Being Together as a Body Exercise. Ethnographic Perspectives

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Abstract In a multi-ethnic and multicultural city, being together is also a body exercise, a habit to different smells, tastes, skin colours, to heterogeneous ways of understanding proximity and distance. To understand how individuals and groups shape their existence in the city of differences, we cannot consider them as subjects without a body, but rather as actors who produce and receive sensory stimuli. A way of living together, sometimes of "disturbing" each other, which involves spaces and bodies. The body is one of the means through which knowledge is acquired, and the chapter makes an explicit positioning on ethnographic methodologies to explore the links between spaces and bodies, reconstructing the fundamental moments of the so-called "sensory turn" in anthropological studies. Several examples are mobilised to recount the extent to which the senses contribute to defining otherness, establishing tolerance thresholds, tracing material and symbolic boundaries between foreigner and native, but also between rich and poor. And again, the senses can be a register for giving or not giving value to people's lives, helping to construct norms and policies. The pandemic crisis has unequivocally highlighted how closely interrelated spaces and bodies are. But defending oneself "from the other" may have become an automatism: it is a drift to which we must pay attention so as not to lose the many conquests already achieved in so many gyms of coexistence that we call cities.

Keywords Multicultural City · Space · Bodies · Society · Multisensory Ethnography

1 The Pandemic City as a Lens on Spaces and Bodies

Milan, October 2019. I return home on the last metro in a day of transport strike. I share an "intimate" space (Hall 1966) with a lot of people, but especially with a man who is inevitably leaning against me; I think he is as attentive as I am to every

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movement he makes. The situation does not allow us to say that we are uncomfortable, but we are.

Milan, June 2020. I take the metro for the first time after the lockdown that stopped Italy in the first Covid-2019 wave. I choose a time when I think the train is empty, and it is. So, I see in all their (also graphic) power the signs on the floor saying "stay here"; the ones indicating which seats are usable and which are not; the arrows that indicate the directions of entry and exit. I think back to the last metro on that strike day. This space full of instructions makes me uncomfortable, even if it is a different kind of discomfort.

I have been reflecting on the themes proposed in this chapter for some years now, but today I find myself starting it in a different way than I had imagined. The starting point was the conviction that, in a multi-ethnic and multicultural city, being together is also an exercise of the body: a habit of different smells, tastes, skin colours, heterogeneous ways of understanding proximity and distance (Amin 2012; Briata 2019, 2020). Today, I believe it is impossible to write about "spaces and bodies" without mentioning the pandemic that has affected the whole world since the end of 2019. Although I do not want to talk about it, it is interesting to observe how the health crisis has unequivocally highlighted, on the one hand, how closely spaces and bodies are interrelated, and on the other hand how the social polarisation that now characterises our cities (Piketty 2014; Cucca, Ranci 2017; Alacevic, Soci 2019) is also reflected in the "space availability" that each body has at its disposal.

Some have written that in the face of the virus we are all equal because it can indiscriminately affect anyone, but this is not the case: the pandemic has made more evident social divisions and how these have also a spatial dimension. "I'll stay at home", the most basic containment strategy adopted during lockdowns, highlights the impossibility of doing so and the greater exposure to the disease of those who do not have a home, as well as the difficult coexistence of bodies in the space of those who have a small flat and a large family.

The virus has made more evident injustices, but also how we live in the encumbrance and impediment of the body (Bianchetti 2020; Bianchetti, Boano, Di Campli 2020). A body that touches, impacts, perceives and knows space in a direct and carnal relationship. Butler (2020) underlines how vulnerability also recalls the porous and interdependent character of our bodily and social lives. Humans inhale the air that other people exhale. The human trace that someone leaves on the multiple surfaces that constitute the materiality of the world can pass from one body to another.

This reciprocal, material sharing describes a crucial dimension of our vulnerability: the interdependencies of our embodied social lives. It is no coincidence that the response to the vulnerability of bodies towards the threat has been a strategy of separation and containment, which hat operates by drawing perimeters between environments, ecologies, subjects and social groups. In other pages (Briata et al. 2018), I have described how a public transport is also a place of urban compression of bodies that can teach us a lot about living together in the space of the city. Since Covid-2019, compression in public spaces is "regulated" through the multiplication of confines between bodies. A spatial separation between clean and dirty, safe and dangerous,

healthy and sick, foreign and familiar, which configures fences and distances previously absent, sometimes making a regime of prohibition and surveillance normal and accepted.

If living together among strangers is also an exercise of the body, the pandemic has made this exercise much more difficult, because it has exponentially narrowed the circle of "family members", while exponentially enlarging the group of "strangers", potential carriers of a threat. This is perhaps as risky as an accepted regime of surveillance. I shall move away from the virus in these pages, but it was not possible to begin this essay without mentioning it.

2 Ethnography as a "Full Contact" Match

I believe that one of the privileged methods of investigating togetherness as a body exercise are ethnographic routes, and I will try to explain the reason for this positioning. Ethnography implies forms of direct participant observation i.e., being for a long period of time in the contexts and among the people one wants to study. It is a multisensory "full contact" match in space, with other people, even those who are very different from those who are involved in the research (Cefaï 2013; Ocejo 2013). The researchers can be even deeply touched by the situation they are studying, can appreciate it, but also feel distant from it. In any case, participant observation implies the impossibility of being "indifferent" and one's own reactions are also an object of reflection. These reactions are linked not only to what one sees, but also to what one hears, eats and smells.

Attention to the multisensory dimension has become increasingly central to ethnographic research. In his *Doing Sensory in Ethnography*, Pink (2009) underlines that the so-called "sensory turn" is characterised above all by a greater reflexivity on this aspect of field research. The body is important in any human experience and is one means by which knowledge is gained; however, since the 1980s and 1990s, social sciences have worked more intensively on the relevance of the senses for understanding and representing people's lives. The anthropology of senses has outlined very relevant reflections on the importance of the body in human experience (Howes 1991, 2003). In the same years, human geography has also expressed an increasing attention to the sensory dimension in the study of the environment (Rodaway 1994; Pile 2005; Amin 2008). And again, in architecture Pallasmaa (1996) criticised the centrality of sight in the work of Western architects by proposing reflections on the tactile dimensions of buildings and Zardini (2005) emphasised the importance of street life in cities, inviting researchers to consider the sensory qualities of urban life, the sound and smell landscape.

Stoller's (1989, 1997) work shows how anthropological practice is a bodily process that involves the ethnographer not only in putting into play his idea of "the other", but in learning about what the others understand through their own sensory experiences. An important reference point for anthropologists is Simmel's 1907 paper on the sociology of the senses, in which he suggests that sensory perception of

another person or group brings about an intimate emotional and physical response that is an avenue of knowledge (or rejection) of the other (Simmel 1997).

In a multiethnic and multicultural society, several sensations can make us perceive diversity: a way of "disturbing" that is both multisensory and spatial. In the introduction to Peneff's (2009) *Le goût de l'observation*, Becker (2009) points out how skilled we are at constructing otherness even based on the smallest details: hearing the spoken language, observing the way people dress, even the smell of the food they eat and somehow "carry with them". So, if we want to understand how individuals and groups shape their existence in the city of differences (Fincher, Jacobs 1998), we cannot consider them as subjects without a body, but as agents who live by producing and receiving images, sounds, smells, tastes and contacts.

All this concerns the people and places at the centre of attention, but it also concerns the ethnographer. Therefore, a clarification must be introduced. In this piece, I take responsibility for carrying the "pre-judice" of a gaze that I would define, in very broad terms, as "Western". I have studied migratory phenomena in western cities. I was born and raised in Italy, and I have lived in several European metropolises, but always in the West. I have travelled in different countries of the world, but even when I have been very close to very distant cultures, still I was a tourist. This is my background when I "observe with my whole body". Among his talents, the ethnographer must surely have a certain ability to get close to the people with whom he develops his research, but he is not a chameleon. He cannot change the colour of his skin according to the situation he finds himself in.

Also for this reason, my ethnographic experiences over the last twenty years have taught me that one possible way of breaking out of the prejudices we carry through our bodies and backgrounds is to "multiply points of view", i.e. to build research teams composed of people who share a situation and an investigation space, but who have very different ethnic, cultural, social or generational origins. We had the opportunity to do this through a three-year exploration on the 90/91 bus in Milan, asking 80 students from all over the world to develop an ethnographic journey (Briata et al. 2018). The students brought into play bodies with different sensory repertoires and spatial cultures. Bodies that are perhaps the object of prejudice in the West and, also for this reason, register difference or discrimination more easily because they experience it, literally, on their own skin. This has led us to a vision of a situation that is certainly not exhaustive, but plural, in the space of the city of differences.

Through his background, the ethnographer filters the perception of reality, and his point of view is not only about what is visible, but also about the smells that, for better or worse, capture the attention or the promise of more or less familiar flavours. A smell that is foreign to me may make a space familiar to a person from a distant country, but it may also be pleasing to me if it takes me back to a trip to a country I loved. The way behaviour is labelled as right or wrong, normal or deviant is constructed through value scales that are also based on *sensory expectations and memories*.

Although in this essay the pathways will be exposed by separating perceptions according to the five senses, it is evident that each of them collaborates with the

others in creating "repertoires" of images, smells, tastes that are more or less familiar, accepted or stigmatised. Let us begin by talking about smells.

3 Snow (and more) on 42nd Street

Many scholars agree that, in the Western world, smell is a central sense for defining "otherness". According to Simmel (1997), smelling a person is the most intimate perception one can have of another. Less familiar smells are often referred to as an insurmountable barrier. This is another reason why contact with strangers on a crowded bus is uncomfortable. We can smell them without having anything in common, apart from the compressed space in which we find ourselves cohabiting for a more or less prolonged period of time.

Referring extensively to Simmel, Low (2005) dwells on the relevance of what he calls "sensory imagery" in interaction. Besides being a primary factor in the construction of "the other", smell is a barrier in relations between different ethnic groups, but also between different classes. These observations allow us to introduce a key theme in investigating the relationship between senses and society: the process that leads to considering a person or group as an outsider, and sometimes to stigmatising them, has not only to do with an ethnic or racial component, but also with a class component. "Wealth whitens", provocatively writes Ambrosini (2017), one of Italy's leading experts on immigration. And again, Rhys-Taylor (2018), in his walks through the streets of London's East End described in *Food and Multiculture*, came to the conclusion that a stigmatising smell par excellence is that of fried chicken. An extremely caloric and very cheap dish in a society that has made healthy eating a class dividing line. Smells contain information of an ethnic-cultural, but also of an economic-social nature. Fried chicken indicates that one is passing through a poor area. Wealth and poverty, luxury and decay are often associated with odours. Odours are "anticipators of a potential threat" (Corbin 2005), e.g., that of urine in an alley amplifies the perception of neglect and decay. A sophisticated fragrance heralds a space of luxury or the presence of a wealthy person. Bleach is the promise of a harmless place because it is clean, "sanitised", a word we have heard very often in recent months.

But often the city does not smell like a sanitised space (Zardini 2016). I think of a 1971 film by Hal Ashby: *Harold and Maude*. Maude is an exuberant old woman, in love and reciprocated in her love by the very young Harold. One day Maude invites him home and shows him some of her inventions, including a machine that reproduces smells. "I started with the simplest. Roast beef, old books, mown grass. And a Mexican courtyard. Here's one you'll like: snow on 42nd Street". Maude hands Harold a mask attached to a car which starts up as he sniffs and describes the smell: "underground, perfume, cigarettes … snow". I refer to this scene from a film that I love very much both because it allows me to talk about "more or less familiar" smells and how slippery this expression is (a question that also raises methodological aspects

that the ethnography of the senses shows us more clearly) and because Maude's car also leads me to talk about the difficulties of conveying sensory experience.

On the first front, we might think that snow in a city is a harmless, familiar, even romantic smell, but I am not sure that it is so harmless to a person living on the street or that it is familiar to someone coming from a warm country. At the same time, I think it is not easy to define what that concentrate of diversity which we call a city smells like today. More and more, the smell of western cities is not only "underground, smoke and snow", but also kebabs, poke, pizza, burgers.

What is the most appropriate food smell to describe London, one of the cities I have lived in, given that it is now accepted by everyone that the national dishes are both curry and fish and chips? I speak of smells, but implicitly also of tastes: taste is perhaps the "least spatial" of all senses, but it combines with smell in creating more or less attractive urban places. The promise of taste can also be a very strong urban attractor. Think of street food kiosks and how they create urban places, even ephemeral but highly frequented ones.

Smells and tastes can also be used in a stigmatising way. Filipino-born American anthropologist Manalansan (2006) recounts the lives of Asian immigrants in the United States, discussing the notion of "the immigrant who stinks". He points out that one of the concerns of the Americans of Asian origin who participated in his research was the persistent smell of "ethnic" food in their homes, on their clothes and bodies. Manalansan recalls that Mayor Giuliani's quality-of-life campaign in the second half of the 1990s criminalised certain odours such as sweeping or urine in working-class neighbourhoods or in those with a high incidence of immigrants. By using odours as a marker of deprivation, neglect was targeted without affecting its structural causes, paving the way for gentrification-centred redevelopment policies.

Harold and Maude introduces a second reflection on the difficulty of conveying and transmitting the multisensory nature of our experiences. Pink (2009) describes how reflection on the senses is often expressed through the work of scholars who tread the line between research and art. One example is the work by Oswaldo Maciá *1 Woodchurch Road, London NW6 3PL*, the address of a building where the artist lived with other people of different generations and nationalities. The installation consisted of five rubbish cans in which the smells of household waste were reproduced. Each inhalation by the visitors was intended to induce a reflection on odours in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural apartment block. The story of this work of art brought me back to many ethnographic journeys conducted in Italian cities (Briata 2014), where the issue of the rubbish smell was one of the first coexistence problems between people from different backgrounds that were pointed out to me. If rubbish is in many ways an extreme case, it is clear that the smell of unfamiliar food is a matter of discussion in multicultural coexistence. In a multi-ethnic block of flats where the smell of unfamiliar food disturbs tenants who do not produce it, should actions be taken to prevent these smells from being smelled or not? What are the right and wrong smells? In order to stay together, do we always have to "separate" or is there a way to train ourselves to be different? A first step, I think, is to recognise that there are just and unjust differences; that smells associated with poverty are not good, not because they are bad, but because poverty is unjust.

Therefore, smells are a register to signal ethnic-cultural and social diversity and to give or not value to some lives, contributing to build norms and policies.

4 Flesh and Stone

In *Flesh and Stone. The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, Sennet (1994) argues that Roland Barthes was one of the first to draw attention to the "repertoires of images" used by people when encountering a stranger. By analysing, even unintentionally, an unfamiliar scene, one tries to understand it quickly by resorting to images that fall into "already seen" general categories, stereotypes and simplifications. Thus, on encountering a black-skinned or an Arab man in the street, a white Western person registers a form of threat and is not inclined to explore the situation further. The judgement, according to Barthes, is *instantaneous*: based on their image repertoire, people close themselves off from any further encounter possibility.

Flesh and Stones reminds us that image repertoires concern both the diversity of bodies and the diversity of the built environment. On the diversity of bodies, the writings by the black (a clarification to which he is very attached) American ethnographer Elijah Anderson highlight that sometimes wealth is not enough to overcome prejudice towards black people. And this happens in a country where coloured people are often not immigrants, but citizens in their own right. Anderson (2015) recounts how, since the end of the civil rights movement, many black people have managed to find their own way into the American middle class and how much has been done to implement reforms in the spaces of black segregation. But racial segregation persists, along with the consequent stigmatisation of black ghettos by whites. Anderson's most interesting observations come from his description of what black people call "the white space". Restaurants, shopping malls, residential neighbourhoods, schools and public spaces where one does not expect to see black people and where their presence implicitly requires an explanation. Anderson recounts several situations where middle-class black persons wearing expensive clothes may perhaps go unnoticed in the white space, but, if they are dressed casually, they may be looked at with suspicion. If they don't want this to happen, they need to put some status recognition strategies in place, such as displaying their company badge prominently when they go shopping during their lunch break. Black people, especially if they are young males, are associated with a threat when they enter the white space. The images repertoire Barthes refers to associates skin colour with the stigmatised image of the ghetto, with poverty and danger. Referring to the reality of the United States, Anderson goes so far as to say that the public spaces of the city and its neighbourhoods can be conceptualised essentially as a mosaic of "white spaces", "black ghettos" (where not only African Americans, but also Latinos, Haitians or Caribbeans live) and what he calls "cosmopolitan canopies" where very different people can live together without problems because "the manifestation of public acceptance of all by all is particularly intense, becoming one of the defining characteristics of a place" (Anderson 2011, 3). Anderson's work is interesting because it shows unequivocally not only how much

the race issue matters in American society—it is an issue that we have seen re-emerge in all its power during the pandemic—but also how it is associated with both a class issue and the iconic image of the stigmatised black ghetto.

We talked about "flesh", but also about how flesh is associated with stones, with places in the city connected with a stigma. The city is also made of stones, and some more than others can arouse attention as much as skin colour. Leone's (2009, 2012) studies of Islamic worship places in Australia are a good example of this and tell of processes that are also recognisable in Europe. Leone says that Australians look at Islamic worship places as something that can ruin the architectural character of a neighbourhood. In Western countries where Islam is not predominant, all legal disputes over the construction of mosques mainly concern minarets, objects of contention even when they are purely decorative. This is because, more or less consciously, non-Islamic citizens see them as an architecturally visible sign of the appropriation of public space by Islamic minorities. In Europe, several countries have imposed a series of restrictions on the construction of minarets, often with the clear intention of making them appear lower and therefore symbolically less present in the urban landscape than the bell towers of Christianity (Haenni, Lathion 2009). In Italy, the fact that the project for an unbuilt mosque in Florence presented a façade strikingly similar to that of the church of Santa Maria Novella and minarets that resembled the architectural forms of Giotto's campanile makes us think. The height of the minarets is evidently a matter of contention not only for the "visual domain" but also for the potential diffusion of "Islamic sounds" in the Western city. And this brings us to soundscapes.

5 The "Boundaries" of the Bells of St Mary-le-Bow

Anthropologist De Martino (2002) described how the bell towers of Christian churches play a central role in public space not only because they are highly visible, but also because the greater the height, the greater the area in which the bells can be heard. This is also why Western societies have always tried to reduce the height of Islamic minarets as much as possible. The idea that minarets are used to spread the call to prayer by competing with the dominance of bells is viewed with hostility. Allievi (2009) has devoted much attention to the conflicts over mosques in Europe and, from his perspective, sound, even more than visual aspects, is one of the most controversial issues about these worship places. One example I have worked on directly is the mosque in East London, which is located in a neighbourhood where 70% of the population is of Bengali origin. Here, the permission to make the call to prayer was made possible by the support of the Anglican church (Eade, 1996). In recounting this controversy, I recall the bewilderment of the Bengali population because the mosque in question overlooks one of London's busiest thoroughfares and even powerful loudspeakers did not make the call to prayer audible. Therefore, the contrast was more symbolic than real (Briata 2007). On the other hand, in this part of London, the longest-established communities still say that the real Londoners

are the Cockneys, the people born in the East End. And you can only be called truly Cockney if you were born in a part of the city from which you can hear the bells of St Mary-le-Bow church. Actually today, in the crowded soundscape of the megalopolis, it is difficult to hear the sound of these bells.

These examples are interesting because they make clear how sounds can also be brought into play to "draw boundaries" in the territory of the city, thus expressing more or less explicit forms of space appropriation and control. Musicologists describe minarets and bell towers as "sound-marks" that also act on the sensory horizon of hearing (Schafer 1994; Lee 1999). At the same time, the soundscape, the sounds mix in a sound space, profoundly characterises the identity of places and their atmospheres (Bull, Back 2005; Mikola 2007), which is also why sound can be controlled, banned, discriminated against, promoted or celebrated. Sounds in a city where we are used to live are often so familiar that we tend to naturalise them: a mixture of traffic, trams running on rails, building sites under construction, advertisements, but also of wind, birds or rain; of course, church bells, but increasingly also different languages in the streets, music and rhythms from more or less neighbouring countries. As with smells and tastes, in cities it will become increasingly difficult to distinguish "foreign" and "native" sounds, an issue that does not only concern public spaces, but also interiors because sound goes beyond the walls of the house.

People experience domestic as well as public space in different ways that also depend on cultures, traditions, material conditions. As with odours, there is a tolerance issue, in this case related to the volume or times at which noise is made, and some have observed that the tolerance threshold may also have a socio-cultural connotation (Arkette 2004). A theme that we also find in the different interpretations of proximity and distance that are referred to by Hall (1966) and are discussed in the next section, but on which we must be careful not to slip into potentially stigmatising cultural reductionisms. Many studies on multi-ethnic society have highlighted how invisibility is a very important feature in the acceptance of immigrants (Tosi 2000). The multisensory journey proposed in this essay helps to understand how "invisibility" also concerns the possibility of not being heard or not letting people smell the food being cooked.

I conclude this journey by returning to the "compression of bodies" and the coexistence of strangers when bodies "touch" each other in a limited space.

6 The Hidden Dimension

The Hidden Dimension by anthropologist Hall (1966) is a text in which the author develops the concept of proxemics, analysing space or distances as a communicative element. Hall focuses on the meanings of the material distances that humans tend to interpose between themselves and others. The focus is on the distance people maintain between themselves in offices, shops and public spaces in the city. Hall describes four ways of being together in space: distances between people can be intimate, personal, social or public. But the perception of what is the right distance

in different situations can vary from culture to culture and thus become a matter of conflict. Thus, proxemics outlines the often implicit (hidden) rules of a spatial language that can be as diverse and comprehensible as a spoken language. Relevant observations; however, as with sounds and smells, associating a certain way of "being together" with a culture is a slippery slope where one must beware of reductionism and stigmatisation. Space is one of the basic elements in the life organisation of living beings, and Hall often refers to the animal world in developing his theories. Animals need to stay in contact, because in a group you are less vulnerable; therefore, the definition of "social distance" indicates the distance beyond which an animal loses contact with its group, can no longer see others, smell them or hear their calls. This is the opposite interpretation to the one we have become accustomed to over the past few months, when social distance is the minimum space that allows a primary defence against contagion. Through the comparison with the animal world, Hall also recalls the concept of territoriality, i.e., the behaviour through which an organism takes possession of an area in various ways and defends it. In animals, territoriality is a way of protecting oneself from predators. Man, on the other hand, creates material extensions of territoriality in order to take possession of a space, for example by establishing boundaries to delimit private property. I introduced the theme of territoriality because it leads me towards the closing of this essay.

I started with a reference to an underground, I told how the study of a trolleybus used by very different populations helped us to understand some mechanisms of coexistence within a space of "compression of bodies"; I end by staying with a means of transport and relying on a passage from the essay *The Great Migration* by Enzensberger (1992). The author describes a common dynamic in the compartment of a railway carriage. Two passengers enter and occupy tables, hangers, luggage racks. By territorialising the compartment, they feel "at home". Newspapers, coats and bags occupy the empty seats, trying to deter the arrival of other passengers. But the compartment door opens, two new travellers enter, and their arrival is not welcomed. Between the two passengers who arrived first, even though they do not know each other, there is an immediate feeling of solidarity, which is expressed especially in their body language. There is a clear reluctance to vacate the empty seats and share space with the newcomers. The compartment has become the territory of the first to arrive and any new person who wants to enter is an intruder. This behaviour, says Enzensberger, has no justification: it is deeply rooted in human nature. Newcomers are gradually tolerated, and one gets used to their presence, even if those who arrive later are always subject to a subtle form of stigmatisation. Newcomers are often not welcome even in a public and transient space like a train. Elias and Scotson (1994) in their book *The Established and the Outsiders* extended this reasoning by studying a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in a British town. The scale is larger, the area is a place of permanence, but the mechanisms are similar. In this study, there are inhabitants who "arrived first"—the *established*. The newcomers—the *outsiders*—are looked upon with suspicion, but over time even the new faces become familiar. However, the stigma is repeated with the arrival of each new generation. These stories help me to conclude with a certainly "partisan" look, but also with a vein of optimism.

7 Conclusion

The path outlined so far has made us realise how relations between individuals in space are also shaped by how people experience their own bodies and those of others. In spaces, people brush against each other, touch each other, share air, sounds, smells, life practices, but not necessarily a common identity horizon (Sini, Pasqui 2020). Where can I put my body? According to Sini and Pasqui, this is a crucial question in thinking about the problems of coexistence in contemporary cities.

What have design disciplines done and what are their action possibilities, having the aim to regulate the uses of space, in a context such as the one outlined so far? To articulate this question, I rely on Fincher and Iveson's *Planning and Diversity in the City* (2008). The two authors argue that in order to ensure spatial and social justice in a context of diversity, plans need to address three interconnected dimensions: redistribution, recognition and encounter. Fincher and Iveson develop these dimensions by referring to the links between space and society. The added value of the reasoning proposed in these pages introduces an additional element, looking at the links between spaces, *bodies* and society.

The *redistributive dimension* is perhaps the most difficult to tackle because it is the one most connected to structural factors. Redistribution implies a willingness to invest in policies, resources and spaces to support the most fragile components of a society, and this is also an increasingly difficult political positioning in a world dominated by neo-liberal drifts and an effective reduction in the resources available to the public hand. In front of the *perceptible* presence of urban immigration associated with poverty, the response is often anything but redistributive, rather repressive. Manalansan (2006) recounts how the smell of decay was one of the factors that led to the introduction of expulsion policies of the poor and immigrants during Mayor Giuliani's tenure in New York. Planning and architecture often play a repressive role against bodies that bear the marks of poverty, as well as potentially welcoming spaces for "diversity": think of the countless manifestations of so-called defensive architecture, but also of the roots of all those bans on mosques that in many cases are put in place thanks to more or less explicit planning rules (Fincher et al. 2014).

Mosques inevitably lead to the *recognition* dimension. Again, analysis at the "micro" scale is not sufficient in the face of structural issues because more or less inclusive policies and public discourses are played out in broader contexts. Mosques are a paradigmatic example of how visual and sound aspects combine to make non-Muslim populations think that Muslim are trying to appropriate urban space. The countless *invisible* worship places (mosques and others) in the basements of our cities are not in the spotlight because they bypass the issue of recognition. And it is the lack of recognition that determines the difficulties for black persons to cross the "white space" without using escamotage that make it clear to everyone that they are harmless. And again, there is an issue of recognition (and habit) in deciding where the line is between "the immigrant smelling bad" because he cooks and eats an unfamiliar food and assuming that curry is one of the national dishes in a Western country.

When I write that being together is also a body exercise, I think that cities, despite the countless repressions we are more or less aware of, are also *great gyms* to train for diversity. If the *established* seem to get used to *outsiders* in a more or less short time, part of the habit also concerns *landscapes*, *soundscapes* and *smellscapes*.

Cities change and people get used to the changes regardless of what the planners do, but perhaps it is worth understanding better the connections between spaces, bodies and society, starting also from the places where coexistence seems simpler and more possible. Space offers outlets and obstacles to the social practices of different populations, so understanding how spaces can be opened up to possibilities and opportunities for aggregation is an important task for planning and project culture. Spaces can be designed to be more or less open to unforeseen uses; working on spaces in the city of differences also means conceiving them as fields of possibilities that can be activated by the most diverse people.

For this reason, too, the *encounter* dimension is perhaps *the one on which designers could work most*, beyond structural issues, by understanding and learning to act on the "micro-publics of encounter" (Amin 2002) where people simply live together, confronting themselves with difference on a daily basis; also, by studying more carefully the spatial dynamics of places such as *cosmopolitan canopies*, which Anderson (2011) explored especially in their social dimensions. For many years the encounter issue has also been declined in terms of cultural hybridisation, the idea that in being together there is an exchange dimension that brings cultures and bodies closer together (Marconi, Ostanel 2016). If this is a possible perspective, it is important to recognise that sometimes encounters occur even without hybridisation and that the challenge is to share spaces even if space is really the only thing people have in common. During the pandemic, sharing the space became a problem. Social distancing was first and foremost a spatial distancing. If being together is also a body exercise, the virus may have taken us a big step backwards, because defending ourselves from the "other" with whom we share space has also become automatic. While respecting the provisions aimed at protecting the health of all, this is a drift to which we must pay attention so that we do not lose the many achievements already made in so many coexistence gyms that we call cities.

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