulates at once a temporality (the occurrence), a topology (the place) and a process (eventing).

In his argument for an eventful sociology, Sewell (1996) proposes to overcome the limited understanding of the event originating from either 'teleological' or 'experimental' conceptions of temporality. The first reduces events to mere manifestations of wider historical processes. The second de-contextualises them as 'interchangeable units' for comparative analysis. An "eventful temporality", instead, "recognizes the power of events in history", assuming them as 'transformative' in themselves, and as such able to "bring about historical changes" (p.262).

Radicalising this suggestion, events should be understood not only as transformative in themselves, but more precisely as belonging to a temporality that coexists with and insists in history, whilst remaining radically *other* to it: "what History grasps of the event", Deleuze and Guattari wrote, "is its effectuation in states of affairs or lived experience, but the event in its becoming ... escapes history" (1994, p.111). The event is always, potentially, a 'liberation' from – a tearing apart of – the historical conditions and their causal chains. It is thus constitutively *excessive* to a given states of affair in which it is 'registered':

an event always "exceed[s] its causes – and the space of an event is that which opens up by the gap that separates an effect from its causes" (Zizek, 2014, p.14).

In fact, the materiality of the event is expressed in the space, or rather, *spacing* of its excessive taking place. In Deleuzian terms, an event is "that which, in what happens, has become and will become" (Badiou, 2007).[3] In other words, events are inseparable from what becomes, they are always an 'eventing', excessive vis-à-vis their situation and as such productive, holding "an expressive power as active interventions in the co-fabrication of worlds" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p.14). Eventful is the ever-present potential haunting the state of affair of a given situation, holding the possibility for it to be otherwise. As Foucault clarifies, "it is always at the level of materiality that it [the event] takes effect, that it is effect; it has its locus and it consists in the relation, the coexistence, the dispersion, the overlapping, the accumulation, and the selection of material elements" (1981, p.69).

From a symmetrically-opposed view, Badiou argues that the event is "a pure break with the becoming", fundamentally rare, emerging out of the void of a (historical) situation, and as such constituting a radical rupture that cannot be incorporated within the parameters of the situation itself, and thus forces it to be radically modified (2007). This understanding helps us further emphasising the rupturing force of events. However, we believe it less equipped to grasp the generative materiality of the event, insofar as tending to reduce it to an "expression of processes whose truth is best grasped by purely speculative reflection" (Barnett, 2011, p.5), rather than to a materiality to be explored in the contingent terrain of political practice (Sinnerbrink, 2006).[4]

Pace Badiou, events do not occur in a vacuum, but always emerge out of a dense spatiality of bodies, forces and intensive becoming, and whilst they should not

[3] Note that here Badiou is referring to the concept of event in Deleuze, that he opposes.

[4] Of course the complexity of Badiou's thinking warns against such a *trenchant* simplification, and a full critique of his position cannot be carried out in this context. However, his recent problematic attempt to force-fit the Arab spring within his conception of the event has shown – as many Arab commentators have demonstrated - how his approach, at the very least, runs the risk of erasing the contingent dynamics – the material taking place – of events (e.g. Kacem, 2011)

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be reduced to that, they cannot be addressed without it either. Space is never a *tabula rasa* on which events occurs, but an always thick and contingent being-together that the event does not deterministically shape, but *in* and *through* which it takes place. This 'throwntogetherness', in Massey's efficacious term, is the 'event of place', i.e. "the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing … a locus of the generation of new trajectories" (2005, pp.140-1).

Excessive, material and processual: these dimensions of the event, expressive of its potential to produce novel normativities, drastically reconfiguring practices and ways of being, are encapsulated in what we may define as its essentially *conflictual* quality. Potentially, events bring "fundamental aspects of society, normally overlaid by the customs and habits of daily intercourse, into frightening prominence" – as in Victor Turner's definition of conflict (1974, p.35). Essentially, events *are* conflict. Here lies their radically 'political' quality, the affective resonance they generate, re-articulating the atmosphere and rhythm of being-together, "mak[ing] visible what had no business being seen, and mak[ing] heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise" (Rancière, 1995, p.30).

Looking at organised events such as festivals or demonstrations through this angle means focusing on this conflictuality as the very locus in which their dialectics and politics (management, participation, outcome etc.) are played out. This requires going beyond the point of view of the organisers, as well as the categories through which impact and legacy are often (deterministically) explained. Whilst it is important to define organised events as apparatuses aimed to produce certain objectives, there is always an "actual immanent moment, and an actual site wherein the apparatus' efforts precipitate or insist" (Rahola, 2014, p.391). This is the eventfulness of the event, its conflictual taking place, as "the point at which the formal structure, as it were, falls…. into contingent reality" (Zizek, 2014, p.65). In this sense, even the most organised

events are always potentially 'destabilising events' (Gotham, 2011, p.200), 'moments of discontinuity' that may reveal the 'dynamic, transformative, conflictual' and contradictory quality of urban space (Dansero et al., 2011, p.196).

As Elias and Dunning (1971, p.31) observed, organising an event always entails a 'controlled decontrolling', an attempt to spectacularly manage into a 'normalised' exceptionality the contradictory and hazardous task of simultaneously generating *and* regulating enthusiasm. The 'resonant fusion' of the crowd, that is, at the same time the dream and nightmare of event-organisers, who rely in this 'fusional instant that *produces the event*', but at the same time are aware of the danger of this 'explosive mixture' (Boullier, 2011). If most of the times the task of event organisers can be thus described as the attempt to *pacify* the event into a consensual outcome by depurating it from its conflictual potential, it is crucial not to reduce critical event research to a similarly pacifying approach. Instead, we intend to be faithful to the antagonism of the event, accounting for the frictions generated at the encounter between the eventful lines of flight and the attempts to control them. Events are shaped by this turbulent negotiation, and inherently political, as we explain below, is the form in which they contingently unfold. Here, we aim to translate this understanding into a methodological approach. Prior to do so, we proceed to situate our endeavour within the existent research.

RESEARCHING THE CONTINGENT CONFLICTUALITY OF EVENTS

Notwithstanding the "predominance of the case study approach and descriptive level of much events research published in academic journals" (Connell and Page, 2012, p. 9), this is generally accompanied by an insufficient attention to the conflictual and material dimensions of the event. The overarching tendency

is to resort to a “set of preexisting social, cultural, economic, or political conditions too often ... explain[ing] away the eventfulness of events by referring them back to a set of conditions that structure and, ultimately, determine them” (Anderson and Holden, 2008, p. 143). Empirically, this is often tied to a temporal separation of the event, which is either pre-emptively explained *a priori* – i.e. framed through its preparatory phase, e.g. organisation routines, practices, programs etc. (Stadler et al., 2013) – or *a posteriori*, as exemplified by the current emphasis on impacts and legacy (Sharpley and Stone, 2012 p. 352). This approach ignores the very fact that “the social effect of an event is that it is experienced as a particular situation because the effect relies on a ‘drift, an unplanned result of the cumulation of adjacent interactions’ (Linstead and Thanem, 2007, p. 1489), that includes the intensification of people's sensed and lived experiences” (Ploger, 2010, p. 859).

Besides such a temporal mismatch, empirical research on events also betrays an insufficient ‘spatial consciousness’, often considering their unfolding and implications separately from the material settings and overall spatial conditions in which they take place (Hall and Page, 2012, p.150). Of course, the relevance of space is formally emphasised by most analyses of events (Cornell and Page, 2012). Yet, this is generally done from a managerial understanding of the context of the event (Sharpley and Stone, 2012, p.352), considering uniquely the official framing of events – i.e. their ‘desired effects’ rather than ‘emerging effects’ (ibid.) – and thus ignoring its contingent and material taking place.

Synthetically, two major methodological obstacles prevent the possibility of researching the latter dimension. First, inadequate research methods, and in particular the use of techniques – such as questionnaires - providing empirical evidences that are separated from its spatio-temporal contingency (Stadler et al., 2013). Second, the tendency to uncritically frame the event, its occurrence and implications, through assumptions that are not supported by an appropriate empirical attention to its conflicts and contradictions. This is for instance the

case of arguments assuming urban events as inevitable top-down processes of 'spectacularization' and transformation of the urban in 'staged experience' (Johansonn and Kociatkiewicz, 2011) – an approach that however too often implicitly assumes individuals as passive consumers of hegemonic spectacles, rather than potential active agents that may resist and re-appropriate them through counter-hegemonic narratives (e.g. Frew and McGillivray, 2014; Jones, 2012).

It is not surprising then that attention to the material, dynamic and contingent dimensions of the event emerges in those studies that are exploratively and critically focused on their explicitly conflictual aspects. This is for instance the case of Giulianotti's study of Premier League as diffuse sport mega event, where the focus on the "disquiet, transgression and resistance" (Giulianotti, 2011, p.3304) emerging in this context allows to highlight the opaque link between commercialisation and securitisation in the transformative processes affecting stadia. Useful tools and categories in this sense come from social movement studies, as for instance in della Porta's suggestion to analyse social protest by looking not only "at what produces protest but at the 'byproduct' of protest itself" (2008, pp.27-30). That is, analysing the protest not as an instrumental and 'dependent variable', "explained on the basis of political opportunities and organizational resources", but rather as an "eventful protest", as such to be explored in the contingency of its occurrence and in the immanence of its effect (ibid.). For instance, by looking at the way "during the course of a protest resources of solidarity are created (or re-created)" and a sense of community is formed (ibid., p.31). From another perspective, Boullier's (2010) work on urban events similarly underlines the capacity of events to overflow spatially and temporally beyond their pre-given boundaries – a capacity that derives directly from dynamics that are internal to the event, i.e. its taking place –, stressing how this aspect can be grasped by empirically exploring their contingent and material dimensions.

Attuning to the excessive and situated quality of the event requires focusing on this conflictual *encounter* between the event and the city. Since events always take place, we stress, *going* to these places is necessary in order to explore how the urban vibrates on the effect of this turbulent occurrence. There is "something tangible about collective events", Latham and McCormack observe (2009, p.67), a 'phenomenological this-ness' that needs to be accounted for. Yet, as Ploger suggests, "the event is a twofold production of significance by its forms of visibility (capturing space) and modes of articulation (mode of action, discursively)" (2011, p.864). Therefore, studying the event requires a sensibility simultaneously attuned to its territorialisation and deterritorialisation, that is, to both its contingent occurrence in the here-and-now as well as its prolongation into other space-times (Brighenti, 2010a)

A sensibility that, we believe, ethnography is able to provide. Having a direct and insider knowledge of the event in its unfolding is crucial if we are to grasp how it takes shape and resonates through space and time. Interesting works in this sense are those of Frey and Macgilliray (2008), Schreiber and Adang (2010), Millward (2009), who focus on the turbulent relation between the actualisation of an event through promotional, performative, physical and normative means, how this affects fans perceptions and actions, and how it is reworked by them. Similar sensibility is shown by Duffy et al. (2011), who compellingly explore the role of bodily coordination and rhythmic synchronisation, showing how the material unfolding of the event, the conflictual interaction that its "throwntogetherness" engenders, is the key dimension through which it takes shape as well as, we add, the locus of its 'political' potential (e.g. Jackson, 1993; del Barrio et al, 2012; Ryan, 2012).

Following this inspiration, in the next section we illustrate our methodological proposal through two relevant case studies.

CASE STUDIES

The choice of case studies emphasises the adaptability of our approach that, regardless of scale, resists the temptation to pre-emptively and uncritically 'explain away' the event. Moving beyond the rhetoric endorsement of the official framing of the event, we instead look at what the event actually produces, and how, in its contingent, material and conflictual encounter with the urban space. Notwithstanding their differences, both case studies can be usefully approached through two analytical categories.

First, the *carnivalesque* (Bakhtin, 1941), which frames the interpretation of the event as a subversion of the institutional order and everyday routine. Here we show how, if this category is to be usefully operationalised to study events, it should not be taken for granted, but always critically and empirically calibrated to the contingent singularity of the studied event.

The second selected analytical category refers to the political potential embodied by the form in and through which the event takes place (Jackson, 1992; Rancière, 1995). We contend that it is crucial, by moving beyond preventive assumptions and post-event evaluation, to explore the shape the event takes in its contingent unfolding, since it is in this very unfolding that non-obvious insights on the political meaning and impact of the event itself may be grasped (del Barrio et al. 2012; Hall and Page 2012).

How does the event shape and is shaped by the space in which it takes place? Does this lead to a pacification of its relations, a bracketing of power and socio-economic inequalities, or instead the event allows to make visible and evolving latent conflicts?

2010 FIFA Wold Cup. Johannesburg.

This case study looks at the 2010 South Africa World Cup in the city of Johannesburg, in particular focusing on the way perceptions of safety and danger shape the everyday life in the city, and the role played by the World Cup in this context.

Mbembe and Nuttall (2004) rightly suggest that Johannesburg should not be stereotyped as a 'space of fear'. Yet, its shrinking public space, fragmented patchwork of malls, gated communities, townships, business districts and huge highways, is undeniably engulfed by an atmosphere of uncertainty and danger, which shapes the way in which it is traversed and experienced (e.g. Dirsuweit, 2002). In Sao Paulo, Caldeira writes, "narratives and practices impose partitions, build up walls, delineate and enclose spaces, establish distances, segregate, differentiate, impose prohibitions, multiply rules of avoidance and exclusion, and restrict movement" (2001, p.20). Through a self-reflexive ethnographic exploration of Johannesburg we are able, first, to detect a similar pattern in its constellation of formal and informal advises, narratives, warnings, clues, tips etc. Second, to observe and experiment their 'real', i.e. material effects in 'tuning' the everyday life of the city along a danger/safety axis (Pavoni, 2011).

In this way the researcher soon realises that traversing the public space of Johannesburg is an activity 'tuned' by certain ways of looking around, being looked at and mapping the space. First, a constant 'awareness of what people in the street around you are doing' (McCrea et al., 2002, p.82). Second, a confident demonstration of belonging to the place: 'never look disorientated, always look confident [...] you don't have to seem that you don't know where to go [...] you have to rhythmise yourself'.[5] As a result, traversing the urban space depends on a pre-arranged, syncopated point-to-point movement, travelling fast, minimising the stops, then to relax in atmospherically-sealed, private bubbles: house, car,

[5]Policeman interviewed by the researcher, 14 June 2010.

office, mall.[6] A 'double rhythm' (Prior, 2011), certainly influenced by, and yet transversally shared across race, class, age, gender.[7]

Mega events are usually assumed as 'Trojan horses' allowing to implement politics of hyper-securitisation, surveillance and control in the city (e.g. Samatas, 2007; Fussey and Boycoff, 2014; etc.). In this context, however, the World Cup also appeared to many as a chance to generate a 'new-found sense of safety' (Urquhart, 2008), that is, to *ease* the anxious 'state of preparedness' through which the inhabitants daily traverse the urban space (Simone, 2004). Although obviously relevant, often the debate on the (positive vs. negative) legacies of an event depends on a set of preexisting (rhetorical, critical, ideological) categories that pretend to define *a priori* and/or *a posteriori* its impact. The ethnographic sensibility here proposed, instead, intends to move beyond these presuppositions, zooming in on the actual taking place of the event and thus accounting for the shape in which it unfolds.

The entry-point chosen here was a specific spatial apparatus epitomising the way in which the symbolic, spectacular, commercial and securitarian apparatus of the World Cup gains a urban dimension: *fan zoning*. The term refers to the enclosed live sites (*Fan Fests* or *Fan Parks*) where fans gather to watch matches on giant screens, and to the demarcated paths (*Fan Walk* or *Fan Miles*) that usually connect live sites to stadia. Although entrance to live sites is free, these spaces are fenced and filtered by search-and-seizure procedures looking for dangerous, edible or promotional items incompatible with official sponsors. FIFA define them as a "safe, recognised and exciting environment for visitors

[6] A rhythm that is organised around cars, walking being understood as a sort of enterprise – "get advice from your hotel prior to *embarking* on foot" –, to be avoided if possible (Department of Community Safety and Liaison [KwaZulu-Natal], *Traveller Tips,* 2010 (our emphasis). Incidentally, even when driving alertness must be kept high: "fasten your seatbelt, lock your door and only leave your window open about 5 cm [...] Be aware of you surrounding when you stop at a robot [i.e. a traffic light] or stop street" (ibid.)

[7] For instance, a white Afrikaans living in a gated community advises me against going to Bree St: "wherever you go, don't go to Bree". His black, *Xhosa* friend living in a residential area laughs at that: "don't listen to him. Bree Street is fine, just don't go to Hillbrow". On a bus, a *Xhosa* girl living in Hillbrow explains: "Hillbrow is fine, just don't go there at night". A Zimbabwean guy squatting there instead points out that Hillbrow is safer than white suburbs, since Hillbrow 'is busy', whilst it is emptiness that generates opportunities for crime (from the field notes)

who have limited comparable alternatives”.[8] Others instead see them as a tool to facilitate event-led processes of privatisation, commodification and securitisation of the urban space (Eick, 2011; Hagemann, 2010). Again, our approach does not stop to this oppositional reading, and instead focuses on the *break* with the everyday space of the city that fan zoning actually brings about. This means looking not only at how fan zoning is resisted and re-appropriated by those populating these spaces (Frew and McGillivray, 2014), but also at the frictions generated by its eventful and excessive taking place. Here, this is done through participant observation, employed as an experimental practice, intervening, touching, provoking and breaching *à la* Garfinkel, i.e. experimenting with the potentialities of the urban rather than merely observing them from a comfortable distance.

Thus, when in the city-centre fan park I ask a policeman for the directions to the bus stop, he promptly warns: ‘It's not very safe ... no good to go ... stay here’. A volunteer adds: ‘outside is very dangerous … the most dangerous place in South Africa’. Looking at my phone he then continues: ‘here is OK ... [when you are outside] never pick up your phone, it's dangerous’.[9] In another fan park similar questions find similar answers: “it’s too dangerous now, you cannot take a mini-taxi, I cannot guarantee you security”. Eventually, he insists to escort me to destination.[10]

Here it is possible to take pictures, walk oblivious of the surrounding, use mobile phone without worries. No need to rhythmise oneself to the rhythm of alertness and confidence of the city, since this very rhythm has been *slowed down*, a space of ‘safety’ has been produced, encapsulated within a legal, securitarian and physical fence. *There* lies a space of uncertainty and danger. This is what a Uruguayan fan suddenly realises as the closing time approaches. “I haven't got any *problem* so far”, he told me some time before. Now he adds: “the thing is,

[8]Organisation Committee of Germany ’06, quoted in Frew and McGilliray (2008, p.187)
[9] Gundo, 21, interviewed by the researcher. This convsersation took place at the Newtown unofficial Fan Park
[10] This conversation took place in Innes Free Park FIFA fan fest, north of town, 18th June 2010. ‘Mini-taxi’ are old Toyota 13-seaters, mostly used by working class people

now we park the car very far away from here … now we're quite afraid of going back to the car because there's no light, we haven't thought about that, but we'll have to go … security is a *problem* in this world cup, definitively".[11]

In their ethnography of Germany '06, Frew and McGillivray (2008, pp.191-2) emphasise how fan zones (officially introduced by FIFA that year) produced hyper-experiences of enjoyment and "micro-level resistance to the everyday banality of work". Yet, in Johannesburg fan zoning seemed to function more as a dispositif protecting the audience from the city than, as in Germany, the city from the audience (most notably hooligans). As a result, often they rather produced not-that-hyper experiences of 'relief', that is, micro-level resistance to the everyday anxiety of public space. When a clear physical and affective 'break' from the 'dangerous' outside was lacking, in fact, fan zoning collapsed, as was the case of the unfenced fan walk connecting the fan park to the Ellis Park stadium: the path traversed notorious neighbourhoods and was deemed too dangerous both by fans and authorities, who did not bother to advertise it too much.[12]

We may say that in Johannesburg fan zoning appeared as a space in which "you can walk around without any worries ... a place where people blend and can forget about the past and current anxieties" (de Vries, 2008, pp.301, 303). De Vries' definition of the mall in South Africa perfectly applies here, suggesting interesting considerations vis-à-vis the two hypotheses explored.

First, more often than the "carnivalesque inversion" of the everyday routine Ryan describes (2012), fan zoning seemed to reproduce and institutionalise the double-rhythm of the city, by generating yet another set of exceptional, semi-private bubbles where to be screened from the 'dangerous' outside.

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[11] Uruguary fan interviewed by researcher, 18th June 2010

[12] Personal communication from a manager working on the Jo'burg City Safety Programme (JCSP). Similar was the case of volunteers in Cape Town whose black uniform which, differently from the sparkling yellow of their colleagues in Johannesburg, were often greeted with suspicion by the public. Here again their uniform did not produce an evident affective and physical break from the city,

Second, if the political potential of an event may lie in its capacity to make visible latent urban conflict and contradictions, such potential was eventually neutralised by the form taken by fan zoning in Johannesburg. As many have written, malls in South Africa play the role of quasi-public spaces where most of the everyday *public* activities (e.g. meeting up, hanging out, dining) are performed. However, these spaces remain privately owned, extensively surveilled and strictly regulated, with high behavioural expectations and discretionary powers of control and exclusion (e.g. Kempa et al., 2004). This is the sort of exclusionary public space that fan zoning *de facto* reproduced, only apparently challenging the everyday anxiety of the city, but in the end confirming it. In fact, its physical, legal and techno-securitarian boundaries simply displaced (real or perceived) 'danger' *outside* this safe, private and commodified spatiality, rather than challenging its uncomfortable perception.

It is in this sense interesting to note how fan zoning worked out inside actual malls. Here, we could observe fans wandering around the mall and blatantly breaching its strict policies: drinking alcohol, drunkenly singing, smoking in the escalators, blowing vuvuzelas. When applied to a space that was already *screened* from the outside, fan zoning functioned as a bubble-within-the-bubble, opening up carnivalesque 'spaces of enjoyment' within a commodified space of controlled consumption, turning a 'serial event' into something closer to a 'presence-event' (Pløger, 2010). This is no suggestion this would be in any way an emancipatory outcome. What we are concerned with is stressing the non-obvious outcome of the event, how this was dependent on its excessive, material and conflictual taking place within an already complex reality and, finally and most importantly, how the ethnographic approach here proposed was equipped to detect these particularities.

Popolando-mi Culture 2014. Milan

Via Padova is a 4 km street renown in Milan as the place where most of poor foreign migrants concentrate (Arrigoni, 2011). Just like Johannesburg, Via Padova is stigmatised as dangerous in political and popular narratives (ibid.), which occasionally reach media national resonance.[13] Popolando-Mi[14] is an "intercultural street festival" aiming to explicitly challenge and reverse this stigma. Here we focus on the opening event, *Popolando-mi Culture*, a 'multi-ethnic parade' involving more than 300 - mainly foreigners – performers. As we will see, the event did not reverse the institutionalised tuning of via Padova: together with offering a stage for a variety of unpredictable performances, its material and conflictual unfolding confirmed such tuning and, similarly to the former case study, simply shifted its spatio-temporal boundaries.

Immersing ethnographically in the everyday life of via Padova allows the researcher to gradually elaborate a grasp on its stigmatised atmosphere. Although here a 'codified' street knowledge such as the one we found in Johannesburg is lacking, it is possible to ascertain a pattern of coordination among passing strangers that – consistently with accounts of Milan as a city "characterized by the lack of sociability" (Foot, 2003, p. 40) – seems to take to the extreme the *civil inattention* typical of the public realm (Lofland, 1998). Everyone is implicitly invited to mind one's own business, avoiding eye contact (especially if you are a young woman), interiorising as routine the yelling drunkards at the street corner or the half-naked prostitutes spending their afternoons next to the exit of the local elementary school.

Understanding how this atmosphere is re-shaped by the "multi-ethnic parade" requires immersing oneself, bodily and affectively, within the space of its

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[13] For example, this occurred in 2010 due to the urban riots that followed the killing of a young Egyptian in the street; also this occurred in march 2015 because of the contested visit in the neighbourhood of an Italian political leader of a racist national party.

[14] see: https://www.facebook.com/FestivalPopolandomi . The festival is funded by a private foundation with the official aim of enhancing occasions of cultural fruition in deprived urban areas that lack them

contingent unfolding. At first sight this event appears to represent an instance of carnivalesque subversion. Even before its colourful, noisy and chaotic stream irrupts into the Sunday routine of the street – and disrupts the car flow, as the parade was authorized but local authorities decide not to stop the car traffic –, the parade seems to have already infected the neighbourhood with a sense of exceptionality, opening up possibilities for creative and unusual practices. While the performers are still gathering, a very old man in undershirt, with extreme effort, reaches a wall to modify a 'W Berlusconi' sign into "ʍ Berlusconi. Ladro [*thief*]!" with a black marker. He returns on his footsteps, without even looking around, in the general indifference of the many people surrounding. Is such indifference a sign of the carnivalesque inversion of the everyday tuning or rather a confirmation that civil inattention still regulates street interactions?

Similarly, later on, in an isolated spot fof the parade there is an old dancer using its belt to lash the naked back of a young one, while the other dancers around laugh in amusement. Upon asking, the reply is that "new one is being baptised". Besides the participant-observer, no one in the public is paying explicit attention to such an unusual scene, thus suggesting that the parade is not exactly producing a carnivalesque inversion of the street's everyday tuning.

My self-reflexive ethnography included a six months participant-observation (as volunteer) in the organization of the event. With on my arm the green bandana that event's organisers wear during the parade, I offer to help a barman that is offering water bottles to the sweated performers passing in front of his bar. He shouts at me: 'I distribute these bottles! The water must be paid'. Evidently, the parade falls short of reversing the general circumspection/mistrust among strangers normally shaping the everyday life of the street (Arrigoni, 2011). This implicit pattern of interaction still organises social interaction, although the event seems to be shifting its boundaries, temporarily including foreign migrants - normally a rather mistrusted category (ibid.) - among those that can be trusted, as long as they dance in heavy parade costumes hit by the summer

sun. At the same time, the exceptional tuning of the parade opens up unprecedented possibilities of action, not necessarily *subversive* to the everyday tuning of the street, but strategically exploitable in different ways: e.g. mixing with an indifferent crowd to reverse a political sign on the wall or profiting of an exceptional stage in front of a numerous audience to provide a positive image of oneself and one's own commercial activity.

Once the parade arrives in the local park the comments from the audience seem much less positive and enthusiast than before. After 20 minutes the stage remains empty, the heat is relentless, the amphitheatre seats too hot for seating, the info-point sign too small to be read from afar. Frustration ensues, as expressed to me by elderly couple: "weren't supposed to be more shows? Nobody is telling us anything. They could at least hand out a program. Aren't you part of the organisers?"

A specific assumption is normally (uncritically) associated to the carnivalesque, i.e. the fact that the 'subversive inversion' would be generated by the "passionate and sometimes destructive impulses of its participants", in opposition to "the orderly ambitions of its organizers" (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011 p. 403). Here, instead, it is the audience that seems to be actively trying to re-establish control, seeking to reduce the atmosphere of collective uncertainty created by the event. The loose control on the event exercised by the organisers instead provides much room to the pro-active involvement of its participants, even when performing practices at the limits of legality (e.g. the belt-lashing). The participant-observation of the event in its contingent taking place thus allowed to challenge too simplistic applications of the category of the carnivalesque, and its taken-for-granted assumptions about the sources of "control and creativity in [seemingly] staged urban experiences" (ibid.).

Turning to the second hypothesis, here, similar to Jackson's (1992) study on Toronto's Caribana street parade, we may explore the "variety of accommodations that have been made between the event's organizers and the

police – including the routing and rerouting of the parade […] – as indications of the limits that are set to the public recognition of marginalized cultures by the state" (p. 140). In fact, in each of its different editions, the routing of Popolando-mi was also the object of harsh confrontations between the organisers and the local authorities. Here, matters such as providing legal authorisation for the itinerary of the parade or stopping the car traffic during its passing can be clearly addressed as indicators of broader political conditions, notably the State's recognition of both migrant communities and the local associations representing them. Instead our approach, allowing to focus on the event's contingent "presence-effects" (Ploger, 2011), provides a further angle to understand the political form of the event, as not uniquely shaped by the organisers but also strongly affected by the uncontrolled participation of performers and audience. This permits to highlight that the form taken by Popolando-mi did not pacify ongoing local conflicts, but instead favoured their possible multiplication, from the quarrels of car drivers to quasi-legal practices such as belt lashing and graffiti writing.

As regards the hypothesis of "spectacularization" (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011) of the urban space possibly produced by Popolando-mi, our approach provides two further precious insights on its political nature. First, as already noted, the fact that it did not bring about a pacification of conflicts, as usually assumed to be the case for similar "staged urban experiences" (ibid.). Second, the event did not exactly produce a carnivalesque subversion of Via Padova's everyday life, but rather drew from and reproduced the latter; hardly by chance, most of the very footsteps performed during the parade drew from and reproduced those rehearsed by young south-Americans in the public spaces of via Padova and in other places of Milan such as underground stations. Popolando-mi offered a stage for these performances to be looked at, hyper-visibilising practices that were however already present in – and thus far from being exceptional to – the daily routine of the street.

At first sight, by attracting the attention of the public to its own spectacular unfolding, the parade seemingly suspended the everyday civil inattention, also expressing the potential of exhibition that is intrinsic to the very urban dimension (Brighenti, 2010b). On a closer look, however, civil inattention appeared as not reversed by the event, but simply spatio-temporally displaced: bracketed from the middle of the street during the parade but yet still organising social interactions on its margins: e.g. among spectators on the sidewalks or in the relational spaces in which occurred the afore-mentioned graffiti writing and belt lashing. As for the previous case study, the researcher's immersive participant-observation allowed the exploration of the material taking shape of the event, permitting to verify specific research hypotheses and providing a precious insight into what an event produces in – and how it is shaped by – its context.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Exploring the conflictual taking place of events requires avoiding to presuppose their context as a *tabula rasa* on which events would produce self-evident impacts. Events occur in and through a dense spatiality made of practices, assumptions, affects, bodies, a complexity shaped into shared rhythms that 'tune' the everyday life in the city. As we have shown in this chapter, to grasp this material normativity we need to move beyond the 'Cartesian window' from which Lefebvre (1999) famously conducted his rhythmanalysis, in favour of a more immersive and participant ethnographic position. Understanding oneself as a body among other bodies (tangible and intangible, human and nonhuman), the researcher has to become a sort of 'radio receiver' (Law, 2004), constantly attuning to the frequencies of this being-together and the way s/he is tuned by them, or indeed a *seismographer*, capable of detecting the telluric waves

generated by the encounter between the event and the space in which it takes place.

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