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Events in the affective city: Affect, attention and alignment in two ordinary urban events

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Abstract

In a representational regime, planned urban events are used by urban planners to render urban projects visible and acceptable. As a corollary of the focus of urban studies on their representational dimension and in spite of a burgeoning literature on the notion of affective urbanism, the experiential character of events remains surprisingly unexplored. This paper argues that an ordinary regime of events is mobilised by city-makers to act on the embodied, affective experience of the city and on the ways urban dwellers know and act upon the city. By analysing planned urban events in their embodied, experiential dimension, we focus on the ways in which, through the design of ephemeral material dispositives, urbanists attempt to encourage citizens to incorporate ways of knowing and acting on space and on the modalities of knowing and acting that are at play. We stage an encounter between critical event studies and Ingoldian approaches to affect and attention, examining two urban events in a Swiss canton. We show how intense encounters with urban matter are staged in an attempt to modulate affects, guide attention, and produce alignment with a specific political project, asking urban dwellers either to embody a project still in the making or to cultivate expectations regarding an already-written future.

Keywords

Cities, events, urbanism, experience, affect, attention

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Urban beaches and golf courses, pianos made available to the public, art exhibits temporarily occupying public space, and deck chairs in parks offering relaxation to passers-by: contemporary public spaces are no longer merely produced and defended but are also made eventful. The increasing eventfulness of public space is enmeshed in a new, more flexible planning paradigm advocated by a number of theorists, including certain gurus (e.g. Montgomery, 2013), who provide public authorities with roadmaps for more entertaining and happier cities (Ernwein et al., 2016). This approach has its critics, some of them stemming from the emerging field of critical events studies (Lamond, 2015), which contend that planned events lose their potential to interfere with and disturb a city's regulatory order. Rather than disturbing, events have become a tool of community control through the process of "subverting the subversion", which is precisely what Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) have called the "new spirit of capitalism", a capitalism that has gradually managed to internalise the 1960s artistic criticism by becoming "creative". The increasing recourse to planned events—whether "low cost", such as the two dispositives (Braun, 2014) described below, or more expensive, like some major events that call upon public-private partnerships to animate urban space—is said to be typical of a "new spirit of urbanism" (Devisme, 2005; Ouvrard, 2016); i.e. an urbanism that has progressively incorporated decades of criticisms into its ordinary ways of city-making. The irony of this diversion undoubtedly resides in the fact that urban planners socialised in this new spirit are very quick to mobilise the most disturbing references (the lettrist and situationist inheritance, in particular) to demonstrate the power of disordered routines and of the daily deritualisation of their interventions. Some of the zealots of event-based urbanism mobilise and reinterpret the idea that more or less spontaneous events (ranging from the accidental to militant interventions) have an intrinsic subversive potential (Gwiazdzinski, 2011; Lerner, 2007; Lydon and Garcia, 2015; Miranda, 2010; Montgomery, 2013). At the opposite end of the spectrum, many commentators understand events as a tool of government. Such scholarly work has demonstrated the extent to which planned events help legitimise the construction of a certain urban order (Smith, 2016). This literature puts a great deal of emphasis on the usage of events to showcase urban projects, transforming them into a spectacle and relying on narration techniques (Matthey, 2014a) and storytelling (Pradel, 2007). In contrast, the experiential dimension of events has been approached to a much lesser extent, which is all the more surprising given the growth of a body of literature on affective urbanism that insists on the growing attention paid by city planners to the production of atmospheres and sensorial environments. Much remains to be said about the role played by events in affective urbanism. This is the task we embrace in this paper. We argue that as a project management tool meant to shape urban dwellers' experience of the city, events take hold of their audiences in a material and corporeal sense, activating the individual's senses, including the kinetic sense of the body's position in space, and offering affordances that can be used to shape intimate ways of knowing. As such, evental urbanism diverts the "virtuous appeal" (Bochet, 2000, 2007; Bochet and Racine, 2002; Feildel, 2010) of social sciences to urban planners "to restore the sensorial to urban design and planning" (Bochet, 2008: 253). We approach events as carefully crafted affective experiences by looking at their materiality, interrogating the ways in which these temporary usages of space attempt to make urban dwellers know the city in a certain way and align with a longer-term project. We approach this through a conceptual apparatus that examines the relationship between affective encounters, attention and alignment.

Making cities and governing subjects through events: Two regimes

The social and political roles played by—planned—events in contemporary cities must be understood against the backdrop of deep transformations in the practice of urbanism. On the one hand, neoliberal political-economic changes of the post-Fordist era have transformed the regime of visibility of cities. Having been transformed into full-fledged political and economic actors through rescaling processes (Brenner, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2004), they are participants in a competitive system in which they seek to increase their powers of attraction through heightened external visibility. New Public Management has also brought new requirements of accountability; besides the setting-up of indicators, narrative techniques are said to help render forthcoming projects “always already present” and thus administratively visible (Matthey, 2011). On the other hand, the intensification of social, environmental and economic uncertainties has led to a transition from rationalist and conquering urbanistic practice (Feildel, 2013; Pradel, 2007) to a flexible (Matthey, 2014b) or malleable (Gwiazdzinski, 2007) urbanism. This urbanism of uncertainty incorporates a shifting, versatile paradigm meant to enable city-makers to cope with unpredictable forecasting horizons (Matthey, 2014b: 4). The former role of urbanists as urban development specialists capable of providing specific lines of action from well-informed diagnosis tends to be replaced by coordination work (Matthey, 2014b: 2). Instead of defining the formal and material aspects of urban development (Matthey, 2014b: 5), urbanists now tend to manage processes to determine fundamental principles and values in collaboration with geographers, landscapers, architects and sociologists. This value-based, narrative urbanism is fully embedded in an “economy of signs” (Lash and Urry, 1994), in which events are first and foremost understood to be representational.

Whilst the planning and organisation of events in cities is by no means a new phenomenon, many authors argue that events are taking on new roles and meanings in the post-Fordist city. Looking at large-scale events, Chaudoir argues that whereas until the mid-20th-century, cities provided the stage for events that aimed to enhance powers located elsewhere (e.g. national and international exhibitions), neoliberal logics of inter-city concurrence have resignified events, as cities now stage themselves through them (Chaudoir, 2007: 3; see also Smith, 2016: 1). Indeed, understood as spectacles and stories, events generate images and contribute to the engineering of local urban identities (Gravari-Barbas, 2009). They work as symbols—of coming together (Pradel, 2013: 79), of the jubilant city (Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2007: 5)—that contribute to the (re)production of the mythology of urbanity. In the paradigm of evaluation and benchmarking, events are also indicators of an area’s vitality (Pradel, 2013: 123) and of the acceptability of an urban transformation tested prior to implementation (Pradel, 2013: 90). This new regime of the event is not only the result of neoliberal transformations but also provides further justification for their expansion. As catalysts of partnerships between project sponsors, government agencies and private investors, urban events indeed give rise to new forms of governance and collaboration, and allow partners to establish their place in future urban projects (Gravari-Barbas, 2009; Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2007). Beyond their ephemeral nature evocative of a “timelessness” (Gravari-Barbas, 2009: 282) or of a “parenthesis” in the city (Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2007: 5), events are thus a key element of a chronotopic urbanism (Gwiazdzinski, 2009) that distinguishes and manages the various times of day and seasons of the city.

Although well rehearsed, this is an incomplete story. What is missing is an appreciation of the role played by events in the emergence of an affective urbanism (Anderson and Holden, 2008; Feildel, 2010, 2013). Indeed, urban planners and developers acknowledge the progress made in cognitive

science research and attempt to design “pre-reflective architectures” (Jelic, 2015) that speak to a purportedly pre-social, purely experiential, rather than social and reasoning subject (Jelic, 2015: 2). More broadly, contemporary urbanism calls upon the sensory dimension of the spatial experience and actively produces sensory environments and atmospheres (Pradel, 2007: 9). This is by no means in contradiction to the representational regime presented above, as the production of atmospheres and the mobilisation of cognitive science in urban design are also accompanied with discursive and visual marketing strategies based on a rhetoric of attachments (Feildel, 2013; Matthey, 2014b: 2) intended to stimulate adherence through sensual seduction. The role of events in this affective urbanism has attracted a surprisingly low level of attention, and only a limited number of publications have attempted to address their experiential, embodied character. Whilst the representational quality of events testifies to their embeddedness in an economy of signs, the affective regime of urban events speaks more to the emergence of an economy of attention (Davenport and Beck, 2001), of experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), or of affect (Hardt, 1999). Bringing together bodies at sites whose image urbanists seek to transform, urban events are understood within this emerging framework to produce certain habits that make urbanistic interventions more readily acceptable (Pradel, 2013: 88). Indeed, being corporeally accustomed to using a site in a certain way during an event, citizens are expected to be more willing to accept a permanent conversion of the site for that same purpose. Moreover, many events turn visitors into “actors whose role is to enliven the decor created for them” (Pradel, 2007: 8). Going to Paris-Plage in a swimsuit (Pradel, 2007) or wearing a construction helmet when visiting the site of a future urban project (Matthey, 2011) are ways of acting out the urban transformation; that is, of making it exist through one’s body. Such events are especially effective when they fall into a context of everyday life, when well-known sites are experienced differently (the first of the dispositives described below) or when familiar places are projected into the future (the second of the dispositives described below). It is, moreover, this ordinary regime that allows events to divert the subjective experience of places from everyday routines. This paper aims to contribute to this emerging interest towards the more-than-representational dimensions of urban events and to discuss their contribution to the production of the so-called “experiential subject” (Jelic, 2015: 2) within the project of affective urbanism. We will examine this by bringing together the concepts of affect and attention to understand how materiality is mobilised in temporary events to produce long-term alignments with political projects.

Governing attention through affective techniques

Evocative of sensual atmospheres for some (Anderson, 2009), the notion of affect also refers to the intensity of (more-than-human) bodily encounters, an intensity which is understood to have a transformative potential (Roelvink, 2010), but also to be modulable (Ash, 2012: 9) if not engineerable (Thrift, 2007). This speaks to an ontology of emergence, whereby the individual subject does not pre-exist their affects. To be clear, if affect is pre-individual, it is always social: it precedes reflection but is embedded in structures of feeling that are acquired throughout life (Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Masumi, 2002). This ability to feel can be nurtured—“learning to be affected” is a way of disciplining one’s body to become attuned to other human or non-human bodies (Arpin et al., 2015; Hinchliffe et al., 2005; Lorimer, 2015). This perspective disrupts the modernist dichotomies between affect and knowledge, feeling and knowing, body and mind and approaches “intelligence as embodied in the everyday practices and encounters with other bodies” (Peltola and Tuomisaari,

2015: 4). In this perspective, learning is being affected—and thus transformed—by the activities of other bodies rather than amalgamating information in pre-formed cognitive system (Ingold, 2001). It is, in Ingold's terms, an embodied process of enskilment, not enculturation. If a great deal of literature glorifies this ethos of "learning to be affected" as a way of nurturing more convivial, caring worlds (see e.g. Hinchliffe et al, 2005), more critical scholarship has also shed light on the mobilisation of affect as a way of "conduct[ing] others by structuring possible courses of action" (Richard and Rudnyckij, 2009: 61). Research has shown how architecture (Thrift, 2007), videogame design (Ash, 2012), food tasting (Hayes-Conroy, 2010) or group coaching (Richard and Rudnyckij, 2009) are concerned with engineering or modulating a series of affective responses (sense of fear, of failure, of success, of disgust, etc.) to render some activities desirable or not and to more or less successfully direct behaviours.

We focus on the design of two low-cost urban events organised by urban planners in a Swiss canton to shed light on the ways in which the design of ephemeral, intense encounters between human bodies and urban materials is mobilised in attempts to shift citizen's long-term perceptions of the city. Both of these events had the singularity of being composed of a set of material assemblages that city-dwellers were invited to touch, grab hold of, and experience. These events were, in that sense, less about discourses and representations than about the crafting of intense bodily encounters with urban matter. They were about creating a new understanding of the city through the staging of embodied experiences. We examine how the crafting of these affective encounters attempted to transform the modalities of attention to produce alignment with specific, longer-term political projects.

Two quite different strands of literature have taken up the relationship between affect and attention. One, in line with Ingold's Bergsonian/Gibsonian take, is based on the idea that "learning to perceive is learning to attend". In this perspective, "attention is not about a decision to think harder, look harder about x; rather attention occurs when an unexpected y forces us to think anew" (Cull, 2014, drawing on Bergson, 2002). Attention here is a capacity that can be enhanced through encounters with other bodies. The papers that draw on this framework (e.g. Arpin et al., 2015; Peltola and Tuomisaari, 2015) argue that attending is an activity that involves the whole organism and that attention can be expanded through—carefully prepared—encounters. The other body of literature that approaches the nexus of affect and attention sees attention as a limited capital that provides a source of value in capitalist economies. As there is, according to this framework, only so much attention that can be paid in a day, the entertainment and advertisement industries fight hard to appropriate as much of it as possible. It is with this consideration in mind that Ash writes: "understood as the force of an encounter, affect opens up and prompts attention to take place" (Ash, 2012: 9). Drawing on Stiegler, he analyses the strategic modulation of affect by videogame designers to capture attention so as to ensure that it does not go elsewhere. In this perspective, capturing attention is a goal, per se, for game designers, and their attempts to modulate affective intensities serve to increase its duration.

In this paper, we want to take the Ingoldian/Bergsonian perspective seriously and yet instil it with more critique. We certainly do not approach attention as fixed capital for which capitalism fights. However, whilst we acknowledge the fact that attention can be expanded to induce new capacities, we want to remain attentive to the fact that it can also be carefully crafted so as to control the terms under which the development of new (intellectual, perceptual, physical) capacities is possible. We want to draw more attention to Ingold's (2014) addendum to his "Education of attention" paper

(2001), where he insists that attending is also aligning. In this perspective, attention is transformative in that it brings the person who pays attention closer to whom or what they pay attention to. We look at the ways in which temporary, intense encounters with material dispositives are meant to make urban dwellers attend—and thus align—with particular ways of knowing and acting on the city. We use Arpin et al.'s notion of “technologies of education of attention” (2015) outside of the framework of explicitly didactic contexts or individual equipment and tooling. In so doing, we adopt the proposal of Allen (2006), who encourages researchers to grasp the notion of seductive power, a concept that allows understanding how “power works, not through electronic surveillance technologies or some rule-bound logic imposed from above, but through the experience of space itself, through its ambient qualities” (Allen, 2006: 442). “Suggestive encouragements” are said to guide the subject’s affective perception. The analysis of such suggestive encouragements and particular arrangements can be performed from the perspective of technologies of attention. Such “infrastructures and tools of knowing” (Peltola and Tuomisaari, 2015: 3) may include material installations that “reform habits of relating with [urban space]” (Peltola and Tuomisaari, 2015: 5).

In the next two sections, we apply this conceptual framework to two events. The first is an urban greening event that invited citizens of a Swiss city to corporeally encounter a set of material dispositives in a limited time in the hope of transforming the role they attribute to themselves in the greening of the city and of raising support towards a long-term greening programme. We document this case using material collected through interviews and observations in the context of doctoral research project (Ernwein, 2015). The second is an architectural and urbanistic mediation on the major urban projects of a Swiss canton¹, whose operators included public and private actors and associations. It is a matter of publicising upcoming major “urban projects”.

We call upon materials collected during long-term participant observation (Matthey, 2014a), giving rise to a hermeneutic description. Beyond their different relationships to temporality—in the first case, the event focuses on the present in order to activate a programme that is in the course of preparation, whereas the second creates expectations around a future that has already been decided upon—and their mobilisation by different actors of the same Swiss Canton, both constitute an event: they occur, they set up an exceptional phenomenological regime intended to transform the ways urbanites pay attention to urban space, and they allow a certain normality to be restored in which this new way of attending must stabilise to produce alignment with a specific project.

The event of the present: Disrupting embodied routines of everyday public space

Our first entry point is the celebrations of the 150th Anniversary of the green space department of a major Swiss city. Celebrated over the summer of 2013, these festivities have provided the department with an opportunity to experiment with an evental approach to urban greening. This approach was to be applied systematically from the following year on through the launch of an annual urban greening programme—confirming the role of events as testers of longer-term policies (Pradel, 2013). Both the 150th celebrations and the subsequent event-based approach to urban greening fell within the term of office of an elected official who has regularly used bodily performances in green spaces to advertise his actions, including giving a press conference in a tracksuit for the inauguration of an urban outdoor gym. We use this relationship between events, the body and political transformation to examine the ways in which the staging of intense bodily encounters with urban matter in events related to green spaces has been used to encourage a new

way of knowing and acting on the city, much in line with the liberal-individualist ethos of the elected official's political party.

In spite of their name, the celebrations of the parks department's 150th Anniversary were markedly non-retrospective. The book published on the occasion testifies to the event's focus on the present, encouraging as it does its readers to discover the wide range of contemporary usages of parks—yoga, outdoor cinema, urban picnics, slack lining, and dance lessons, to mention a few—without examining their evolution over the 150 years of their existence. Reenchanting the present city through surprise was the watchword of the event. Surprise was engineered through the overnight movements, always in secret, of “wandering gardens”, as well as to the never pre-announced distribution of “flowery surprise packages” (seed packets and bouquets of flowers). These festivities all had in common encountering the bodies of citizens, who were invited to let greenery come to them by taking hold of the bouquets handed out to them or settling down for a few moments in the temporary garden set up at the base of their building. In that sense, instead of going to the park, urban dwellers were directly called out by features of parks coming to them, offering affordances and asking for their attention. The only element within these celebrations that was evocative of the past and that called for citizens to actually go to a park was the “remarkable tree” programme. It encouraged residents to discover 150 trees classified as “remarkable” by the municipality using a mobile app that allowed users to travel along a tree-lined path. However, whilst the app was meant to bring urban dwellers to parks, it contributed to focusing their attention on a set of digital information rather than on trees as a material reality.² The festivities arguably took attention away from parks themselves, instead attracting it to temporary green spaces. At the same time, creating a sense of anxious expectation through the careful manipulation of surprise, it prevented park management being put in historical perspective. These two aspects, we argue, form the two sides of the same medal, as they contributed to shifting attention away from political issues regarding the transformation of parks management.

The programme inaugurated the following year built on this evental approach to implement a new way of doing and communicating about urban greening. In an interview conducted in 2014, the project managers commented on the design on this new programme by evoking a three-stage rocket, whose base is composed of seasonal events (the most numerous), whose centre corresponds to a smaller number of longer-lasting interventions (planting flowerbeds at the base of trees, converting certain roadsides into flowery meadows), and whose top is meant to be, when the time comes, a programme of long-term actions to promote nature in the city, entrusted to the canton's University of Engineering. Whilst the conception of the strategic stage of the rocket had not yet begun, the programme started to take on life each summer through the setting up of six seasonally planted mini-plazas. The wandering gardens of the 150th celebrations were reused for that purpose under the new name Southern Places, alluding to the Mediterranean origin of the trees planted (lemon and orange trees, with the occasional bougainvillea). In a local newspaper article, the elected official in charge of green spaces insisted that their purpose was to provide “unexpected, generous and audacious greenery” and to “continue to surprise, while seeking to ensure the sustainability of the planting campaign” (in Mertenat, 2016). Green, synthetic carpet imitating lawn, and benches and trees—these plazas assembled some of most iconic features of parks to signify, in a representational regime, that the department was investing in more greenery. All these factors seem to have been set up to encourage use by city-dwellers. Comfortably shaped, concave, and covered with fake lawn, the benches are closer to sofas than to the generic wooden benches one

would find in a park. They invite passersby to stretch out for a moment. Illustrative of the “folding and unfolding city” (Pradel, 2013: 87), they were initially recycled from an event which, a few years earlier, had celebrated the arrival of public Wi-Fi. Contrary to the “law-and-order” approach to public space furniture that makes it impossible to assume any kind of horizontal position on most recently designed benches, the public bench is transformed into a couch moved out of the living room and into the street, with joyous transgression of the boundary between public and private. Should this be interpreted as an invitation to city-dwellers to hold gatherings in public areas? The materiality of the object, its concave shape, suggests a focus on the interior rather than on opening up. Its size makes it difficult to accommodate more than two people. We view it, rather, as the transfer of a typical symbol of private space onto public space, as a contribution to the individualisation of public sphere and its shaping by the model of the private sphere (Illustration 1).

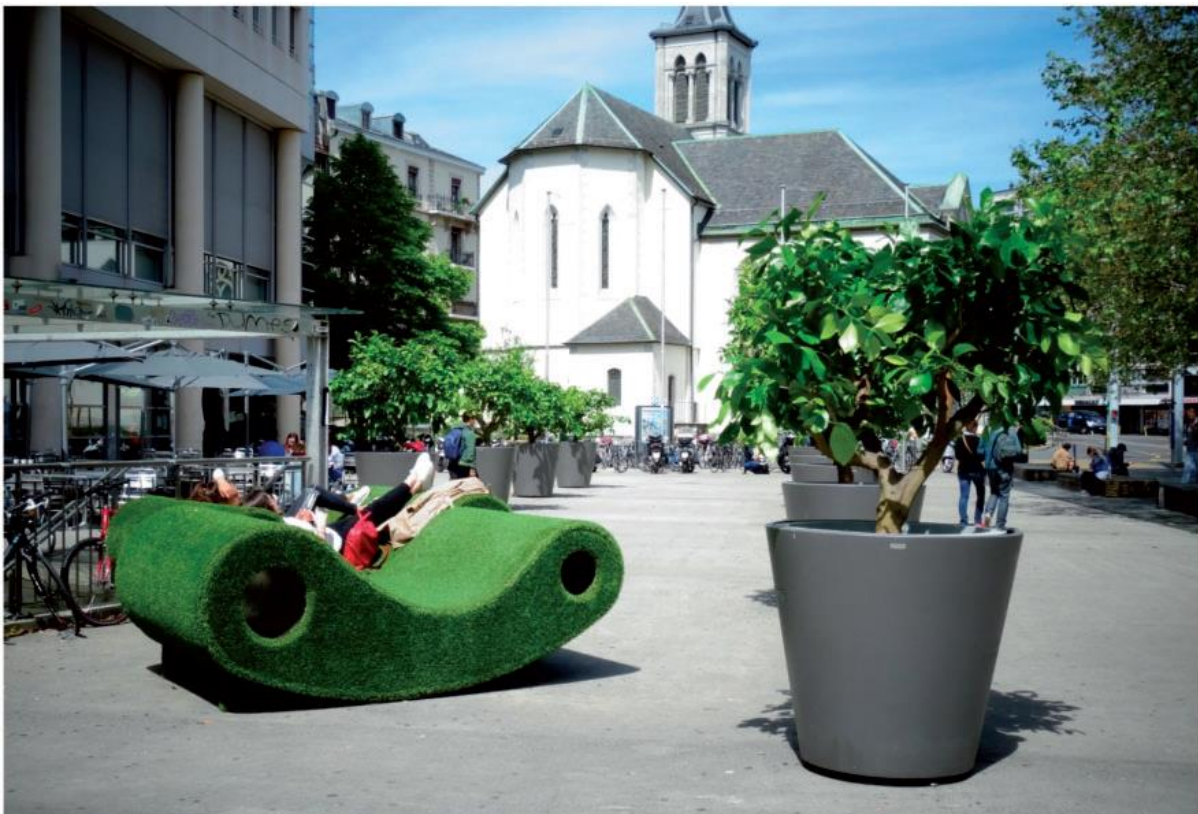


Illustration 1. A “Southern Place” with its “couch benches”.

This instillation of a private ethos is further accentuated in other features of the programme. At its inauguration in June 2014, at the entrance to one of the city’s most frequently visited parks, park department employees handed out small paper bags of seed bombs made of compost, clay and seeds. One may recognise one of the typical “weapons” of “guerrilla gardening”, a movement that finds its historical roots in grassroots urban movements that wished to reclaim abandoned urban spaces by throwing “seed bombs” into vacant lots (Baudry, 2011). In our case, they were handed out by a government agency after taking the precaution of changing the word “bomb” to “ball” and printing instructions on the bag. Unlike the activists who threw seed bombs over fences in a gesture that symbolised the citizens’ right to the city, city-dwellers were invited to “participate in the greening of the city” by planting the seed balls “somewhere in [their own] balcony, windowsill or garden”. By equipping urbanites with seed balls, the event invited them to take part in the fabrication of a “greener” city, somehow drawing on a discourse that valorises the power of citizens

to change the city. However, the transformation of the city was deemed to be achievable through individual action in small pockets of private space. The role of city-dwellers was restricted to decorating their own private space, whilst the greening of public space remained under the control of experts (Illustration 2).



Illustration 2. A bag of “seed balls” handed out in 2014.

In both of these urban greening programmes, the eventual dimension was built on the rearticulation and dis-articulation of the temporalities (daily, weekly, seasonal; past, present and future) of the production of urban space, a rearticulating meant to generate surprise to attract attention and to focus that attention on a specific temporality: the present. Whilst both played on short-scale temporalities, they also each deliberately left aside either a reflection on the past (150th celebrations) or the possibility to decide a future still in the making (eventual greening programme). Both events were furthermore articulated around the bodies of citizens, with features of parks coming to them, offering affordances and asking for their attention. Citizens were encouraged to grab hold of bouquets and bags of seeds, to flop down on a sofa-bench, and to get soil under their fingernails. This called for a disruption of their bodily routines, as their physical engagements with non-human nature in cities were temporarily transformed through the adoption of new bodily postures and an active engagement in greening. Yet, beyond their “generous” nature, the events invited urban dwellers to perform bodily attitudes that reproduced forms of sociability translated from private space, and to co-produce the city in the very limited space of their own house. The city with which citizens were invited to align through their corporeal engagement appears as a collection of private initiatives and spaces rather than as a stake around which collective action and mobilisation should be organised. These events provide a striking example of how events work within the framework of affective urbanism: the disruption of the usual temporalities of the production of urban space combined with the staging of intense encounters with matter that disrupt

embodied routines both worked to make urban dwellers align with a specific vision of the city, in line with the political colouration of the elected representative in charge of green spaces of the city as a collection of private spaces and initiatives.

Arousing the desire for future transformations

Advertising practices for major urban projects have changed to a noticeable degree in recent years (Bailleul, 2008). Images have assumed greater importance in architectural competitions. 3-D visualisation has introduced new modes of rendering (virtual maquettes), which transform the sensory grasp of the projected pieces of cities (Merrifield, 2015): the viewer changes into a new Icarus who, breaking free from the gravitational forces of the ordinary city and carried by atmospheric currents, flies over the planned neighbourhoods through a wrinkle-free space. These new forms of advertising are subject to criticisms based on a theoretical apparatus informed by the work of Guy Debord (Matthey, 2014a; Merrifield, 2015). In parallel, the need for the urban fabric to be reclaimed by the sensory body of its residents has led to the invention or rediscovery of methods favouring an embodied understanding of urban projects, which are always suspected to be a bit abstract insofar as they are forward-looking (Matthey, 2011). The old situationist *Derive*, after being transformed into a tool for reading spatial structures by behaviourist geographers of the 1970s, has become a tool for architectural and urbanistic mediation (Bonard and Capt, 2009; Bonard et al., 2009; Gwiazdzinski, 2016). Tours of major urban projects are organised by public agencies, allowing participants to gain a better understanding of the history of the perimeter and, thus, to better understand its evolution (Bossé, 2013). These tours are sometimes accompanied by mobile phones and tablets that provide the visitor with an artificial sense organ to aid their imagination in understanding the logic of the city in the making, by allowing them to visualise both the past and future appearance of the places visited (Drozd et al., 2010).

Drawing on materials collected from a long-term participant observation study (2013–2015), this section examines two editions of a major urbanistic event that conceived of urban dwellers' bodies as media through which to instil a sense of support for upcoming urban development projects. This time, the future is very much present, in a setting that has a more explicitly didactic approach to a participant's body, affects and dexterity. We question again the articulation between event-ness (planning events to make people feel the need to build—first sub-section below), affect (making one experience the complexity of city-making—second sub-section below) and attention (building acceptance for an urban project through technologies of attention—third sub-section below).

Making people feel the need to build

The operation of architectural and urbanistic mediation, in which one of the authors took part as both an actor and an observer, is illustrative of the transformation of the advertising practices of the major urban projects identified above.⁴ It combined the logic of the event with that of cultural mediation to provide visitors with an educational experience meant to teach them about the challenges of urban transformations. A team of local actors of architecture and urbanism (educational institutions, cultural institutions, and professional associations) assembled to respond to the public authorities' initiative to organise an event intended to be held on a regular basis and aimed to speak (and spark discussion) about the city and its architecture. Unanimously united around that general objective, the group formed a community, an *us*. We were, to take up the formula used by one of us, "a group of people interested in the construction of the city".

The event we wished to organise aimed to offer a supervised experience of contemporary city-making. One of us insisted on the need to accompany visitors rather than letting them confront abstract information on their own. We should walk and talk with them to make them understand. “This event must be accompanied, visitors can’t just walk in and stroll around there”, noted a representative of a government agency. This accompaniment is all the more legitimate, he continued, since “people never read the written information in exhibits”. It is therefore necessary “to approach them and accompany them”. A consensus gradually emerged around the postulate that the best way to make our event’s visitors grasp the local challenges of urbanism was to build up a certain relationship that would activate a kinaesthetic range of feeling (walking, seeing, and touching). Another one of us who represented a professional association evoked the possibility of having visitors see and touch the material of which the city is made, e.g. the various types of concrete. Another person enthusiastically agreed and suggested placing an exhibit in the parking lot of the building hosting the event so that visitors could touch panels of the city’s materials—and almost sensuously caress them, as we thought, taking on our observer role.

This experiential register was reinforced by a remark formulated by a representative of an educational institution: “we have to bank on the population’s needs in order to make them understand the need to build”. The best way to do so, he went on, is to reawaken the sensations experienced in the everyday routine of the city—the stress of getting around, the difficulties of finding housing—to highlight the attractions of the proposed solutions. As a collective, we progressively came to understand what we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it. We were a collective that was interested in city-making and that aspired to organise an event to make people feel the need for projects promoted by the public authorities to improve the quality of life in the city. At that moment, we had approximately one year left—i.e. numerous plenary meetings and bilateral sessions—to implement the mechanism in question, that is, one year until the first edition of our event.

Experiencing the complexity of city-making

Under the concrete ceiling of an oblong room that used to house the main office of a company in the firefighting industry, lays an arrangement of explanatory boards, maquettes, and games. At the centre of the room, a system of plugs and maps allows visitors to simulate densifying the city by producing different urban forms (high-rises, barres, and city blocks). The most daring or innovative creation is noted, and the purpose of this activity is decidedly playful and didactic. The small-scale maquettes are for pedagogical purposes, revealing the complexity of the big city and the challenges of the present and future construction sites. They also pay homage to the humble tradesman, a way of giving concrete form to the often intangible processes (engineering, competitions, planning, etc.) that punctuate the path to the concrete city. In the kick-off session of our working group, we discussed the advantages of such objects, which can give those who wish to coordinate the local planning an understanding of the relationships of mass and scale. The maquettes allow the understanding of the amplitude of a living space and enable one to better situate their body within a large region (Illustration 3).



Illustration 3. Densifying the city.

Close to the entrance, an orthophotograph of the urban area on the floor allows people to walk around the perimeter of the city—between baby-steps and giant-steps—and to assume a position in the urban space. Visitors become informed whilst looking for the place where they live. Some walk side by side, looking down. When they pass one another, they smile. They seem to have been transported from a museum experience (reading information signs) to the entertaining experience of an amusement park, stimulating the sensations⁵ of a body that moves in space to make an idea or a concept emerge. This translation serves as an example of a contemporary communications strategy of urbanistic projects: to inform whilst entertaining, calling upon an experience of the city in the making that is both moral and aesthetic, highlighting forms of rationality other than those activated on a daily basis by specialists in the field. In short, the resident's interest is aroused by varying the vectors. The actor who once again becomes an observer thinks that from this point of view, the organisation collective has done a good job.

Focusing attention, building acceptance

The orthophotographic system was to be fine-tuned in the second year of the event to let the linoleum interact with an application running on a tablet, creating a form of augmented reality meant to heighten the experience of the city in the making. However, adding a new technical device increased the need for human assistants to teach visitors how to use the tool—which can provide both context-specific and planning information simultaneously—and how to use that information correctly. Visitors were therefore to be accompanied by guides who, when they approached the

linoleum orthophotograph, would describe what it represents and introduce them to the tablet, show them how to use it, and tell them what they can learn from it (Illustration 4).



Illustration 4. Walking on an orthophotograph.

When placed above the linoleum, the tablet acts as both a device that helps visitors inscribe their living space within a larger perimeter (the frame circumscribes a point in the city like a sort of “human seashell”, in the language of Moles and Rohmer, 1972) and a magnifying glass to explore the inner workings of the urban area and find emerging future trends: anticipated transformations, expected residents, planned facilities, and so on. The software also makes it possible to juxtapose all the data that are mobilised by the specialists to make the city. In that sense, manipulating the tablet makes visitors experience the work conducted to identify the relevant perimeters of densification and to feel the complexity of the challenges of planning. The sociotechnical device makes users appreciate that city-making really does require expertise.

Having learned how to use the “artificial sense organ”, visitors are allowed to walk around the miniaturised city perimeter by themselves. The monitors are then both present and absent, hidden behind the thin case of a tablet. A new form of influence takes shape, as the sociotechnical device provides the subject with the impression of walking around alone. At the same time the visitor regains possession of the linoleum, they gain increasing mastery of the tablet. They play (as suggested by the smile of the participants and the enjoyment that their bodies seem to reflect when attentively leaning over the linoleum), which means accepting the rules of the game (Huizinga, 1951). They fly from one perimeter to the next, discovering increasing data, scenarios, projections, and images of the expected future. By doing and perceiving, bodies incorporate future projects as if

they were already more than projects: something pre-existing, already “on record”, as civil servants say, which leads to a gradual transition from *software* to *softpower*.

The playfulness of our device makes an instructional visit entertaining, something along the lines of the model of infotainment. Our concern here is about the risk for playfulness to reduce critical vigilance. As sociotechnical devices are capable of having certain “orthopaedic” effects (Matthey and Gaillard, 2011), they can straighten out cognitive schema and encourage the user to ask the right questions for a certain purpose, in this case, how to build a city without opposition. The pieces of concrete and the bodily experience of an urban region reduced to the size of a square of linoleum are a means of edification, a way of “learning things” about “what’s going on close to home”, a playful way of discovering one’s local environment. Visitors follow the monitor and then feel that they have reached a point where they can continue alone. They learn. They understand. The exhibit is the type of experience from which visitors walk away fully convinced. The infotainment dispositives script the reception of information. New modalities of communication about urban projects no longer deal with correcting reality after its actualisation but, rather, with building expectations. They seem to subtly open a door to a deeper stratum of the subject’s intimacy in an effort to manage not only city-making itself but also the subjective world of residents. As we have written elsewhere, it seems that “while urban centres are transformed in an effort to make them attractive, at the same time, it is ensured that they will fit in with the new economy of desire by making the visitor’s experience one of relaxation, even self-abandonment. Concomitantly, information relating to urban projects is disseminated over the typical communication channels of the leisure economy, festively distancing itself from the political arena and thus decollectivizing its reception” (Matthey, 2014a: 108).

Making bodies available to produce alignment: A conclusion

Urban studies have emphasised the link between urbanists’ growing resort to images and narratives in a regime of representation and the emergence of an event-based urbanism. It has shown how the production of events works to reinforce established orders and to increase the social acceptability of the transformations of the city’s material infrastructure. Such critical approaches are often based on a theoretical framework that is more or less explicitly derived from Guy Debord’s writings on the “spectacle” (1967, 1988). In contrast, only a limited number of papers have thus far shown an interest in the experiential aspects of events (see e.g. Pradel, 2007, 2013). This paper thus attempted to account for the ways in which events contribute to the emerging praxis of affective urbanism (Anderson and Holden, 2008; Feildel, 2013).

With this objective in mind and staging a perhaps unorthodox encounter between critical event studies and a broadly Ingoldian approach to affect and attention, we examined a series of planned urban events in a Swiss canton. We shed light on the ways in which planned events attempted to disrupt embodied routines in daily lived space by staging intense encounters with unusual assemblages of matter. Thanks to their ephemeral character, the modulation of temporalities, and the careful crafting of surprise, these events attempted to prevent habituation. We have shown how these disruptive encounters were designed to offer citizens new material affordances aimed to enhance and transform the modalities of their attention from the perspective of influencing their intimate, embodied ways of knowing the city. Following Ingold’s take on attention (2001, 2014), according to whom attending is also aligning, we argued that this attempt at modulating attention aimed to produce longer-term alignment with specific political/urban projects. Indeed, both of the

events we examined set an exceptional phenomenological regime that aimed to produce an affective alignment, and both then let a certain normality come back, in which this alignment was expected to stabilise.

The first case comprised several editions of an urban greening event in a major Swiss city. This series of events was located in public space. Through the crafting of surprising happenings and the installation of unusual assemblages of material, it disrupted the embodied experience of daily lived space. The case showed how the evental quality was built through the modulation of temporalities, a modulation that also attempted to focus attention on the present. Indeed, the organisers endeavoured to consolidate a “moment” through ephemeral, surprising activities, a sort of translation of Sartre’s “perfect moments” (Sartre, 1938), which might otherwise slip through the visitor’s fingers. As a result, visitors were alienated in the present time, complicating the possibility of a forward-looking perception of time necessary for debating desirable futures. The programme in the making was furthermore inscribed in the residents’ bodies as though it were already an established fact. Indeed, the events were articulated around the bodies of citizens, with features of parks coming to them and asking for their active engagement—grabbing bouquets and planting seed balls. However, these material engagements, we argued, encouraged residents to participate in city-making individually by acting in their own private space. The disruption of people’s usual, daily experience of the public sphere through the design of temporary, intense encounters with unusual assemblages of matter was therefore meant as a way of expanding their attention to align with a specific neoliberal political project.

The second case provided a hermeneutic description of a mediation operation intended to accompany visitors through side-by-side presence and touch in their discovery of the major urban projects forming part of the master development plan of a Swiss canton. Organised outside of urban public space, the events nonetheless rendered the city present through a variety of material mediations. The objective of the organisers was to create an embodied grasp of planning perimeters, which they expected would be too abstract to be understood through textual media. Various technologies of attention (Arpin et al., 2015; Peltola and Tuomisaari, 2015)—games, plugs, orthophotographic floor mats, and computer tablets—were used to make visitors perceive upcoming projects as necessary and experience the dense city as unavoidable. The strategy was to inform through entertainment, making use of alternative modes of rationality. In sum, the activity encouraged visitors to ask suitable urban planning questions and to reach the same conclusions as the cantonal authorities.

Both of the events analysed made use of the same paradoxical ethos of the active body that through the senses and affects, can be made available to the experience of a new, eminently political form of spatiality. By making the visitor adhere to the present or by arousing expectations of a future that is no longer debatable, the objective of such events is to build public acceptance of urban projects. Each of the bodies subjugated to the pleasure of the experience becomes a potential vector of transmission of the “new” urban values. The communication of urban projects can go viral by taking hold of the bodies and affects of its target audience.

Of course, we do not want to depict the subject of these dispositives as resourceless, passive and manipulated. Since the empiricist and sensualist philosophies of the 18th-century, much scholarship has insisted on the fact that individual subjective experience is always interpreted in light of other experiences (Matthey, 2008: 127–176). The literature on affects also specifically insists on their

fleeting, at least partially indeterminate character (Ash, 2012; Peltola and Tuomisaari, 2015; Richard and Rudnyckij, 2009). Our argument is that the dispositif endeavours to produce affordances intended to achieve the best possible reception (related to the experiential capital and the horizon of the expectations of the intended audience) of major projects. It is in that sense that the dispositif should be understood as a generator of subjectivity. Both of the cases we draw upon testify to the relentless job required to generate affect and guide attention. In both cases, organisers proceeded in several stages, carefully adjusting their dispositives to the practices displayed by city dwellers. In this sense, there is no definitive disciplining of bodies but, rather, a continuous affective labour of directing attention.

This article began with the idea of a “new spirit of urbanism”, that is to say, an urbanism that managed to benefit from the criticisms raised against it to reinforce its own mechanisms through the “subversion of subversions”. Yet, if some of the bodies captivated by the event-based dispositives described above may be inclined to adhere to the rhetoric and aesthetics of the new “urban quality” of the neoliberal city, “counter-events” may also have the power to subvert the subversion of the subversion and introduce disorder again. Slipping into the dramaturgy of the first dispositif, the “Weeds” [Mauvaises herbes] campaign carried out by a group of students in the same city in the summer of 2017 questioned the practices of public space by promoting shifting utilisations of emblematic places by multiplying the furniture of public space (chairs and more chairs)—reintroducing the collective, where the greening event insinuated the privative, and installing the mess of a flea market, where the order of a living room was installed. Symmetrically, whilst the second dispositif was inaugurated with great pomp and by invitation only, a group of residents fighting densification was astonished not to be invited to the vernissage and distributed tracts in the parking lot—a genuine event aimed to disrupt a well-oiled mechanism that dared call itself an event. This dialectical reversal undoubtedly invites us to look both at the planned usage of events as they pertain to “strategy” in Michel de Certeau’s term (1980)—namely, a long-term development intended to mobilise resources to achieve one’s ends—and at spontaneous events in the sense of de Certeau’s “tactics”—namely actions of shorter duration aimed to generate margins of freedom. If events are instruments of government, this instrument determines a field of struggles – of affective, embodied struggles.

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Notes

1. Since this is a clandestine participant-observer study, we have chosen to anonymize our choice of sites: the places, organisations and actors are designated through periphrases. This choice sometimes implies an excessively allusive text.
2. For a discussion of the role of digital technologies in the transformations of modes of engagement with nature, see the special issue of *Geoforum* on “Nature 2.0” published in February 2017.
3. In 2012 and 2014, municipal gardeners employed by the city’s green space department went on strike and demonstrated in the streets to denounce an important decrease in the workforce and the transformation of their working conditions.
4. This dispositif is particularly interesting for two reasons. On the one hand, it assembles technologies mobilized by the cantonal administration during other events. On the other hand, it makes it possible to test prototypes that will then be disseminated in more popular events. For instance, pictures illustrating this paper have been taken during an event dedicated to (as stated by its promoting website) “fashion, interior design, well-being, gastronomy, nature, without forgetting leisure of all kinds, sport or culture”.
5. The sensationalist epistemology, as formulated by Condillac or Helvetius, proposes that ideas are born of the senses, or more precisely, from a relationship with objects mediated by the sense apparatus; i.e. the transformation of sensations in human consciousness. In a nutshell, there is no idea prior to experience. Knowledge is gained only through the interactions of the memory, the body and comparison.

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