

14 Placing Performance into a Distressed Space

The Case of San Berillo

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What kind of relationship exists between spatial action and performance? Moreover, what are the conditions for a transformative performance? These are, in summary, the objectives of this chapter, addressed through a case study that focuses on a distressed space located in Catania, a city in southern Italy.

The appropriation of space that produces the uniqueness of a place cannot come about without the space-related actions of which the space itself is the pre-condition. When space is seriously decomposed, performance becomes a mere representation that will struggle to succeed in transforming the given conditions in which it unfolds and to produce processes subjectively oriented towards change. The unravelled space is a space subject to domination because it does not allow transformative performance rooted in space.

The term performance has a complex genealogy, used to express both the power of new forms of domination and the subjectivization processes occurring through the body. Concerning this domain, especially with reference to contemporary spaces, the media interfaces that pervade social life (Gras 1997) require continuous on-demand performances, just as a performative communication is dictated by the so-called new regime of historicity (Hartog 2003) characterized by the affirmation of communication on the action (Perniola 2009). Performance is also linked to the aesthetic imperative that has its origin in what some authors have called the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999) and aesthetic capitalism (Murphy and de La Fuente 2014). On the side of subjectivization, performance constitutes an aesthetic reflexivity, which carries out a critique of universals by the aesthetic particular (Lash 2000), in a predominantly extra-discursive direction. A performance, as Schechner and Appel (1989) argue, is a dialectic of 'flow', i.e. of spontaneous movement in which action and 'reflexivity' are indistinguishable. Placing itself in this ford, between domination and subjectivization, performance is proposed as a predominantly 'affective' analytic construct (Deleuze 1988, Massumi 2002), aimed at overcoming the mind/body, material/immaterial, individual/social dichotomies that go across a large part of the social sphere. Performance is, therefore, a concept sensitive to the ambivalences of contemporaneity. Still, following Schechner (2013, p. 4), it is above all a concept in tune 'with the avant-garde, the marginal, the unusual, the minority, the subversive, the twisted, the queer, the black people and the formerly colonized'; it has, therefore, its own strength in unhinging

structured spatial orders, offering itself as a picklock to subvert the hierarchy of beliefs, ideas, people and objects that have settled in space and are structured as a domain.

Starting from these considerations, in this chapter, I would like to problematize the question of the relationship between performance and space. My thesis is that domination today is experienced mainly in terms of the decomposition of space. Space is perceived more as the disorganization and fragmentation of logics that are difficult to summarize and whose recomposition requires an effort and a reflective capacity that we can read in terms of subjectivization. This representation helps us to understand how, in the absence of resources of subjectivization, a destroyed space, i.e. poor in structures in which materiality, imagination and signification are grafted, cannot generate and cannot be activated by transformative performances. This happens above all in those areas that we could define as partially excluded from economic globalization or rather that have not found a competitive role in the global division of labour, but that suffer the effects of this division. An example may be given by some areas of social hardship in southern Italy, where I have chosen to empirically anchor the theoretical reflections expressed in this essay.

I have chosen to treat space by making reference to the relational approach of Martina Löw (2016, p. 135), according to which space is the result of two different processes. The first, defined as ‘spacing’, is constituted through the ‘deploying or positioning of the social goods and people’ and ‘by the positioning of markings which are primarily symbolic’. The second, which Löw defines as the ‘operation of synthesis’, through which goods and people are amalgamated to spaces, involves the mediation of ‘perception, memory and imagination’. This relational approach seems particularly fruitful because it places the relationship between space and performance in terms of reciprocity: how does space activate performance, and how is it activated in turn by performance? Given the interdisciplinarity that can be understood through a genealogical perspective on performance and considering the aforementioned relational approach to space, in order to understand the problem that performance poses to the study of the dynamics of space, I have identified as an empirical field the historic district of San Berillo located in Catania, a large city in southern Italy.

I have structured the chapter as follows: first of all, I have drawn a map that, although partial and limited, allows us to lay down the different meanings of performance and the representations of space that can be associated with them. Subsequently, to bring out the interdependence between performance and space, I placed performance in a concrete space characterized by uncertainty and social inequality. Finally, I conclude the chapter by problematizing the transformative power of performance and the conditions necessary to unfold its subversive strength. The research work consists for the most part of an analysis of the documentary and visual material; daily ethnographic walks in the lanes of the neighbourhood on various days of the week, in daylight and after dark, with subsequent writing up of research notes and video-photographic data collection; the carrying out of interviews with informants and residents; and participation in public events located in

the neighbourhood. The duration of the fieldwork stretched over one year, with three periods of research, each lasting two weeks.

Space through Performance

Over the past few decades, we have seen a proliferation of theoretical approaches to performance. These frames correspond to different definitions of subjectivity and power and different articulations of the two poles (Gregson and Rose 2000). Among the original and most influential formulations of the term, it could be made reference to Erving Goffman's (1959) analysis of 'social interaction', Austin's (1962) linguistic theory of 'expressions performative', which was subsequently developed by Butler (1988) and, influenced by Schechner (1977), Victor Turner's (1986) ethnographic descriptions of ritual as a procedural form of 'social drama'. In the sociological field, following the contribution of Goffman, it is important to take into account the contributions of the two interpretative strands related to performance, that of cultural sociology and cultural studies. Over time, other disciplinary perspectives have fruitfully crossed both areas. For example, Alexander (2003), one of the founders of cultural sociology, while maintaining some structuralist assumptions, in an attempt to describe the concretely observable manifestations of social action, combines the thought of Turner, Schechner and Burke (Cossu 2006), while some authors dealing with cultural studies (e.g. Johnson 2003, Bell 2007, Blackman 2008) hybridize with the objects and theories of continental philosophical thought, including Lacan, Foucault, Kristeva and Butler, to take a stand in the controversial dynamic subjection/ subjectivization. In an attempt to draw such a map, I have interpreted the term performance according to three distinct meanings: dramaturgical, liminal and ambivalent. This is only a provisional analytical device aimed at reducing performance's genealogical complexity and tracing its specific relationship with space.

Goffman is the starting point for the first dramaturgical meaning. In 1959, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman used the concept of performance to interpret the way individuals act in social situations. Much of the scholar's work has focused on the limitations of the 'presentational self', of what happens when presentation fails or breaks with the result of 'losing face' or in an experience of embarrassment, shame or humiliation. Following Goffman, Alexander (2004, 2017) plays an important role in the dramaturgical approach, looking at performance in terms of social drama. For him, when the social system and the community are complex and pluralistic, the elements of performance are de-fused. In a context of increasing social complexity, successful performances develop only through a process of re-fusion. Alexander argues that social theorists must resort to the tools of dramaturgy, drama theory and theatre criticism to develop a contemporary cultural sociology in order to understand social performance as a device for remodelling previously fragmented elements. Goffman seems to have in mind how performance can help avoid the failure of interaction. Similarly, Alexander only indirectly refers to space, because he is primarily interested in the factors that make a performance convincing or perceived as authentic by the audience. Among

these factors, he mentions space as an element that contributes to the ‘authenticity’ of the performance in the sense that to be credible, the performance must happen in a specific place and with a specific duration, which avoids the inappropriateness of place and time (Alexander 2006). However, both authors seem obsessed with removing embarrassment from the interaction (Probyn 2005).

We can thus infer that for both authors, space is intended as a device functional for managing emotions and regulating feelings, finalized to avoid the failure of the interaction. Yet, it also should be pointed out that, in an attempt to unravel the normative logic of face-to-face interactions, Goffman explores a great variety of physical spaces and objects. They are not only the scenario in which the interactions take place, but, as Frehse (2008) emphasizes, they actively intervene on the scene by breaking in with their own logic. In the dramaturgical characterization of the ‘facade’, there are furniture, decorations, physical appearance and other background elements that intervene in the actions. They are scenic and communicative resources that Goffman includes, we would say today with Latour (2005), as actants in the social assembly.

If the cracks, the uncertainties and the temporariness in the dramaturgical sense are considered by the performer primarily a problem to be avoided, the liminal frame performance opens up to something absolutely unexpected, sudden and extra-discursive. Here, performance is above all a unique creative output, a representation without reproduction (Phelan 2010). The liminal meaning of performance is identified with the body; through it, borders are explored, the loss of meaning is denounced, and escape routes are traced (Phelan 1996). The space activated by this meaning of performance is indeterminate, experimental and fluid. Indeed, we should say that it is the body that creates space. A certain assonance with the artistic performances of the 1960s and 1970s helps us to fully understand the radical nature of the criticism entrusted to the body and its *creating space*. Wounded bodies, covered in blood, bodies stripped or forced into unnatural poses or simply defenceless at the mercy of others, assign an extraordinarily critical value to the body. The body enhances its aesthetic and symbolic values until slipping into shamanism (Dantini 2005; Wood 2018). The space activated by the body becomes a visionary, magical space, almost on the verge of madness; in it, all forms of mediation are abolished, and the norm is suspended. It is a dialogical, fleeting and risky space, as suggested by Thrift (2008, p. 136), centred on the relationship between body and environment without mediations, especially those associated with the social role.

In the third connotation of performance, defined as ambivalent, the starting point is Judith Butler’s influential work on gender and queer studies, but, above all, the debate that followed (see Blackman 2008). This focuses on the implicit ambivalence that the term performativity¹ brings to the dynamics of subjectivization/subjugation, from which there is no way out. For Butler (1993), referring to Foucault, one cannot free oneself from power. There is no space whose freedom can transcend power relations. It is about living within a time matrix to understand what is possible. Among what is possible to do, there are parodic practices, useful to denature and re-signify, in a subversive way, the corporeal categories by projecting them beyond the frame of binarism. The parody of the genre, like

that of a drag queen or drag king, is a subversive repetitive practice. For Butler, it is a politics of despair, through which the gender marginalized from the real reveals the aspect of non-reality (Butler 1990). Although Butler works largely in a temporal rather than spatial register, Thrift (2008) suggests that Butler manages to emphasize the importance of context, as its demarcation already foreshadows the outcome. For her (2011), space has a materiality that must be recognized; elements such as floors, streets, squares and architecture represent necessary conditions, for example, in activating public space, but it is the bodies that animate them by reconfiguring the material of the environments. In essence, it is performativity that creates the quality of the space as an audience. Butler's most stinging criticism comes from Nussbaum, who argues against Butler's allusive and abstruse style, which she blames for bracketing out the real dimension of life, ultimately neglecting emplaced situations. In the vein of Nussbaum's critique, it can be argued that the reduction in performance to the mere gestural dimension represents space as a void to be filled. In the next paragraph, I will discuss an alternative idea: that performance continuously and inescapably interacts with space.

This concise and necessarily incomplete cartography of performance is nevertheless useful to make us understand the role of performance in structuring space, both in social integration and individualistic competition and in the oppositional statement with respect to the social representation originated by the norm. The dramaturgical performance attributes the task of recasting elements previously held together by the institutional programme (Dubet 2002) and today precisely defused. Unlike in Alexander, in Goffman we find the sociology of space but always within a framework that is dependent on social expectations. For authors mainly dealing with performance studies, however, it retains something resistant and resilient that cannot be traced back to the discursive representations of the social sphere. Here it is the performer who activates the space or rather *creates space*. In the third sense, ambivalent in its production of subjectivization/subjectation, space is present primarily as a structure that generates and organizes performance, which in turn reveals the dominance of the norm. We can therefore argue that performance maintains a dynamic tension towards space in all three areas analysed. Space is never placed outside the performance. As Schechner (2013, p. 3) states, the performance reveals the quality of liveness inherent to 'bodies, affect, process qualities, informal texts, fragments of architecture, visual observations, or any other object or artefact of art or culture *considered not in itself* (my italics), but as actors of continuous relationships'.

Space and performance are two concepts that force us to account for the materiality and affectivity inherent in the social sphere. Space is material, ontic-kinetic, factual, vital, experiential, imaginary; the performance takes place in a practical space that becomes the medium of an ongoing experience. In the next paragraph, I will try to use the concept of performance to interpret a real context. Performance is adopted as an interpretative construct with regard to a specific space whose material and social aspects are disorganized. It will be argued that the contextual absence of a structured space finds in performance the only way to re-figure it. It is important to underline that when I speak of the structuring of space, I am

referring not only to materiality but also to the imaginary dimension that is grafted onto material objects. Part of the significance of materiality inheres in its capacity to function as that on which people project meanings and imaginaries. The social therefore emerges as a material, cognitive and symbolic structure.

In a deconstructed space, performance takes on the burden of organizing the missing space, the one in which meanings, imaginaries and materiality are settled – we can also define it as institutional. Performance under these conditions takes on the effort of recomposing logics that are fragmented, however, at the same time, weakening its transformative capacity. The observed area is a neighbourhood of Catania. It is a poor neighbourhood lacking in dynamism within a relatively affluent and constantly moving society. The experience of the subjects who live there is conflicting, moving between the desire to be part of society and the unfeasibility to fulfil such a wish.

San Berillo

The history of San Berillo is marked by a history of traumatic events and migratory processes. The former has always triggered a movement of bodies, an element from which the latter originates, generating a double movement (internal/external, external/internal). For this and other historical reasons, the pre-existing space has been emptied and filled every time. The first event is this gigantic demolition work called ‘gutting’ (*sventramento*)² of San Berillo, started in February 1957 and was interrupted ten years later, following which 240,000 square metres of the entire existing urban fabric of houses, shops and roads were demolished, including squares, alleys and courtyards. Thirty thousand inhabitants were forced into exile, and about half of them moved to a peripheral area. It is the original trauma, accompanied by the first great migration. In the following decades, in the residual part of the neighbourhood, there was a growing influx of prostitutes of almost always South American origin. Their bodies occupied the space abandoned by the old residents, transforming it into the largest red-light district in southern Italy. A police raid where houses were evacuated and then bricked up and people expelled or arrested caused the second violent trauma.

In recent years, globalization has erupted in the neighbourhood, with the subjects of the new migrations, especially from Senegal and to a lesser extent young people from Gambia. With progressive inflows, space is refilled by restoring balance, even if unstable and precarious. The bodies of the people of San Berillo carried the memory of the trauma suffered in the place they fled from as well as the perception of those who suffered in the hosting neighbourhood. Today, San Berillo appears as a quadrilateral, in which about 1,200 families live, mainly of Senegalese origin. It is a refuge for the homeless, is chosen by prostitutes and transgender people and is inhabited by illegal migrants who find there a very first landing. A cultural association, *Trame di Quartiere*, operates in the neighbourhood. Through action-research, Trame intends to subvert the logic of exclusion and marginalization of San Berillo’s residents. *Trame* enables grassroots practices, encouraging the participation of individual and collective actors in both public and private contexts.

Trame basically works by supporting the re-figuration (Knoblauch and Löw 2017) of San Berillo's space. The activities of *Trame* include a series of projects from which emerges, as a distinctive feature, the constant implication of performative reflexivity as an inspiring principle and implementation method. In essence, the social and aesthetic dimensions of San Berillo seem to be primarily performative for several reasons. The first concerns precisely the place and the trauma of the *sventramento*, which represented a real social drama; the second concerns the specificity of the social figures who live there; the third refers to the type of activities that take place; and the fourth, of a methodological nature, concerns *Trame di Quartiere's* way to re-figurate space.

The social performance that most characterizes San Berillo is the *sventramento*, so cruelly defined to highlight the wound inflicted to this portion of the space. It represents a historical trauma for the city but fails to be a convincing performance. Following Alexander (2012), trauma is not only an event in itself but also the product of a social representation resulting from a complex spiral of signification. San Berillo as a collectivity has failed to merge the elements of the scene to persuade and promote a decisive action for its recovery and relaunch. Despite the unquestionable discomfort caused by the forced uprooting of entire families, prostitutes have been forced to move to the dark and less safe provincial roads, the nature of the lower-class victims, generally considered marginal and irredeemable, has probably influenced the lack of empathic complicity between the residents and the other citizens. We should add to this the media campaign aimed at justifying and spreading the rhetoric, very present in the 1960s, based on the communication binomial gutting-modernization. This is why the gutting has never represented for the city an 'effective performance' such as to convey interest in the change in the situation. The gutting, or rather its failure as a social performance, has given the neighbourhood that sense of incompleteness that today manifests through the neglect of spaces characterized by the presence of waste and the absence of basic services: water, electricity, essential sanitation, schools and pharmacies.

In the maze of alleys and streets of the neighbourhood, you come across numerous ruins, the crumbling structures of buildings invaded by spontaneous vegetation, the pipes that protrude from the walls, the many walled doors of the houses, the uneven pavement, the rubble, fragments of bottles, used masks, abandoned waste. Crossing some alleys, used as toilets, one continually subjects the sense of smell to unpleasant stresses. Part of the waste is hidden in the ravines and empty spaces of buildings and street furniture. Observing San Berillo's space, what is the performance that is immediately grasped by the observer and combines spacing and synthesis together? The performance that emblematically collects all the others, subsuming the way people are related to space, is *Waiting*. This is the main performance present in the space and through the space. In this sense, San Berillo is structured around suspension. Prostitutes wait for customers; the young Gambians who are stationed in the street wait for drug consumers; the police, just outside the perimeter of San Berillo, wait for the fight that will require an intervention. Waiting is also a broad expectation of the consequences of the announcements, whether miraculous or traumatic, of the coming new 'urban regeneration',³ which

will probably become a new trauma for the inhabitants because, as it happened in the past, they will be displaced or more simply removed. San Berillo seems to constitute a space of immediate waiting, for the next customer or consumer, and of hopeful waiting, which as already known will be disregarded, to change one's conditions of existence from precarious, unstable and insecure to that of a less risky instability. Expectation and disregard are the ghosts that repeatedly 'haunt' and thus structure the space of San Berillo, marking its malacotic atmosphere.

Another performance that combines spacing and performance in the constitution of space consists of *crossing*. San Berillo is always crossed quickly, head down and without expressing opinions. Even being a tourist in San Berillo is a bodily ambivalent experience. How do you observe is much more important than what you observe. It is quite difficult not to be attracted by the improvised performances of the dancing prostitutes, not to stop to observe the glamorous clothing of the trans people, not to be suddenly frightened by the screams of a fight or not to be disgusted by the waste or pleasantly impressed by the creative care of some corners. The specificity of the neighbourhood is so marked that the entrance of a stranger is immediately evident; the inhabitants experience his or her presence as an opportunity for a look, for a gentle but almost always mocking exchange. The stranger, in turn, immediately perceives this condition, assumes it and adapts to it, understanding that San Berillo does not justify any stay but only crossings, which thus determines its passage into space. This embodied reflexivity, to which all the actors are forced, as we have said, is constitutive of the performance. Despite this, San Berillo appears as an ever-elusive attempt to make it a home, to domesticate space.

Space appears to be the premise and consequence of this interplay with the tensions expressed there, structured, above all, by worn objects in various locations. By the many chairs scattered among the alleys with different shapes and materials used by prostitutes, the empty bottles of all kinds, the mattresses used as makeshift beds, the old unusable bikes stacked on the sides of the streets, the worn armchairs used by migrants and the votive shrines robbed of the statues inside them. The gutting has represented a traumatic breakdown of the social script that was originally organized around the heterogeneous presence of artisans, traders, dockers and large working-class families. Today, the neighbourhood is experiencing the effects of that unhealed fracture. The social space inside appears rigidly subdivided, not very integrated even if contiguous. These are immaterial boundaries, sounds, food and lifestyles, which, however, constitute real dividing lines. The territory occupied by young Gambians is separated from that in which the Senegalese families reside, just as the area of historical prostitutes is distinct from the first two. Young Gambians camp out for the whole day along an internal road that is their home space. There they spend the night and consume the hours of the day often intent on carrying out small dealings. As night falls, they become annoying and noisy; stunned by alcohol and drugs, they fight each other.

San Berillo, however, is not only degradation. In the neighbourhood, there is a resilient tension of the opposite sign; in several places, space is transformed by a growing number of small renovated buildings, whose appearance contrasts

with the conditions of abandonment and decay observed previously. The space inhabited by the Senegalese community appears as an ordinary space, punctuated by the presence of groups of men in front of their respective homes, while women almost always stay indoors and children play outdoors, especially in the afternoon. The overall appearance returns an image of normal life, typical of a low-income neighbourhood. Prostitutes keep their space always clean and tidy. It is a multi-dimensional space: it is historical because it keeps the memory of the past; it is affected, meaning affection both as pure bodily intensity and as emotion, for example about the feeling of friendship, expressed by the relationship of mutual support between the prostitutes; it is a space, in some cases, of tenderness, which transforms occasional relationships with customers into friendships. Furthermore, the creative stitching of the tears and the attempt to make space liveable are increasingly evident: increasingly frequent is the presence of graffiti drawn by writers on the external walls and the walled houses, the aesthetic care of little common areas with vases of plants and flowers, benches and various furnishings built with recycled materials and other small details (windows, frames, balconies, facades).

The Transformative Reflexivity of *Trame di Quartiere*

San Berillo seems to be a performative neighbourhood. This specific feature is behind the action of *Trame di Quartiere*,⁴ the cultural association mentioned above aimed at reactivating abandoned spaces. *Trame* defines itself as an interdisciplinary working group that promotes and facilitates action and research practices in the San Berillo area, intending to lay the foundations of an urban transformation for an inclusive and cohesive city and conceiving and enhancing diversity as a resource. A regeneration that includes vulnerable people, attention to a space of rights, the integration of migrants, the co-design of public spaces and the promotion of tangible and intangible heritage are their main goals. The implementation of urban sustainability actions always requires a reflexively oriented mapping of the multiple and concrete ways of using the space by the residents. *Trame*'s choice to settle within the neighbourhood, becoming an integral part of it, while not resolving the inevitable and latent conflict, gives it back the right to be recognized as a place of intercultural intersections, production of symbols and practices for the constitution of space. With its action, *Trame* also monitors the gap between the top-down representations of the neighbourhood and the spatial performances that emerge from below, i.e. the sedimentation of memories, relationships, meanings and incorporations that reshape the space on a daily basis. Practices, which are not antagonistic but alternative to the discourse of economic interest, guide the inhabitants in acquiring a voice (Hirschman 1981) and the ability to aspire (Appadurai 2004).

Trame constructs a counter-narrative based on the neighbourhood's resilient bodies. It is the spokesperson for the overturning of the stigma and strengthens its multiformity by giving voice through storytelling, artistic performances and dramaturgy. Thus, the inhabitants are listened to and seen in their tiring and painful paths of subjectivization. The performative reflexivity that *Trame* implements through creative projects and actions, of which the residents are the protagonists, seems

to act on the ability to transform isolated stories into collective ones, of common meaning, a choral space. Next to the images of insecurity, material poverty and very precarious conditions of existence, we can see emerging affirmation, determination and a strong tension towards subjectivization. This is not a romanticization of exclusion but an attempt that legitimizes bodies and claims to be included in the design processes of common spaces. To do this, *Trame* mediates, negotiates and, in some respects, minimizes conflicts between groups, emphasizing the possibility of coexistence. *Trame* is deeply involved in a community-building operation through the practices of sharing historical and present memories. All these activities converge into what we can define as performative reflexivity. It expresses a position: a rewriting that focuses on the body, both in its physical contamination with space and by considering bodies as subjects. By operating a continuous connection between materiality and relationality, the practices implemented by the association constitute a virtuous example of the methodological power of performance. Understanding how people act in space and how they transform it requires a methodological approach committed to transformation (Conquergood 1998). It is for this reason that the methodology implemented by *Trame* is also performative, using laboratories, audio-visual experiments and dramaturgical languages. Through the use of this methodology and the creative forms it produces, *Trame* allows itself to be a co-witness of the space, by sharing its daily and participatory constitution. Reflexivity through performance underlines simultaneously the materiality of the actions contrasting the traumatic description of the neighbourhood and the miraculous nature of the announcements on the regeneration of San Berillo.

Space as Producer of Re-figurative Performance

In the experience of San Berillo, performance seems to be saturated by the experience of the trauma and the prevailing space in its disorganized aspects, emblematically represented by rubble, garbage and excrement. The performances of excess and noisy bodies in the neighbourhood seem to be, at the moment, the only possible response to the aggression of the removal of San Berillo and the ever-present ghost of the transfer or evacuation, already experienced in the past but which remain like a sword of Damocles constantly hovering over their heads. This leads us to address the question of space as a generator of transformative performances and to capture the role of spatial structures as symbolic and material resources in the constitution of performance. We can speak of spatial structures when the constitution of space as spacing and synthesis (Löw 2016, p. 233) 'is inscribed in rules and ensured by resources, which are recursively incorporated into institutions independent of places and time points'. Spatial structures are the result of processes of signification, incorporation and resources that are material and symbolic. What happens, however, when space is so severely de-institutionalized or where the institution is fictitious? Here, performances are pure self-expression, reiterated and desperate. The performance in San Berillo can only develop as *waiting* or as a spectacle. It shall not come as a surprise that San Berillo has mainly become, among the citizens of Catania, a space of spectacularizing.

San Berillo's space reminds an artistic installation. Space as installation, in the abstract, is a polyphonic whole in which texts, bodies memories, meanings and movements overlap. In a space seen as an installation, we find flexible models of narratives and alternative forms of experience and creativity, an imaginary that can be both utopian and dystopian. It can be a space open to participation and creative involvement. Space as an installation, however, has an unavoidable criticality. It is a space that functions mainly for dominant groups or for those who possess the resources for subjectivization or are capable of affirmative construction of themselves. In contexts of uncertainty and social exclusion, space as an installation is deconstructive, becoming, on the contrary, an experience of the splitting of the social context and the subjects themselves (McDonald 1999). San Berillo lacks water, electricity, sewage, logistics, sanitation and education. The bodies that structure the material and emotional space are performative bodies. They are bodies weakened by the burden of making up for the lack of spatial structures and of making themselves social infrastructure. In the absence of resources, this action of literally creating space ends up being a tiring and impossible performance. There are bodies that carry the weight of community disorganization, which experience participation in society mainly in terms of exclusion and in which subjectivization risks becoming only resentment or depression. They are trapped bodies. Structuring the space through rules ensured by resources incorporated in institutions is not a question of making a neo-Marxist or nostalgic discourse but of affirming the conditions for which performance can be transformative. The people of San Berillo live in a kind of informal settlement. The quality of life is haphazard, fleeting and occasional; it can happen one day and disappear the next, precisely because the quality of the spaces is not culturally, materially and symbolically structured.

Institutional infrastructures, as Amin and Thrift (2017, p. 3) recall, are primarily 'machinic qualities' that create rights; they are common urban public goods that generate the public sphere. The miraculous and traumatic spirit of the announcements about the neighbourhood's revitalization plans alternates with trauma. Trauma, as Perniola (2009) says, is in complicity with miraculousness. A miracle is always expected in San Berillo; devotion and prayers are very present practices. Unfortunately, they are literalized by the theft of the statues of the numerous votive shrines in the neighbourhood. However, what is worrying is miraculous as a social logic: by entering the emporiums managed by the migrants, social opportunity is on sale. Dirty and worn gaming machines are increasingly crowded even during the night hours.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have introduced performance as a concept that amalgamates body, affection and processualism in the re-figuration of space (Knoblauch and Löw 2017). Starting from the polyphony of the concept, I tried to address the interpretative implications of space. Performance as an analytic construct has its own strength that draws from being an appropriate concept to enlighten the liminality of

the transitional place and the subjectivities in between, such as those of migrants, refugees and border identities. Performance introduces the theme of dislocation, which is expressed both in the great themes of discrimination and exclusion and in the ordinary construction of social life, revealing the constant presence of a dimension of bodily life that cannot be fully represented. I argue that performance is, embodied wanting to use the words of Löw (2016), an ‘operation of synthesis’, aimed at distilling the complexity of the social sphere and giving it meaning through the body; it represents a sort of tactile language, a posture and a positioning that goes beyond cognitive reflexivity. In short, it is an affective, material and imaginative practice, in some cases of survival from domination and in others of creative reinvention of the social context.

Starting from the idea of re-figuration of space, I have attempted to underline that in conditions of lack of material and symbolic infrastructural spaces, the performance can give way to spectacularizing and remaining trapped in a vicious circle that makes changing the given conditions impossible. The processes of deconstruction and de-institutionalization of the space of modernity coexist with the restructuring and institutionalization of the new spaces of contemporaneity: aesthetic, communicative and technological. Performance is a perfect candidate to be a key concept that subsumes the tension between body docility and reactive libidinal force.⁵ The point is that it can be re-figurative in a constructive or deconstructive sense, only within a tension with space. In the case of San Berillo, the relationship between performance and space revolves around the rubble, garbage and scattered armchairs and refers to the liminality of *waiting*. The more the space is disorganized, the more the performance loses its transformative power. Performances can be intense and touching but too weak to undermine the existing spatial order. San Berillo, as an emblematic space, risks to produce self-referential performances, in which the temporal register of repetition predominates.

Notes

- 1 For Butler, performativity must not be confused with performance. The latter requires an already existing subject to perform it, while performativity precedes the subject and is what gives rise to the subject. However, this process is continuous in the sense that it is never full or completed (Butler 1994).
- 2 The word ‘sventramento’ in Italian evokes a gash caused in the belly.
- 3 Announcements are made from time to time about the neighbourhood’s rebirth. The so-called technical working groups are activated to summon the owners of the buildings and regenerate and clean up the area. Months of oblivion by the administration follow these moments.
- 4 To learn more about the projects started by Trame di Quartiere, please refer to the website <https://www.tramediquartiere.org/>.
- 5 The concept of libidinal forces is part of a debate that we report here through Lash (2000). He trying to root the sociology of action in the unconscious, returns to Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze’s genealogy and describes their differences. Nietzsche conceives of the body using discourse, Foucault states how the order of discourse acts on the body, and Deleuze criticizes him for attributing reactive libidinal forces to the body. Kerslake, the author of ‘Deleuze and the Unconscious’ (2007) in fact, captures in the scholar a Bergsonian root more akin to the Jungian hypothesis of libido as a

universal vital drive, as an energetic value attributable to any sphere of activity: power, hunger, hatred, sexuality, etc. The Jungian perspective is useful to Deleuze to reduce the complexity of Eros to the drive or not to sexualize desire, as happens in the Freudian context. Deleuze's critique of Foucault is re-launched, from another perspective, by Vikki Bell (2007), who highlights how Deleuze believes that bodies' resistance is creative in this sense. When power becomes biopower, the resistance of the actor becomes the life force.

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